

LOST IN TRANSLATION, FOUND IN AI: THE WHY, WHO, WHAT, AND HOW

MELITA VEGA
MARÍA DE LOURDES MOSCOSO

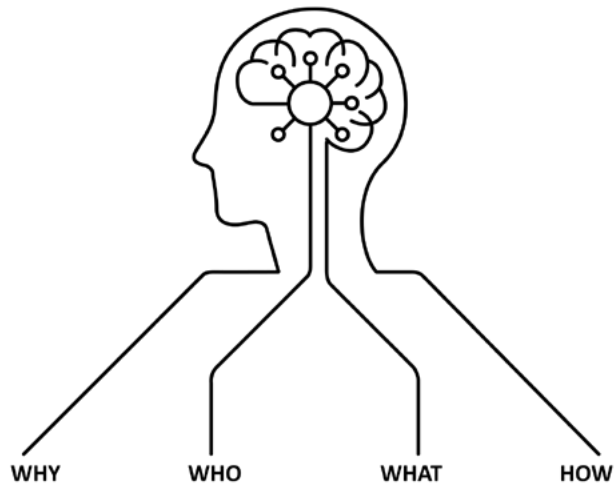


Book 2 from the Lost in Translation Series





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THE WHY, WHO, WHAT, AND HOW**



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Lost in translation, found in AI: The why, who, what, and how
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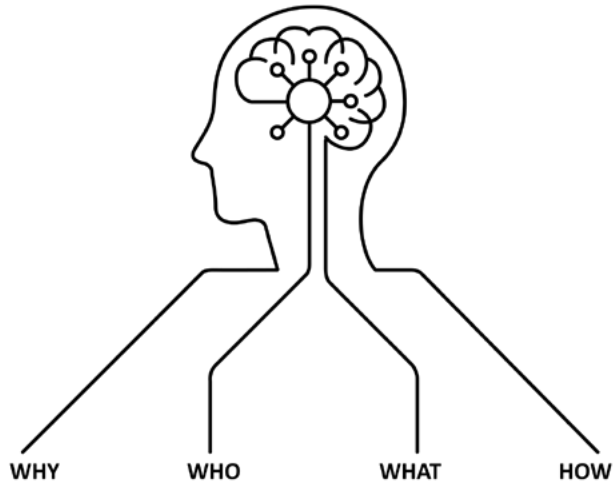
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Prologue

It is both a privilege and a pleasure to introduce *Lost in Translation, Found in AI: The Why, Who, What, and How* by Maria de Lourdes Moscoso and Melita Vega. As someone who has worked closely with them sharing classrooms, conversations, and an enduring concern for the realities of language teaching, I can attest that this book is not merely the product of academic inquiry, but of a long-standing, reflective engagement with practice. It emerges from the kind of intellectual restlessness that refuses to accept pedagogical conventions, and instead seeks to understand how and why such conventions persist, often unquestioned, within our field.

What gives this work its particular strength is precisely this intersection between theory and lived experience. The analysis is grounded in years of observing how teachers and learners navigate the complexities of language use, often negotiating between institutional expectations and pedagogical intuition. In this sense, the book can be read as both a scholarly contribution and a reflective response to the everyday dilemmas faced by educators.

At its core, this text is the result of a sustained questioning of practices that many of us have long taken for granted. Among these, few have been as persistently misunderstood or as rigidly framed as the role of translation in English language teaching. The uneasy relationship between translation and EFL pedagogy, historically shaped by methodological shifts and ideological positions, is here revisited with both critical distance and pedagogical sensitivity. Rather than reproducing inherited binaries, such as L1 versus L2 or communication versus translation, the authors invite us to reconsider these assumptions considering contemporary realities where multilingualism and digital mediation are no longer peripheral but central to the learning process.

For decades, translation has been treated as something of a pedagogical taboo, that is, tolerated in practice, yet rarely acknowledged in theory. Many of us were trained under the implicit (and sometimes explicit) mandate to exclude the first language from the classroom, as though it were an interference rather than a resource. Yet, as this book compellingly demonstrates, such assumptions have always been more ideological than empirical. Translation never truly disappeared; it simply went underground, reappearing in whispered explanations, hurried comparisons, and, more recently, in the silent glow of students' smartphones.

