# SIMON SAYS IT SHOULD BE CONTEXTUAL: VOCABULARY TEACHING DURING TRANSLATION STUDIES COURSES

*Yrd. Doç. Dr. Bahadır Cahit TOSUN*
*Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi*
*İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü*
*bahadrtosun@gmail.com*
*ORCID ID: http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2915-5316*

**Abstract**

Context in vocabulary teaching is one of the major factors that help language learners grasp the meaning and then internalize it. Accordingly, Contextual Vocabulary Teaching (CVT) is necessary both for foreign language teaching and constructivist translation studies courses as well. Yet, there are few if any quantitative studies in the literature that consolidate both CVT and constructivist translation studies courses. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to make a contribution to the literature via investigating the significance of the contextual vocabulary teaching in constructivist translation studies courses in terms of students' perspective and their achievement scores. The participants of the study comprised the third-year students of the English Language and Literature Department of a state University. A case specific questionnaire developed for the present study was submitted to the third-year students in Advanced Translation I course and, then their attitudes were juxtaposed with their achievement scores. Despite the non-existent correlation between the students' attitudes towards CVT and their achievement scores, and the lack of previous findings in the literature which is necessary to evaluate the present one, both their attitudes and achievement scores indicated that CVT during constructivist translation studies courses would provide new benefits for the interest of foreign language teaching.

**Keywords:** Contextual vocabulary teaching, translation studies, foreign language teaching, attitude scale.

# SIMON DER Kİ BAĞLAMSAL OLMALI: ÇEVİRİ ÇALIŞMALARI DERSLERİNDE KELİME ÖĞRETİMİ

**Öz**

Bağlam sözcük öğretiminde öğrencinin anlamı kavramasını ve içselleştirmesini sağlayan başlıca faktörlerden biridir. Böylece, bağlamsal sözcük öğretimi hem yabancı dil öğretimi hem de yapılandırmacı çeviri çalışmaları dersleri için önemlidir. Kaldı ki alan-yazında hem bağlamsal sözcük öğretimini hem de yapılandırmacı çeviri çalışmaları derslerini birleştiren niceliksel çalışmalar yok denecek kadar azdır. Böylelikle, mevcut çalışmanın amacı yapılandırmacı çeviri çalışmaları derslerinde bağlamsal sözcük öğretiminin önemini öğrencilerin perspektiflerinden ve başarı puanları açısından araştırarak alan-yazına katkıda bulunmak olmuştur. Çalışmanın katılımcıları bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünün üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerinden oluşmuştur. Mevcut çalışmaya özel geliştirilmiş vakaya özgü bir ölçek, İleri Çeviri Çalışmaları I adlı derste üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerine dağıtılmış ve ardından tutumları başarı puanları ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Öğrencilerin bağlamsal sözcük öğretimi hakkındaki tutumları ve başarı puanları arasında mevcut olmayan korelasyona ve alan-yazında mevcut çalışmayı değerlendirmek için gerekli olan önceki çalışmaların eksikliğine rağmen hem tutumları hem de başarı puanları yapılandırmacı çeviri çalışmaları dersleri esnasında bağlamsal sözcük öğretiminin yabancı dil öğretimi açısından yeni faydalar sağlayabileceğini işaret etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bağlamsal sözcük öğretimi, yapılandırmacı çeviri çalışmaları, yabancı dil öğretimi, tutum ölçeği.

**INTRODUCTION**

Translation and language teaching have long been adopted as two coterminous concepts beginning from the earlier times in Western tradition, though it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that studies of translation were incorporated into language teaching curriculum as a significant course (Richard & Rogers 2003; Maruoane, et al. 2009). The origins of this incident rest on the practice of sentence translation procedure of European schools in the eighteenth century as these schools adopted the way Latin was taught as a model. This preference would open a new way in the nineteenth century for the first translation based language teaching method: Grammar-Translation Method. With the advent of this new method textbooks began to focus more on grammar and translation rather than oral aspects of a language, the main aim of which was to learn a foreign language for utilizing its literature (Richard& Rogers 2003).

Nevertheless, with the rise of communicative approach in language teaching, the interest in translation as a teaching instrument lost its importance rapidly. The proposition that a better manipulation of the second language (L2) could only be reached at the expense of the first language (L1) use in language teaching led translation to disappear in language teaching classrooms (Tsagari & Floros 2013). As opposed to this conception in favor of using only L2 in language classes, Cook advocates the turn towards such a trend in language teaching rests more on commercial interests rather than scientific ones. He also emphasizes that "translation has an important role to play in language learning—that develops both language awareness and use, that it is pedagogically effective and educationally desirable, and that it answers student needs in the contemporary globalized and multicultural world" (2010: 155).

