

The Role Of Content Background Knowledge On Translation

Artalan Bilgisinin Çeviri Üzerindeki Rolü

Suna Akalın¹

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı Lisans öğrencilerinin Çeviri derslerinde kullanabilecekleri etkili ve pratik öğretim yöntemleri geliştirebilmektir. Bu çalışma, özellikle çeviride konu hakkında ön bilgi almanın çevirinin kalitesini arttırmada bir önemi olup olmadığını araştırmaktadır. Bir grup araştırmada deney grubu olarak yer almıştır. Bu gruba çeviri yapmadan önce ön bilgi verilmiştir. Kontrol grubuna ise ön bilgi verilmeden çeviri yapmaları istenmiştir. Sonuçlar göstermiştir ki, kontrol grubunun % 69u ön bilgi almadıklarından ön bilgi almak, çeviride daha başarılı olmakta faydalıdır.

Anahtar Sözcük: çeviri,art alan bilgisi, söylev

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore ways to provide effective as well as practical teaching tools that can be utilized in translation courses for undergraduate students. The present study specifically focuses on the effect of having access to background information of the translation. One group was aimed to participate in the research. First, this group was given some sentences to translate from English into Turkish without acquiring them with background information. Then the same group was supplied with necessary background information. Outputs of the two phases were compared to assess the impact of background information. The results showed that 69 percent of the subjects could not interpret the sentences they were given before they acquired content background knowledge. However, they were successful at the second parts of the sentences in which the subjects try to translate the same sentences after having been given content background information. This percentage confirms the relationship between content background knowledge and translation.

Keywords: translation, background knowledge, discourse

Introduction

Pedagogically, knowledge of language does not merely include grammar and lexicon. While interpreting a text or a speech, even native speakers of the language of the text or the speech may have

¹ Yrd. Doç. Dr. Atatürk Üniversitesi, Kazım Karabekir Eğitim Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, eposta:sakalin@atauni.edu.tr

difficulty understanding it. However, it is more complicated and difficult to overcome if it is required to interpret the text and translate it into another language. Scholars of translation have studied diverse perspectives such as discourse analysis, conversation analysis, sociolinguist pragmatics and psycholinguistics (Saldanha, 2009). Several studies have supported the close relationship between background knowledge and achievement (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987; Bloom, 1976; Dochy, Segers, & Buehl, 1999; Tobias, 1994; Alexander, Kulikowich, & Schulze, 1994; Schiefele & Krapp, 1996; Tamir, 1996; Boulanger, 1981). Schema refers to the previous knowledge existing in the mind. The previous knowledge can turn a translator's focus to the familiar information in the translation process. Comprehension occurs as a result of an interaction between the available information and the information in the text. The same mechanism can be considered for translation too. In the translation process, the translator first take the information, then asks for the relevant background knowledge.

In case the relevant schema is identified, the translator works on it. In this way the new information is comprehended. When the related schema is found, the former schema will be used to compare with the new information and then translators analyze and work on it. Thus the new information will be understood. So it is a process of dealing with information. In other words, translation can be seen as a complex procedure consisting of taking knowledge, processing it and constructing new knowledge. The main purpose of this study is to show the effects of content background knowledge on interpreting information and translating it into another language. For example, Turkish people may hardly have difficulty in comprehending a text about the features of traditional Turkish wedding ceremony when compared to the Americans. This situation occurs as the Turkish have approximate background knowledge about the content of the text whereas the Americans do not.

Literature Review

Translation is a way of communication that involves taking a text in one language and producing a version of it in another language. It is an activity which involves at least two languages and two cultural

traditions (Toury, 1978; p.200). From this aspect it is cross-cultural as it enables people to be aware of different cultures' work. Translation theorists remark the relationship between language and culture, claiming that translation is a process of intercultural exchange (Lotman & Uspensky, 1978; Kloepfer & Shaw, 1981; Newmark, 1988; Kramersch, 1998; Pena, 2007; Pennycook, 2007). We can define translation with the help of a chart as:

“The process of translation between two different written languages involves changing of an original written text (the source text or ST) in the original verbal language (the source language or SL) into a written text (the target text or TT) in a different verbal language (the target language or TL)



The use of translation in EFL/ESL classes is a controversial subject. In the twentieth century new approaches like Direct and Communicative were against the use of translation in language teaching classes due to the effect of Grammar Translation Method. In contrast to Grammar Translation Method that uses classical written texts Communicative Language Teaching suggests using authentic materials as it sees the languages' first aim is communication. Hence it asserts that there is no need for translation. On the other hand, when considered that the main purpose of translation is communication, translation should be a part of language learning. It deepens comprehension and improves writing skill. Schäffner (2002, p. 125) lists those benefits of translation in language teaching: “(a) improve verbal agility, (b) expand the students' vocabulary in L2, (c) develop their style, (d) improve their understanding of how languages work, (e) consolidate L2 structures for active use, and (f) monitor and improve the comprehension of L2”.