What distinguishes this work is its clarity of purpose. Rather than asking whether translation should exist in the EFL classroom (a question that now feels almost obsolete), the authors reframe the discussion around four essential dimensions: why translation matters, who is responsible for its use, what educators need to understand, and how it can be implemented effectively. This structure is not merely organizational; it reflects a pedagogical stance that is both critical and constructive, grounded in theory yet attentive to the complexities of real classrooms.

Particularly noteworthy is the book's attention to context. Drawing on data from lived experiences in Ecuador, the authors articulate insights that extend beyond national boundaries while remaining firmly anchored in the sociolinguistic, institutional, and educational realities of the country. In the Ecuadorian EFL landscape, which is marked by persistent tensions between policy prescriptions, standardized curricular frameworks, and the heterogeneous conditions of public and private schooling, this contextual grounding is especially significant. The discussion implicitly dialogues with national curricular orientations and the expectations placed upon English language teaching, while also exposing the gaps between official discourse and classroom enactment.

Equally important is the centrality given to teachers' voices. In a context where pedagogical decisions are often mediated by external mandates, limited resources, and diverse student profiles, the book foregrounds teachers not as passive implementers of methodology, but as reflective practitioners who actively interpret, adapt, and sometimes resist prescribed approaches. This repositioning is particularly relevant in Ecuador, where English teachers frequently navigate multilingual realities, uneven proficiency levels, and evolving policy demands. By situating translation within these concrete conditions, the authors demonstrate that pedagogy is neither neutral nor universally transferable; rather, it emerges from situated judgments shaped by institutional constraints, cultural expectations, and professional agency. In doing so, the book offers not only a methodological contribution, but also a nuanced, context-sensitive rethinking of what it means to teach and make pedagogical decisions in contemporary Ecuadorian classrooms.

The book's engagement with the contemporary landscape of language learning is another key element, particularly the significant impact of artificial intelligence and online machine translation tools. Rather than adopting defensive or alarmist stances, the authors approach these

developments with nuance and pragmatism. They neither dismiss nor uncritically embrace AI; instead, they position it as a tool that, when used thoughtfully, can foster deeper linguistic awareness, critical thinking, and learner autonomy.

As a colleague, I have witnessed the intellectual honesty that underpins this work: the willingness to question entrenched beliefs, to confront contradictions, and to bridge the often artificial divide between theory and practice. This book does not offer simplistic answers, nor does it advocate for a return to outdated methodologies. Instead, it invites educators to reconsider translation as a legitimate, strategic, and even necessary component of language teaching in the 21st century.

Ultimately, *Lost in Translation, Found in AI* is more than a book about translation; it is a book about teaching. It is about what it means to respond thoughtfully to changing educational landscapes while remaining grounded in learners' needs. It challenges us, as educators, to move beyond rigid binaries and to embrace the full linguistic repertoire that our students bring into the classroom.

I have no doubt that this work will provoke reflection, debate, and, most importantly, transformation in the way we think about language teaching. It is a timely and important contribution that speaks not only to researchers and teacher educators, but to every practitioner who has ever wondered whether the rules we follow truly serve the learners in front of us.

Diana Lee Rodas Reinbach

Introduction

For decades, translation has occupied an uneasy place in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Once dismissed as an outdated practice belonging to the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), it has steadily re-emerged as a pedagogical tool, especially in an era of multilingual education and digital innovation. This book, *Lost in Translation, Found in AI: The Why, Who, What, and How*, examines the ever-changing role of pedagogical translation by addressing four key questions: **why** it matters, **who** is responsible for its implementation, **what** considerations need to be known, and **how** it can be applied in practice.

Chapter 1: The Why reviews the history and re-emergence of pedagogical translation. It explains how the stigma against using students' first language (L1) in the language classroom has been challenged by multilingual approaches, sociocultural perspectives on mediation, and the ubiquitousness of online machine translators (OMTs) and AI-powered apps. The chapter argues that, far from blocking learning, strategic use of translation can reduce anxiety, boost comprehension, and foster both linguistic and intercultural skills.

