



The Use of Google Translate in EFL Essay Writing: Is It a Cheating?

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Abstract. During the process of writing an essay, many students are utilizing online translation tools like Google Translate due to the widespread availability of computing technology and the internet. Online translation programming is strong, yet it is inclined to over-exacting interpretation, and cannot represent the setting similar to a human interpreter. As a result, students are left to rely on a tool that promises to "do the hard work" for them by allowing them to only think and write in their native language. This study is aimed to determine the extent to which students at the University of Bengkulu, Indonesia, rely on technology in writing essays and whether they consider its use to be cheating or not. The data was obtained by conducting mixed-method research through survey with a closed-ended questionnaire and interview to the English Department students of Universitas Bengkulu who are currently taking a Critical Writing course. The results discovered that all of the participants have utilized GT as a translation tool for writing essays particularly to translate word from their first language into English. Moreover, they considered using GT for essay writing as cheating depending on how it is used; for graded assignments or writing test.

Keywords: *Google Translate, essay writing, cheating, online translation*

Introduction

With smartphones and the internet now reaching most aspects of our lives, it seems that EFL teachers can no longer expect that their students don't always have direct access to the internet to use online translation apps or sites when writing in English. One of the most used online translation sites is Google Translate, hereinafter will be referred to as GT. Users of GT can translate anything from a single word to an entire range of file types (Sheppard, 2011). In addition, GT users are able to translate entire websites, webpages, email, captions for YouTube video, instant messages, chats, and other content from the source language to hundreds of target languages (Johnson, 2012). Subsequently, GT keeps acquiring more users each day because of the variety of translation services provided.

As it has grown to become the most widely used online machine translation, research on the topic of GT in language learning has received a lot of attention in recent years. One of the research projects on the topic of GT is conducted by Bahri and Mahadi (2016). The focus of their research is on GT as an additional tool in learning Malay. Moreover, in the later study conducted by Murtisari et al. (2019), the result indicated that students frequently utilize GT to translate short passages or particular words for their reading and writing assignments. Because GT is simple to use and inexpensive, the students use it, particularly for their writing activity.

Writing, of the four principal abilities in English, is considered troublesome expertise for undergraduates to procure (Al Darwish & Sadeqi, 2016; Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017). This problem stems from the fact that students need to master a number of writing skill components, such as subject-verb agreement, word order, and diction, in order to improve

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their writing performance. Students also struggle with writing for several other reasons, including a lack of experience with a second language, grammatical weaknesses, a limited vocabulary, and a lack of experience with first languages (Belkhir & Benyelles, 2017). The existence of GT appears to play a crucial role in assisting EFL students in writing essays, given that essay writing has become a problem.

The quality concerns associated with GT have piqued the interest of a number of academics and have been the subject of research. Mixed messages were found in the results. To put it another way, a number of studies found that the translated work lacked quality and was far from publishable. As a result, language learning should not utilize it, whereas other tasks and assignments demonstrated the benefits of GT.

Back in 2012, the research of Van Rensburg et al. was carried out in order to investigate the GT translation quality from English into Afrikaans and vice versa. The result indicated that GT's products would require the most user input. On the off chance that any clients hope to involve GT items as true reports or to distribute GT items, modifications must be made. The study by Precup-Stiegelbauer (2013) also found that academic use of raw GT products was not possible. The findings demonstrated that because computers cannot recognize certain word functions, GT can cause issues. Therefore, the result of the translation by GT should not be used for language learning purposes or academic settings. This review was verified by Groves and Mundt's (2015) research investigation which discovered that the nature of GT yields needed interpretation precision and contained a few mistakes, particularly in word decisions, sentence structures, and missing words.

Despite some previous research results that sounded mostly negative, the study of Chompurach (2021) found the positive side of machine translation. His finding claimed that instead of serving as the primary translation tool, GT could be used as a supplementary tool. In his study, the majority of students viewed GT as a helpful and dependable assistant that improved their writing quality. Next, a study by Wirantaka and Fijanah (2021) has a similar focus but a different point of view. This research aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of the effective use of Google Translate in students' writing. Furthermore, in the recent study by Panah, Yunus, and Babar (2022), both students' and teachers' perceptions are investigated. According to the findings, both teachers and students agreed that GT could be used as an effective translation tool for language learning. It was also mentioned that GT use is strongly correlated with usefulness, ease of use, and accuracy.