During translation, learners encounter many problems arising from differences between source language and target language. Each lan-

guage is unique and has idiocratic features. This uniqueness causes the translation problems. These problems have various dimensions such as pragmatic problems, cultural problems, lexical problems, text-specific problems, grammatical or structural problems. The lack of schematic knowledge about the studied subject is listed as another problem. Schematic knowledge helps organize and interpret and perceive new and existing information. It provides a framework for future understanding by organizing the current knowledge. Schematic knowledge is highly context specific (Quilici & Mayer, 2002).It guides memory retrieval of common visual scenes (Brewer & Treyns, 1981; Friedman,1979). Rumelhart defines schemata as "building blocks of cognition". In general, there are three main types of schemas: formal schemata, linguistic schemata and content schemata.

In this study only the content schemata will be dealt with as it is related to the subject. Content schemata refer to the background knowledge of the content area of a text, or the subject a text talks about such as knowledge about people, the world, culture, and the universe (Brown, 2001revised in Erten and Razi, 2009). They contain an understanding of the topic of the text and the cultural-specific constituents required to interpret it. Content schemata can additionally be divided into two different types: background knowledge and subject matter knowledge. The earlier refers to the knowledge that may or may not be relevant to the content of a particular text, and the final is straightforwardly related to the text content and topic (Alderson, 2000 cited in Erten and Razi, 2009). Content schema is an element of the individual's cultural orientation, and while culture influences all aspects of life, it undoubtedly has a major impact on all components of learning process (Al-Issa, 2006).

Background knowledge about the content in other words content schema is one of the most important requirements in translation. Although the importance of background knowledge in is clear, there are a limited number of studies conducted. One of these studies that investigates the influence of background knowledge in translationHaeyoung Kim (2006) investigated not only the relationship between background knowledge and translation quality but the most effective attribute (quality or quantity) of background knowledge. He

compared two groups consisting of thirty-two undergraduate students in a Korean/English translation course of a university in Korea. One group conducted background research on the translation topic prior to engaging translation while the other group only used dictionaries to carry out the identical task. Besides, one group was allowed to collect background while the other one had no background knowledge. The results show that the background knowledge is more significant than a priori English reading proficiency for a more successful translation. In this study, Kim also claims that “while background information quantity had a significant influence on the translation quality, background information quantity had little effect.” (p. 335)

Knowing a foreign language does not mean that one can easily translate it into another language. Hence the translators who are engaged in translation uttermost should have some skills as they are not an ordinary user of a language. Excellent comprehension of both source and target language, ability of writing, knowledge of structural pattern and lexis, being aware of cultural differences are some of the necessities for being a good translator. Having schemata about content is another requirement that makes the translation process easier for the translators. While listing the general requirements needed for being a successful translator, Gyde Hansen (2010) says that together with the general and professional background knowledge the abilities such as talent, courage, self-awareness and independence, alertness, empathy, tolerance, openmindedness, precision, creativity, the ability to select, judgment, responsibility and a critical attitude constitute translational competence. She sees the background knowledge as a part of “the individual translator’s competence” (p. 201, 204, 205). Another study that investigates the importance of background knowledge for the translators is Xiangyue Yu (2011), who brings his studies focus on a specific field, tries to find the content background knowledge effect on business English translation in his work entitled “Exploration of Schema in Business English Translation”. He states that translators have to possess some background knowledge like the relative business courses and the systematic knowledge to make a qualified translation in the field of business. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the translators should strengthen, construct and extend their schemata by reading more, which will enable them to enhance their translation ability.