All these arguments put aside, one thing is clear that context both for translation studies and language teaching has an exceptional role in line with vocabulary building above all, which makes it necessary to give contextual vocabulary teaching relatively a more space in translation and language courses alike. To this end, CVT in constructivist translation courses is assumed to provide interesting solutions which would serve for the benefits of language teaching also.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to contribute to the literature with the following research questions:

**Q1.** *Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' attitudes towards CVT, and their gender?*

**Q2**. *Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' attitudes towards CVT, and their achievement scores?*

**Literature Review**

Language development has direct association with vocabulary building (Nilsen & Nilsen 2003; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian 2006;), which makes both vocabulary size and vocabulary depth two indispensable concepts for the development of four language skills (Baumann, Edwards, Boland, Olejnik & Kame'enui 2003; Padak, Newton, Rasinski, & Newton 2008; Shen 2008). While vocabulary size would be an indicator to monitor skill development (Morris & Cobb 2003), it requires vocabulary depth as an additional criterion (Zuhong 2011) which both represents vocabulary profile with thematic relevance and integration for a conceptual network (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts-Taffe 2006; Bravo & Cervetti 2008).

Thus, regardless of the strategy which takes place, whether implicit or explicit, vocabulary building requires a context which is a premise for making the process more meaningful and permanent (Otten 2003; Rieder 2003; Graves 2008). By the same token, effective vocabulary teaching must embrace 'meaningful use' (Smith 2008: p.21) which entails students to use the words in different contexts. Different contexts, to this end, appear to have an interrelation with vocabulary depth resting on the direct proportion between vocabulary knowledge and contextual inference (Nassaji 2003; Carlo et al. 2004; Nassaji 2006; Pulido 2007; Barcroft 2009; Montero, Peters,

Clarebout, & Desmet 2014; Restrepo Ramos 2015). More overtly, context limits the meaning of a word towards its aimed sense while making it more comprehensible and proper for retention in mind (Scott, Nagy, & Flinspah 2008). In other words, different contextual activities would lead to a better and more profound vocabulary depth (Blachowicz et al. 2006). After all, context and syntactic awareness are two inseparable terms that are necessary both for metalinguistic and academic vocabulary development (Zipke, Ehri, & Cairns 2009; Blachowicz & Fisher 2008).

On the other hand, Frantzen stands the case on its head and claims that excessive use of context would also cause drawbacks (2003: 168). Although context is a powerful instrument in determining the meaning of a word, it does not ipso facto reveal its exact meaning. What is more, ambiguous contexts may frustrate inference.

### Methodology

The present study is a quantitative research the aim of which is to explore the role of CVT in constructivist translation courses and students' success. In line with the purpose of the study Advanced Translation I course of the English Language and Literature Department of a state University was selected as a model. Following a 14-week Advanced Translation I course, a questionnaire that investigated the students' attitudes towards CVT with randomized texts in constructivist translation lessons was handed in to the third-year students of the abovementioned department. The data obtained were examined by statistical procedures to detect any relation of their attitudes with their gender and achievement scores.

### Participants of the Study

The number of the participants in the present study was 103. Since the majority of the English Language and Literature Department usually comprise female students, most of the participants were females (n=73). Before they are welcome to the department, it is compulsory that the students of the program succeed a placement test that verifies them to be proficient in English. Accordingly, the participants of the present study were acknowledged to be proficient in English despite their label of non-native speakers. Finally, the entire participants of the study were supposed to be almost at the same proficiency level.

### Data Collection

The data of the present study were gathered via Likert-type scales (1 = Strongly Agree; 5 = Strongly Disagree) that consist of 32 questions. During the arrangement of the scale items, 3 experts in the same field were consulted. Besides, additional factor analyses were carried out to avert any converging items in the scale. In the end, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine any possible association of the students' attitudes with their gender and their achievement scores during the measurement of the results attained from the questionnaires.

### The Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprises 32 questions each of which was responded to as *1) Strongly Agree 2) Agree 3) Not Decided 4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree* consistent with their evaluation of CVT with randomized texts in constructivist translation lessons. The researcher constructed the entire items of the scale in compliance with the theoretical constituents of both contextual vocabulary teaching and constructivism.

### Procedure

CVT was applied with randomized texts in the Advanced Translation course for a period of 14 weeks before the distribution of the questionnaire to the third-year students. In the first week of the course, the students were notified of the vocabulary type used in the course which usually interferes with the comprehension of the academic texts and they were recommended an

additional guide-book for self-study in which the most frequently used basic and advanced vocabulary take place with their contextual use. Also, they were informed that they would be expected to use both thesaurus and language dictionaries during the course. This gave the students the opportunity to freely evaluate the content of the vocabulary which would be applied in the course in advance.