Regarding the effectivity, Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017), discovered that using GT effectively requires the student to translate each word. This is so that the students can find the appropriate GT translation. This finding is similar to the research that discusses GT by Chandra and Yuyun (2018) with the purpose to investigate further the practice of GT in EFL essay writing as well as its role in language learning. The conclusion revealed that students utilized GT in three distinct ways: spelling, vocabulary, and grammar. Laiche and Nemouchi (2021) conducted a study that discusses the impact of GT on EFL learners' writing performance. Results revealed that students' writing was slightly enhanced. They used more original words, produced fewer misspellings, arranged ideas more effectively, and wrote longer sentences. This is in line with Mutjaba, Parkash, and Reynolds's (2022) study on the effect of using GT on second language writing complexity, accuracy, fluency, and lexical complexity (CAFL). According to the findings, syntactic and lexical complexity and fluency were more prominent in high-proficiency learners than in low-proficiency learners.

However, a discussion to find out the extent to which students rely on the GT in their writing, and whether they believe that its usage constitutes cheating is still scarce. The urgency of this study is also strengthened by the phenomenon that happened in EFL writing classes taught by the researchers where the students use GT when they are asked to write an essay. When they are told not to use GT, they feel some kind of anxiety which lead to a longer time of completing the tasks. According to unstructured discussion among the lecturers of the Critical Writing course at the University of Bengkulu, using online translation sites can be considered 'cheating', much in the same way as math students derive answers to difficult problems via pre-programmed functions on a calculator. This lecturers' view is in line with the results of the studies regarding this matter, although there were not many of them, that had

been done by Mulyani and Afina (2021) and Ata and Debreli (2021). In addition, the lecturers are able to easily distinguish between the student's own writing style and that of the internet, especially when they suddenly "switch" in writing quality and use more sophisticated vocabulary.

This study, therefore, was to address the lack of literature regarding the extent of students' dependence on GT when writing essays in the EFL context and to explore the students' cognitive attitude towards the use of GT with a focus on the cheating aspect. To accomplish these aims, the present study addressed the following research questions: (1) to what extent do the students rely on GT when writing English essays?; and (2) are the students considered using GT for composing a writing product as cheating?.

Material and Method

The current study used a mixed-method research methodology which is a research strategy that incorporates or is correlated with both qualitative and quantitative research (Sugiyono, 2018). The first research purpose which is to find out to what extent the students rely on GT when writing English essays was addressed by the quantitative approach. While the second research goal which is to determine whether students considered using GT to write a writing product to be cheating was achieved through a qualitative approach. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), a descriptive qualitative design was suitable for the study, exploring experiences, opinions, and perceptions. There are two divisions of the quantitative method: the survey and experimentation methods. A survey was used by the researchers in this study. As stated by Baley (1994), for research using statistical data analysis, the sample size minimum is 30. In the current study, the participants were 35 students of an English Education Department at the University of Bengkulu. The students were selected as participants of the study based on the lecturers' observation of their works; they use GT to write essays in the Critical Writing course. The survey was conducted through Google Forms and was distributed to respondents via the WhatsApp group of Critical Writing course. Moreover, to facilitate longer or more in-depth feedback in the interview session for the qualitative data, the researcher employed purposive sampling by selecting the students based on their active contributions to class discussions. Bertaux (1981) suggests that the smallest acceptable qualitative sample size is 15 interviews, therefore 15 selected respondents were asked to join the interview session. The respondents were assigned codes (S1-15) to anonymize their input. They were assured that nothing they said in the interview would affect their scores on previous assignments or essays.

Results and Discussion

Results

This section displays findings and provides a discussion based on the information gathered from the survey and interview conducted by the researchers. The findings are based on the perceptions of the participants and are followed by a discussion supported by a number of published works. Firstly, the results of demographic data and descriptive analysis are presented in this section.

Table 1:
Gender (N=35)

		Freque	Perce
		nc	nt
		y	t
Valid	Male	5	14.3
	Femal	30	85.7
	Total	35	100.0

The participants' gender is shown in Table 1. It is evident that the study included 30 female students (85.7%) and 5 male students (14.3%).

Table 2:
Frequency of GT Use in Writing Essay

		Frequency	Percent
Valid Responses	Very Often	5	14.3
	Often	15	42.9
	Sometimes	14	40
	Seldom	1	2.9
	Never	0	0

The participants' frequency of using GT is shown in Table 2. Approximately 42.9% of respondents (15 people) indicated that they often use GT, followed by 40 (14) who confirmed that they sometimes use GT, followed by 14.3% (5 people), and 2.9% (1 person) who acknowledged that they very often and seldom use GT when writing essays respectively. Furthermore, there is no respondent who never uses GT at all when writing essays in EFL writing classes.