Schemata activation is necessary for comprehending the current information and acquiring new knowledge. It is effective not only in comprehension but in translation. To show the relationship between schema activation and translation, Pedro Macizo and M. Teresa (2009) did three experiments. In the first experiment, twenty texts and one more for practice were given to sixteen Spanish/English translators having more than two years experience and specialized in a variety of fields. They made sight translation without a prior summary. In the second experiment, ten professional translators were given five narrative texts used in Experiment 1. The translators were asked to read the text silently and translate them orally with the presence of a summary. In the third experiment, the ten translators that participated in Experiment 2 were asked to read each sentence in selected five texts and repeat it. Reading and repeating condition where a summary was not presented and a critical condition having a summary was compared and a working memory was added. The results show that schema activation helps the translators create a mental representation making the understanding of coming information easier and the schemata activation facilitates comprehension especially when it is accompanied by a priori summary. Mohammed Farghal (2010) also provided an empirical evidence for a schematic model in translation. He gave an ambiguous text with two different titles to twenty-three MA students and nine professors. One of these two titles referred to an unmarked and obvious schema and the other one referred to a marked schema. The participants were asked to translate the text from English into Arabic without using dictionary. As to the results, the study shows that schematic competence may override lexical competence in translational activity. Furthermore, Farghal points out that “an unfocused schematic orientation in translation may lead to well-written but nonsensical translation.” (p.132)

Some problems may be encountered when the translators are lack of some skills that are already mentioned in the previous paragraphs. Susanne Heizmann (1994) argues that these translation problems arise if the translator has no necessary information in her work “Human Strategies in Translation and Interpreting – What MT can Learn from Translators”. According to Heizmann, the translators should get information about content from various sources not to have a

translation problem whose parameters are defined by Prahl (1994), Hauenschild/Prahl/Schmitz (1994) as following:

- A decision has to be made
- There is a deficit in information
- at a concrete moment within the translation process
- in a special situation
- the deficit in information the translation problem has to be regarded

on the basis of the available knowledge (p.5).

The translation problems can be categorized as pragmatic problems, lexical problems, text-specific problems, grammatical or structural problems and cultural problems. Knowledge of culture is crucial because of the fact that it is an integrated part of language. Having inadequate information about culture causes some problems like cultural gaps during translation. Jianqing Wu (2008) is one of the researchers dealing with these gaps in his work entitled “The Analysis of Cultural Gaps in Translation and Solutions”. He compared different cultural connotations of some expressions in Chinese and English. In his study, Wu analyzed some cases that were cultural background, non-equivalence, extension and intension, derivation and suggests six methods to solve the problems in the translation. He emphasizes the importance of being familiar with the cultural background. He asserts when we are lack of cultural background we will have some problems like cultural gaps. Another study on the cultural problems carried out by Anica Glodjović (2010) investigating the cultural and linguistic barriers in translation with the help of some examples taken from the Serbian translation of a contemporary novel in her research study entitled “Translation as a means of Cross-Cultural Communication: Some Problems in Literary Text Translations” She especially analyzes culture related issues in the novel that is “Stories We Could Tell” written by Tony Parsons. At the end of the study, Glodjović concludes that the translators have to complete the missing background information to be a good translator.

In the study “Use of Culture-laden Texts to Enhance Culture-specific Translation Skills from English into Arabic”, Mohamed Amin

Mekheimer (2012), made an experimental research to explore the possibility of rendering culture-laden texts from English into Arabic, relying on a corpus of literary texts representing the local cultures of 16th and 18th century England. He used an experimental and a control group consisting of fifty-one fourth year English language learners who were familiar with translation and knew English well. The learners in the control group were not educated on inter-cultural nuances between Arabic and English whereas the students in the experimental group study specially designed course involving culture-specific literary texts from 16th century Shakespearean drama and 18th century novels. The results reinforce the notion that cultural background affects comprehension and so does the translation. For being a good translator, Mekheimer suggests that “they should be trained on how to deal with both the source language and the translation language cultures for which they have well-developed cultural background knowledge than texts that deal with a less familiar or unfamiliar culture and for which they lack the appropriate cultural schemata.” (p. 142)

The studies conducted on the role of content background knowledge also called schema in translation in common propose that background knowledge is important for a good translation. The studies show that schema also helps the translators to have less difficulty as translating from source language to target language. The translators should investigate and read more to get this schema and then combine it with their writing ability. Thus the translation problems can be minimized.