As CVT depends on providing synonyms with academic guidance and interaction in an amusing and easy platform, the students were free to ask any kind of vocabulary question to their lecturer whenever they desired. Also, during the translation process the lecturer furnished the students with at least 5 to 7 synonyms with their comparisons in terms of different contexts. To this end, it was inevitably necessary to instantaneously respond to the students as to the meaning of any academic word by heart. Thus, to use the technique, it is strongly recommended that the lecturer be capable of both verbalizing and writing the synonyms in different contexts, which necessitates to be predominant over the vocabulary content of the selected guide-books.

Ultimately, following the permission procedure of the related University in the Fall term of 2016-2017, the third-year students of the English Language and Literature Department were distributed 103 copies of a three-page questionnaire.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Whereas the first questionnaire prepared for the present study consisted of 36 items, as a result of the pilot study carried out on a population of 60 students of the aforementioned department, 4 items were removed since they turned out to be overlapping in purpose. Successively, the items of the questionnaire were scrutinized by other experts in the field in order provide additional consultancy.

The data analysis of the current study was realized using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0. Both the reliability and the validity of the scale of the study were measured through statistical procedures separately. The statistical results attained in the end are all submitted in the tables with the abbreviations: number of participants with (N), mean with (Mean), mean difference with (Mean Diff.), standard deviation with (Std. D.), standard error with (Std. Err.), standard error mean with (Std. Err. Mean), standard error difference with (Std. Err. Diff.), F statistics with (F), degrees of freedom with (df), significance (p) value of Levene's Test (Sig.), 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference with (95% Con. Inter. Diff.), the two-tailed p value associated with the t-test with (Sig. (2-tailed)).

### Reliability Analysis

The Cronbach's alpha analysis that verifies the internal consistency of the scale showed that the scale was .936 reliable. Despite the close mean and standard deviation values of the scale items, an explanatory factor analysis was realized. Inter-Item Correlation Matrix showed either positive or negative correlation with absolute minimum and maximum values between 0.044 and 0.654. Then, ANOVA with Tukey's Test for Nonadditivity was executed for the items of the scale and the results showed that the items possessed additivity (p<0.001). Also, Hotelling's T-Squared Test validated that the scale items possessed homogeneity. Finally, Intraclass Correlation Coefficient criterion was tested and both the internal consistency for items (p<0.001) and the average measure (p<0.001) screened reliable results.

### Validity Analysis

Construct validity of the scale was measured through exploratory factor analysis using Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Before PCA was conducted, the factorability of the scale was measured through the tests; Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity respectively. The KMO result was 0.83, which was acceptable. The Bartlett's test of Sphericity had a

significant test value (p<0.05), which necessitated an explanatory factor analysis. Then a factor analysis by PCA was carried out to measure the construct validity of the scale. Eight factors with eigen values greater than 1 were detected. The factors accounted for the total variance with a value of 66.9 % cumulatively. Each factor accounted for the total variance with the percentages of 14.6 %, 9.1%, 8.7%, 8.6%, 7.9%, 6.1%, 5.9%, 5.5 % respectively. Yet, the Scree Plot singled out the first factor from the others with a sharp decline in the plot. Therefore, the scale turned out to possess a one-factor pattern, which enabled the study to disregard factor rotation process. Instead, the factor analysis was repeated with the fixed number of factor extraction. As a result of the repeated factor analysis all the factors taking part in the Component Matrix were over .30 and the explained percentage of variance was 33.61. This was slightly over the acceptability criterion 30%. In view of these results two items were supposed to be either reclaimed or discarded from the scale. The study was a psychometric one so the scale items were reclaimed instead of being discarded. In this way, the validity of the scale was preserved.

### Results

**Q1.** *Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' attitudes towards the technique and gender?*

As seen on Table 1. no significant correlation between the students' gender and their attitudes could be suggested (m= 2.14   for males; m= 1.99 for females). The slight difference between the mean values of the two groups represents hardly any difference between the male and the female students, which indicates there is no significant correlation between the students' gender and their attitudes towards CVT in general.

**Table1. Descriptive Statistics for Gender and Attitudes**

|  | Gender of the Participants | N | Mean | Std. D. | Std. Err. Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
|  | Male | 30 | 2.14 | 0.52 | 0.09 |
| Attitudes Mean |  |  |  |  |  |
|  | Female | 103 | 1.99 | 0.46 | 0.05 |

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances in Table 2 reveals no diversity between the variances of males and females. When the t-test for Equality of Means is checked to determine if a significant relation between the two groups is present, it enables the $H_0$ –null hypothesis- to be accepted, which assumes no relation between the students' gender and their attitudes. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value (0.17) is greater than p value=0.05, the $H_0$ hypothesis may not be rejected. This signifies that there is no significant correlation between the students' gender and their attitudes towards CVT.