Table 3:
Descriptive Statistics of the Use of GT in Writing Essays

	Very Often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
	n	n	n	n	n
	%	%	%	%	%
I use GT to translate a 'word' from my first language into English.	11.4	40	40	5.7	2.9
Have used the feature	97.1				
Frequent use of the feature	51.4				
I use GT to translate a 'phrase' from, my first language into English.	14.3	22.9	48.6	14.3	14.3
Have used the feature	85.7				
Frequent use of the feature	37.2				
I use GT to translate a 'sentence' from my first language into English.	8.6	34.3	48.6	5.7	2.9
Have used the feature	97.1				
Frequent use of the feature	42.9				
I use GT to translate a 'paragraph' from my first language into English.	11.4	25.7	31.4	25.7	5.7
Have used the feature	94.3				
Frequent use of the feature	37.9				
I use GT to translate a 'whole text' from my first language into English.	11.4	22.9	28.6	17.1	20
Have used the feature	80				
Frequent use of the feature	34.3				

Table 3 illustrates student use of GTT for writing essays, with the focus on the translation of 'word', 'phrase', 'sentence', 'paragraph', 'and whole text' from the students' first language (Bahasa) into English. The highest percentage (97.1) in term of *have use the feature*

belongs to the items “using GT to translate of a ‘word’ and a ‘sentence’ from the first language into English”. While the lowest percentage (80) in term of *have use the feature* is related to the item “using GT to translate a ‘whole text’ from the first language into English”.

Moreover, for the *frequent use of the feature*, it is revealed that the highest percentage (51.4) is on the item of “using GT to translate of a ‘word’ from the first language into English”, followed by the item of “using GT to translate of a ‘sentence’ from the first language into English” with 42.9%. The items of “using GT to translate of a ‘paragraph’ from the first language into English” and “using GT to translate of a ‘phrase’ from the first language into English” obtain 37.9% and 37.2% respectively in term of *frequent use of the feature*. While the lowest percentage for this criterion is “using GT to translate a ‘whole text’ from the first language into English” with 34.3%.

Based on Table 2 and Table 3 it can be seen that all the respondents stated that they used GT to assist their second-language essay-writing with more than half of the respondents (57.2%) use GT frequently (very often and often). Their dependence on GT in writing essays for EFL writing classes is mostly in the level of word translation (using GT to translate a ‘word’ from the first language into English).

Having found out to which extent the students rely on GT in writing their essays, this research also seeks to find out whether the students consider using GT for writing their assignment essays as cheating or not. An interview with 15 selected respondents shows the following responses.

Table 4:
Students’ Cognitive Attitude of Using GT for Writing Essays

	Q1: Are you confident writing essays without using GT?	Q2: Do you believe that GT makes your writing better?	Q3: Do you believe that using GT for wiring essays is cheating?
S1	No, because I’m not confident with my writing without GT	Sometimes, when I don’t know something, it makes me easier to do my writing.	No, as long as I organize the sentence by myself in my first language
S2	No, because sometimes I forget some vocabulary, and I’m afraid of making mistakes in grammar	I do believe that because we can translate words that we do not know in English, [but] we have to crosscheck them before we write them down.	No, because we’re not copy the text just translate the text
S3	No, I aren’t. because sometimes there are words that are not understood in writing essays.	Yes, I do. It can help to find right word so the essay can be better.	No, GT just help someone to translate word or sentence in their essay
S4	I’m confident writing essays without using GT because I believe that my vocabulary is enough to make a sentence but I usually got difficulties in grammar.	Not really because sometimes the structure in GT doesn’t match.	Yes, I believe that because they use GT to fast do their Essay
S5	No, I am not comfortable because I	I think yes	No, I don’t. English learners really need GT to make an essay to