Methodology

The current study was conducted to reveal the close relationship between the quality of a translation from English into a different language and content background knowledge. In the first place, the features of the subjects were decided on. Language incompetence was desired to be kept out as the frame of the research consists of the role of content background information. That is; any possibility of interpreting the sentences in a wrong way or making any mistakes while translating the sentences because of the lack of knowledge of English language of the subjects needed elimination. The researcher decided to take 65 students as participants, all of whom are at their second year in

English Language Department of Atatürk University and are advanced learners of English language. These 65 students were chosen among 142 students who are at their second year in a random way. Sexes, ages, social and economic backgrounds of the subject were not taken into consideration. Also, the subjects obtained information about the content and the aim of the research before participating in it. 15 different sentences were chosen selectively from different texts and speeches. Sources of these sentences include parts from reviews, articles in monthly magazines, literary works, TV series and historical works to novels and plays. The research was conducted in three phases and each phase was divided into two parts. Each week, on a day at a particular time, the subjects were given five sentences to translate into their native language, Turkish. One phase consists of two parts; on the first part, the subjects translate the five sentences directly and on the second phase after provided with content background knowledge of the sentences, the subjects retranslate the same sentences again.

After the subjects translated the sentences, they were asked to talk about their translations, especially the ones who gave correct translations of some of the sentences before acquiring content background knowledge. In this part, there are samples of the translations done by the subjects for each sentence. the same translations of a sentence which were done by different subjects are not included. Instead, just one of them was written below so that it stands for an example. In the appendix part, Turkish equivalents of these sentences translated by the subjects.

T1: Translation before acquiring content background knowledge.

T2: Translation after acquiring content background knowledge.

Results and Discussion

Before conducting this research, the question of who would participate in the research was of great interest. The subjects were supposed to have the proficiency of English in advanced level since it was demanded that all of the risks which might be caused by the lack of knowledge of English must be eliminated. The task that would be given to the subjects was to figure out whether content background information affects how the subjects translate the sentences with which they were provided by the researcher. If the subjects had had any lack of knowledge of English, the emphasis on the effect of con-

tent background knowledge on translation would have been changed into language incompetence, which was considered as a risk. The decision was made on 65 students, all of whom are at their second year in English Language Department of Atatürk University. These 65 students were chosen among 142 students who are at their second year. The choice of these students was made randomly without taking into consideration of their social and economic backgrounds, sexes, ages and the ratios of their success in the courses in the department. The subjects were informed about the content and the aim of the research beforehand.

Fifteen sentences were selected from different texts and speeches carefully as they were important in evaluating the role of content background knowledge on translation. Sources of the sentences vary from reviews, articles in monthly magazines, literary works, movies and historical works to fragments from Bible. Wide range of sources was thought most appropriate as the role of content background knowledge on translation is the more essential base of the research when compared to the role of formal background knowledge. The research was conducted in three phases and each phase was divided into two parts. Each week, on a day at a particular time, the subjects were given five sentences to translate into their native language, Turkish. The purpose of separating fifteen sentences into three groups is to avoid anxiety which may cause the subjects make wrong inferences from the sentences and have any problem with respect to their comprehension of the sentences. As indicated, one phase consists of two parts; on the first part, the subjects translate the five sentences directly and on the second phase after provided with content background information of the sentences, the subjects retranslate the same sentences again. After the subjects translated the sentences, they were asked to talk about their translations, especially the ones who gave correct translations of some of the sentences before acquiring content background knowledge.

The results of the research show that 69 percent of the subjects failed translating the sentences correctly in the first parts of the phases and in the second parts of the phases after acquiring content background knowledge they became capable of translating the sentences into Turkish. Approximately 16 percent of the subjects failed in translation in both parts of the phases, which means that having content

background knowledge did not have an effect for these subjects. Roughly 9 percent of the subjects gave correct translations in the first part without having obtained content background knowledge and their translations in the second parts were the same with the ones in the first parts. Lastly, 6 percent of the subjects comprehended the invisible meanings of the sentences. However, the translations of those subjects standing for the 6 percent piece of the pie were not accepted correct.