**Table2. t-test for two Independent Samples in terms of Gender**

| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attitudes Mean | | | | | Sig. | Mean | Std. Err. | 95% | |
|  | F | Sig. | t | df | (2-tailed) | Diff. | Diff. | Con. Inter. Diff. | |
| Equal variances assumed | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
|  | 0.01 | 0.89 | 0.38 | 101 | 0.17 | 0.14 | 0.10 | -0.06 | 0.35 |

| Equal variances not assumed | 0.32 | 49.24 | 0.19 | 0.14 | 0.10 | -0.07 | 0.36 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Q2. *Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' attitudes towards the technique and their success?***

Table 3. reveals no significant correlation between successful and unsuccessful students (m= 2.05 for successful students; m= 1.94 for unsuccessful students). The similar mean values represent no difference between the two groups, which indicates no significant correlation between the students' success and attitudes towards CVT in general.

**Table3. Descriptive Statistics for Success and Attitudes**

| | Successful / Unsuccessful | N | Mean | Std. D. | Std. Err. Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Successful | 90 | 2.05 | 0.49 | 0.05 |
| Attitudes Mean | | | | | |
| | Unsuccessful | 13 | 1.94 | 0.43 | 0.12 |

When Levene's Test for Equality of Variances in Table 4 is checked, it denotes no significant difference between the variances of two groups in terms of success (Sig. value= 0.69). This situation requires t-test for Equality of Means be taken into consideration. Thus, the $H_0$ –null hypothesis- that assumes no relation between the students' success and their attitudes is tested. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value (0.47) is greater than p value=0.05, the $H_0$ hypothesis is accepted, which verifies no significant correlation between the students' success and attitudes towards CVT.

**Table4. t-test for two Independent Samples in terms of Success**

| Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Attitudes Mean | | | | | | | | 95% Con. Inter. Diff. | |
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Diff. | Std. Err. Diff. | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 0.15 | 0.69 | 0.71 | 101 | 0.47 | 0.10 | 0.14 | -0.18 | 0.38 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 0.78 | 16.71 | 0.44 | 0.10 | 0.13 | -0.17 | 0.38 |

**Discussion**

In line with the findings of the study there appears to be no correlation between students' gender and their attitudes towards the technique. Accordingly, this situation suggests that CVT seems to be applicable for both genders. Although various studies suggest gender as the most striking individual difference as far as language teaching/learning is concerned (Sunderland, J. 1992, 1994; McMahill 2001; Flood 2003; Norton, & Pavlenko 2004), indeed, there are few if any studies that associate students' attitudes with gender (Oxford & Ehrman 1992; Ellis 1994; Sunderland, J. 2000; Davis & Skilton-Sylvester 2004; Kobayashi 2010). After all, the studies which indicate a strong association between gender and language teaching/learning focus on the correlation between students' gender and their achievement scores rather than their attitudes. In this sense, the present study would be another contribution for the studies that project upon the relation between gender and student attitudes as far as language teaching strategies are concerned.

Correlation between student attitudes and achievement is frequently on the agenda as far as foreign language teaching is concerned (Cotterall 1999; Zimmerman & Dale 2001; Csizér, & Dörnyei 2005; Wenden 2014). Usually, correlation studies reveal no connection between student attitudes and their achievement scores. Likewise, the findings of the current study revealed no significant correlation of these two variables, which may be resulting from the content of the course or the process of classifying attitudes under titles such as 'educational' or 'social' (Gardner 1985). Moreover, amusement would be another key factor for this result as it is one of the major language teaching technique components that determine the strong and weak sides of a technique in students' view (Cameron 2001). As the cognitive evaluation skills of the students would be more analytical in proportion to their growing age, in this case amusement is due to have relatively less impact on university students' evaluations in comparison to high school students or young learners leading the study to reach more reasonable and realistic results.

**LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

It is essential that the present study be evaluated in two main limitations concerning its foundations.

Preliminarily, the current study is based on a Likert scale whereby it becomes possible to investigate the data obtained in terms of inferential statistics. Yet, the Likert scales are actually ordinal scales by nature whereas they are most frequently employed as interval scales by the researchers. In statistics, while nominal and ordinal scales are acknowledged to be used only for descriptive statistics, through some statistical calculations which validate the scale items to be proper for use in inferential statistics, they are employed as interval scales. This situation makes it hard to decide whether parametric or non-parametric tests are to be carried since both tests become viable for the general course of the research. Indeed, there is research either sides that confirm both parametric and non-parametric tests with Likert scales (Brown 2011).

Second, the findings of this study should be assessed in terms of EFL environment since the results of the same study may turn out to be more or less effectual in ESL environment as far as motivation, learning style, learner strategies and cultural barriers are concerned.

Eventually, within the aforementioned limitations, the current study is supposed to contribute to the literature in determining the relation between foreign language teaching, and students' individual differences especially to the extent in which their achievements are concerned. Also, the study would submit implications for further studies so that different age groups such as young learners or different content-based courses would be new cases of investigation when dealing with contextual vocabulary teaching.

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