	am afraid what I write is wrong		help them. But if in writing essay test, yes, I do [think] it's cheating
S6	No	Yes, I believe	depending on the policy of the lecturer
S7	No, because my grammar is bad	Not completely sure	I think yeah
S8	Yes, I am. But using GT gives me more confidence because I think it can correct my word.	No, I don't. I know the GT will translate my language [but] not grammar. And I'm scared if I'm using it, my reader will not understand what I'm writing	Yes, I don't really believe in GT sometimes
S9	No, because I think if I write my grammar is wrong, and also not having enough vocabulary to expand ideas	GT is better than how I write without it. I can think quite deeply in Bahasa Indonesia, but without GT, I need many hours to write	No, because sometimes I wonder with my words. So, I think I will use GT for better correction of my words
S10	No, because sometimes I still have trouble with the vocabulary. And sometimes I'm afraid that my grammar is wrong.	Yes, a combination of GT and Microsoft Word grammar can make a great essay	I think yeah, and I will effort not to use GT next time
S11	No, I'm not confident because I need more vocabulary for writing	Yes, I believe so	Yes, if for the whole text, not for a bit, and sometimes the result is not good when it is used to translate long text
S12	No. because I'm not sure about the grammar, Sometimes I also don't remember a lot of vocabulary.	Depends on how one uses it. If they use it to translate a word, they don't know then it is okay to use GT.	Yes, I do. Though I've ever used it, I admit that was cheating, but sometimes it can make me easier
S13	It may be difficult because I'm weak in translation vocabulary	Yes, but not really, 55%	Perhaps, but I'll try my best to not use GT
S14	I think I am not confident because my grammar is bad and my vocabulary is a little bit	Yes, I believe using GT makes my writing better	No, no. I mostly use GT only to understand words that I don't know
S15	I'm comfortable writing an essay without GT's help. I only use GT to translate words that I don't know.	No, it just helps me to find out the meaning of vocabulary that I haven't know	It depends the situation, if we using it in the test so it can call with cheating. If we using it just to add our knowledge because we don't know some words

or phrases, I think that's okay to using it

Q1: Are you confident writing your essays without using GT?

Only 3 respondents (S4, S8, and S15) confirmed that they were confident in writing essays without using GT. S4 responded with "I'm confident writing essays without using GT because I believe that my vocabulary is enough to make a sentence but I usually got difficulties in grammar". Moreover, S8 and S15 stated that "Yes, I am. But using GT gives me more confident because I think it can correct my word." and "I'm comfortable writing an essay without GT's help. I only use GT to translate the word that I don't know" respectively. From these answers, it was inferred that even though the two respondents confirmed that they were confident enough, they still used GT to some extent which was to translate some words. It was in line with the results of the questionnaire.

On the other hand, 12 respondents confirmed their insecurity when working on essays without GT. Insecurity related to lack of vocabulary was mentioned by 8 respondents (S2, S3, S9, S10, S11, S12, S13, and S14), as S9 said "No, because I think if I write my grammar is wrong and also [I am] not having enough vocabulary to expand ideas". While S6 flatly answered "No", S7 along with S2, S10, S12, and S14 gave reason related to fear of making grammar mistakes. S1 and S5 were just not confident when writing essays without GT by stating "No, because I'm not confident with my writing without GT" and "No, I am not comfortable because I am afraid what I write is wrong".

Q2: Do you believe that GT makes your writing better?

The majority of the interviewees agree that GT makes their writing better to some points. S2 said that "I do believe that because we can translate words that we do not know in English, [but] we have to crosscheck them before we write them down". S1 said that "Sometimes when I don't know something, it makes me easier to do my writing". In addition, S9 said that she thought "GT is better than how I write without it. I can think quite deeply in Bahasa Indonesia, but without GT, I need many hours to write". This response indicated that the student also used GT to save time since he can write faster by utilizing GT. In addition, to strengthen this perception, S10 stated that "Yes, a combination of GT and Microsoft Word grammar can make a great essay".

Q3: Do you believe that using GT for writing essays is cheating?

Interestingly, based on the interview, the number of students who disagree with the idea of using GT is cheating was more than those who agreed. There were 6 participants who disagreed that using GT is cheating, 5 participants who agreed regarding of how it is used, and 4 participants who agreed that using GT is cheating depending on how it is used. S6 commented that it "depends on the policy of the lecturer". In line with this, S15 stated that it was not cheating if students use GT only to look for some words or phrases they do not know. But he also added that if students use GT on a writing test, then it can be considered cheating, so it really depended on the situation.

There were several interesting arguments stated by the interviewees who believe that using GT for writing essays is not cheating. S1 argued that as long as the students organize the sentence(s) by themselves in their first language, and only utilize GT to translate them, then it was not cheating. S2 has similar opinion by saying "No, because we're not copy the text, just translate the text". Their responses indicated that although they used GT for the translation, they developed their own ideas for the essays.