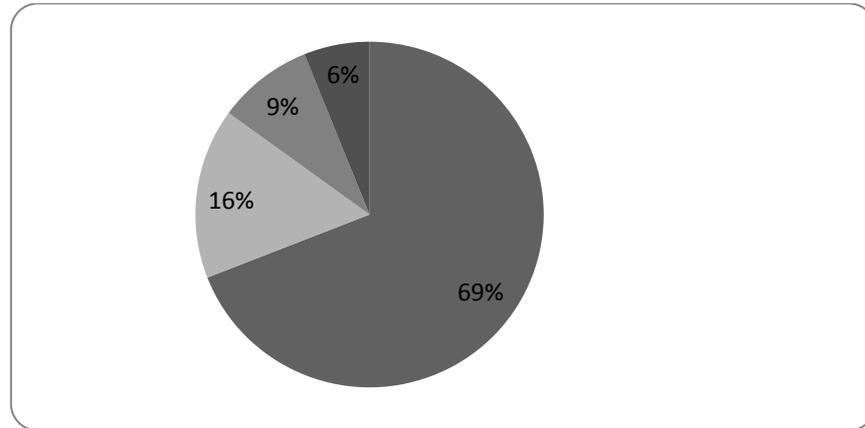
69%: Those who failed in the first parts but succeeded in the second parts in which content background knowledge was given

16%: Those who failed in both parts

9%: Those who succeeded in both parts

6%: Those who comprehended the sentences but could not translate them properly

Figure 1. Achievement Circle Graph of the Translated Expressions



Conclusion

We need to have a look at the process of comprehension so as to be aware of the close relationship between the knowledge stored in human brains and the new input. It is supposed to be kept in mind that

this relationship between content background knowledge and the new input is most likely to affect how people translate written texts or speeches from one language into another. When any visual or audial information is encountered by the human brains, the new input is immediately tried to be made meaningful associating it with schemas or scripts which are already there. When anything is not found about the new input, the brains may face difficulty to make it understandable. Making something meaningful is closely related to translation as we human beings need to interpret what is heard and then we can translate it. Learners of English confront some items which are semantically or syntactically new to their prior knowledge. Because of the novelty, learners of the language may have problems comprehending these new items. Learners of the language may not have all schemas or scripts that a native speaker has.

Firstly, this research participated by 65 subjects who study English Language Teaching Department shows that 69 percent of the subjects could not interpret the sentences they were given before they acquired content background knowledge. However, they were successful at the second parts of the sentences in which the subjects try to translate the same sentences after having been given content background information. This percentage confirms the relationship between content background knowledge and translation. Students who constitute for this percentage reported that this research gained them a different perspective when it comes to translate a text from English to Turkish. They added that the research made them aware that there are many possible ways to translate a text.

Secondly, 9 percent of 65 students translated the sentences directly without any need for background knowledge. They did not need background information to receive as they already had it. For example, for the sentence “That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet” 43 percent of the subjects gave correct translations in the first part of the phase. The big amount of the percentage may be related to the popularity of the play. They reported that they took a course titled as English Literature last semester and they read the play written by Shakespeare. They were familiar with the language that was created again by Shakespeare and the play itself. Also, the sentence “I am doing a load of whites” made it possible for

25 percent of 65 subjects to translate it without content background information. Nearly all of these reported that they have watched that episode of the TV series “Two and a Half Men”. On the other hand, all of the subjects failed translating the sentence “You always had a weak head” into Turkish before having acquired content background knowledge. After they were shown the scene of the play “Private Lives” in which the sentence was, they were able to translate it correctly. That was associated with the unpopularity of the play by the subjects.

Consequently, the findings of this study claim that the role of content background knowledge on translation from one language into another cannot be underestimated. When our brains have content background knowledge which explains the relations of what is said or what is written between the back and forward parts. That is; to understand and translate a written form or speech better, we need to know about the previous or later part of it-or both of them. This research also widened the point of views of the subjects when it is to translate a text or speech as the subjects indicated.

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Genişletilmiş Özet

Amaç: Bu çalışmanın amacı, İngilizce Öğretmenliği öğrencilerinin Çeviri derslerinde kullanılabilecek etkili ve pratik yöntemler geliştirmektir. Bu çalışmada özellikle çeviride ön bilgi vermenin çevirinin daha başarılı olmasındaki etkisi ölçülmüştür.

Metot: Bu çalışmada ön bilgi vermenin Çeviri kalitesini yükseltmedeki rolü incelenmiştir. Önce deneklerin özellikleri tespit edilmiştir. Deneklerin ileri düzey İngilizce bilmelerine özen gösterilmiştir ki, İngilizce bilgisi eksikliğinden kaynaklanan engeller ortadan kalksın. Deneklerin 65 tane olmasına karar verilmiş ve hepsi de Atatürk Üniversitesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü'nde ikinci sınıf lisans öğrencisidir. Farklı parçalardan 15 cümle dikkatle seçilmiştir çünkü çeviri üzerinde ön bilginin önemini ortaya koymada bu seçim önemlidir.

Araştırma üç aşamada gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ve her aşama iki kısma ayrılmıştır. Her hafta belirli bir zamanda deneklere ana dillerine; Türkçe, çevirmek üzere beş cümle verilmiştir. İlk aşamanın ilk kısmında deneklerden cümleleri direk olarak ana dillerine çevirmeleri istenmiş, ön bilgi verilmemiştir. İkinci kısımda ise önce ön bilgi verilmiş sonra cümleleri tekrar çevirmeleri istenmiştir. Denekler çevirileri yaptıktan sonra, kendilerinden çevirileri hakkında konuşmaları istenmiştir; özellikle de ön bilgi verilmeden önce cümleleri doğru yapanlardan bu istenmiştir.

Tartışma: Araştırmanın sonuçları göstermiştir ki, deneklerin %69'u ön bilgi verilmeden önce cümleleri doğru çevirmekte başarısız olmuş, ancak ön bilgi verildikten sonra cümleleri çevirmekte başarılı olmuştur. Deneklerin yaklaşık %16'sı her iki aşamada da çevirileri doğru yapmakta başarılı olamamıştır. Bu da gösteriyor ki, ön bilgi vermek bu denekler üzerinde etkili olmamıştır. Aşağı yukarı deneklerin %9'u ön bilgi alma kısmından önce, direk çeviri yapma kısmında doğru cevaplamıştır. Son olarak deneklerin %6'sı cümlelerin gizli anlamını yakalamıştır. Ancak bu pastanın yalnızca %6'lık kısmını kapsadığı için dikkate alınmamıştır.

Sonuç: Öncelikle, İngilizce Öğretmenliği Bölümü'nde okuyan 65 öğrencinin katıldığı bu çalışma göstermiştir ki, deneklerin %69u ön bilgi almadan yaptıkları çevirilerde başarısız olmuşlardır. Ancak ön bilgi verildikten sonradır ki cümleleri doğru çevirmişlerdir. Bu yüzde, ön bilgi verme ile Çeviri arasındaki bağı onaylamaktadır. Bu yüzdeyi oluşturan öğrenciler, ön bilgi almanın Çeviri dersine olan yaklaşımlarını değiştirdiğini söylemişlerdir. Ayrıca bu çalışmanın Çevirinin tek bir yolu olmayıp birkaç farklı yoldan gidilebileceğini fark etmelerini sağladığını söylemişlerdir.

Ayrıca, 65 öğrencinin %9u ön bilgiye ihtiyaç duymadan ilk aşamada direkt olarak cümleleri çevirmeyi başarmışlardır. Ön bilgiye ihtiyaç duymamışlardır çünkü daha önceden bu bilgiyi almışlardır. Örneğin, "That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet" cümlesini deneklerin %43ü doğru çevirmiştir çünkü bir önceki dönem İngiliz Edebiyatı Dersi'ni aldıklarını ve Shakespeare'nin bir eserinde geçen bu alıntıyı oradan hatırladıklarını söylemişlerdir.

Yine, "I am doing a load of whites" cümlesini öğrencilerin %25i doğru çevirmiştir. Bunun da sebebi "Two and a Half Man" dizisini daha önceden izlemiş olmalarıdır. Oysa deneklerin bütünü "You always had a weak head" cümlesini ön bilgi almadan çevirmekte başarısız olmuşlardır bunun da sebebi cümlenin geçtiği dizi pek popüler olmadığı için önceden izlenmemiş olmasıdır.

Sonuç: Sonuç olarak diyebiliriz ki, bir dilden bir dile çeviri yaparken içerik ön bilgisinin verilmesinin çeviride başarıyı artıracak gerçeği gözardı edilemez. Çünkü ön bilgi verilerek beynimiz cümlenin önünde ve arkasında ne olduğu konusunda uyarılmaktadır. Yani, yazılı bir metni daha iyi anlamak ve daha iyi çevirmek için, cümlenin öncesi veya sonrasını ve hatta her ikisini de bilmemiz gerekir. Bu araştırma ayrıca, deneklerin de belirttiği gibi, bir parçayı çevirmede öğrencilerin ufkunu açıp daha geniş perspektiften bakmalarını sağlamıştır.