S12 admitted that although using GT can make writing essay became easier, he still considered it as cheating. S8 added by saying that "Yes [it is cheating], I don't really believe in GT sometimes". The students thought it was cheating to use Google Translate for anything more than individual words. However, this attitude appears to be caused by the students' inability to trust Google Translate due to its inaccuracy. S11 suggests a boycott of full-text translation by saying that it is cheating "if for the whole text, not for a bit and sometimes the

result is not good when it is used to translate long text". But the statement is more due to the algorithms not being good enough just yet to translate long text, rather than borne of moral disdain for cheating.

Based on the interview given, the students shared their similar perceptions of the general use of Google Translate: (1) most of the participants are not feeling confident when writing an essay without using GT, this result correlates with the students' dependence on GT to translate words from Bahasa Indonesia into English to write English essays; (2) using GT helps in writing a better essay, and it saves time; (3) using GT to write an essay is not some kind of cheating as long as the students develop their own ideas and only use GT to look for some words.

Discussion

From the analysis of the results, the researchers discovered that all of the participants in the current study utilized GT when writing English essays. It is found that the respondents use GT as a supporting tool in their language learning. According to the findings regarding the extent to which the students utilize GT in writing essays, the participants frequently employ it to translate text at the 'word' level. This result indicated that basically, the students do not rely only on GT in writing their essays. From the previous research, Alhaisoni and Alhaysony (2017) had a similar result to the current study. The former researchers also mention that one strategy that is effectively implemented to use GT is by translating one word only. This finding also confirms the study from Chandra and Yuyun (2018). Their study revealed that most of the students use GT to look for words and phrases. Students will produce better results if they use GT to translate a single word rather than entire sentences.

Getting deeper on this matter in the interview section, it was revealed that the students' urge to use GT even only to look for "word" is due to the majority of the students were not confident when writing essays without using GT. Insecurity related to lack of vocabulary was mentioned by 8 respondents in the interview, thus indicating their need to use GT to look for "words" they do not know from Bahasa Indonesia to English. This means that GT is used mostly as a dictionary since the respondents try to find a certain vocabulary while developing their own idea for the essays. However, since the participants were English majors who were expected to translate discourse levels without assistance, this result remained intriguing.

Although several previous related studies (Groves & Mundt, 2015; Precup-Stiegelbauer, 2013; Van Rensburg et al., 2012) had reported the low quality of the GT outputs, GT has been used widely and viewed positively by some language learners (Chompurach, 2021; Wirantaka and Fijanah, 2021; Laiche and Nemouchi, 2021; and Panah, Yunus, and Babar, 2022), and the present study is no exception. The analyzed data reported that most students had positive views toward using GT in English writing particularly to look up words. Also, writing essays with GT allowed them to gain less anxiety about choosing and using the 'wrong' vocabulary in their essays.

Additionally, it was discovered in cognitive attitude that students' attitudes toward the use of GT are ethically acceptable regardless of how it is utilized due to the fact that GT aids in language learning and is a translation tool. Similar results were also found in studies by (Mulyani and Afina, 2021; Ata and Debreli, 2021) state that students using GT without permission from their teachers is unacceptable. Meanwhile, students' attitudes toward the use of GT are viewed as cheating depending on how it is used, as GT is viewed as cheating when used for graded assignments and tests. These results suggest that language learning institutions should develop guidelines for how students should use online machine translation tools such as GT, and that students and teachers should have a mutual understanding in terms of their ethicality.

Conclusion

The findings concerning GT use show that all of the participants have used GT in English writing at "word" level. Based on this circumstance, GT plays the role as the students'

writing assistant in looking up words and finishing the assignments faster. Therefore, most of the students disagreed with not being allowed to use GT in writing. In their defense, in writing the essays they develop their own ideas while utilizing GT as the online dictionary. It means that the students in fact write the essay 'on their own' instead of 'asking' GT to do it for them. In terms of the pedagogical implications, the findings provide insight for language educators into EFL students' GT use and their attitudes toward using the translation site in English writing. Additionally, the findings could be used as evidence by language teachers to plan activities, lessons, and training courses that teach how to use GT effectively. Language learners might learn how to use GT to its full potential in this way. Although the present study provides findings that shed light on university students' behavior and attitude in terms of GT use, the quality of the students' writing with GT use is out of the scope of the present study, thus it was not examined. Additionally, this study employed a quite small number of participants. The researchers suggest for further study to replicate the research by employing a mixed-method with a larger number of participants and a scope based on the assessment of the students' writing with GT use for subsequent research. Furthermore, since the sampling for the interview purposely selected the talkative students, it may have also selected some of the strongest students in their classes. Their likelihood of using Google Translate in the first place may have been skewed by this. Any subsequent research ought to select a more random sample from across the academic spectrum.

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