Chapter 2: The Who focuses on teachers as the core agents of pedagogical translation. It highlights their role as key decision-makers, whose beliefs, experiences, and institutional contexts decide how and when translation is used. Drawing on survey data from EFL teachers in Ecuador from the public and private sectors, this chapter explores their divided feelings, ranging from pragmatic acceptance to skepticism, and the factors that influence their classroom practices.

Chapter 3: The What covers the key considerations for EFL instructors pondering whether to incorporate pedagogical translation. It clarifies that pedagogical translation is not about training professional translators but about combining students' L1 and L2 to enhance learning. The chapter outlines its theoretical foundations, scope, and benefits, such as cognitive, affective, and cultural, while also acknowledging its inherent risks. It offers practical insights on how translation can be used to strengthen vocabulary, grammar awareness, intercultural competence, and creativity.

Chapter 4: The How-Part I moves into applied practice by analyzing film translation in the age of artificial intelligence, with a critical discussion of the 2025 film *Emilia Pérez*. This chapter illustrates how cinema and audiovisual translation can serve as useful tools for language learning, while also examining the limitations of AI-generated subtitles and machine translations of dialogues and lyrics without human involvement. It shows how students and teachers can engage critically with film translation as both linguistic and cultural negotiation.

Chapter 5: The How-Part II turns to classroom practice by presenting concrete applications of pedagogical translation for different levels of learners. It provides task-based activities and examples, ranging from vocabulary-building exercises and idiom comparisons to subtitling projects and more advanced translation challenges that spark debate and critical thinking. This final chapter emphasizes

intentional, measured use of translation as part of a wider toolkit of teaching strategies that includes editing OMT and AI outputs.

Together, these chapters demonstrate that translation is no longer an outdated relic and that strategic L1 use can be a dynamic, engaging, and flexible tool in language teaching. By framing the discussion around the *why, who, what, and how*, this book invites language educators to reconsider translation as a resource that can enrich language learning, affirm learners' identities, and respond to the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly changing educational landscape.

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CHAPTER 1: **THE WHY**

CHAPTER 1: THE WHY

The Re-emergence of Pedagogical Translation

Translation has long been discouraged in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms, particularly during the shift from the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) to more communicative approaches in the 1940s, purporting to foster a more natural language acquisition. The Reform Movement that ushered in methodologies such as the Direct Method in the late 19th century, and later Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the mid-20th century, among others, emphasized using the target language (L2) directly in the classroom rather than relying on translation to the learner's native language (L1) (Brown, 2021; Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). The result was a stigmatization of the L1 and translation in the EFL classroom over concerns that it does not promote authentic interpersonal communication due to a lack of speaking and listening practice.

While translation has long been recognized as a fifth skill, its potential in the EFL classroom has traditionally been diminished due to concerns that it is of no pedagogical use because it requires mastery of two languages, focuses excessively on grammar rules, and bears too much of a resemblance to the inauthentic language learning practices of the early 1800s used to learn Greek and Latin (Gasca Jiménez, 2017; Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). Other critical arguments have centered on the practical implementation of translation activities, namely, they tend to be executed in an ad-hoc manner with little prior planning and do not require students to produce original writing (Iranzo, 2022).

Few educators would argue against the benefit of maximum exposure to the L2 in EFL classrooms; however, there is a question as to whether the presence of students' L1 was ever truly erased from the classroom. In recent decades,

researchers have called for the rehabilitation of the image of translation as a pedagogical tool in language teaching, most notably by challenging the prevalence of monolingual teaching methods that villainize L1 use (Brown, 2021). One argument favoring this rehabilitation is that, from a sociocultural perspective, L1 use can serve as a “psychological tool” that enables students to assist each other to scaffold and mediate their cognitive process while executing tasks or assignments in the L2 (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003, p. 760).

In addition to broadening perspectives that embrace multilingualism and communicative competence, there is the growing recognition that, contrary to hard-held, if not stubborn, beliefs, translation can help improve students’ morphosyntactic precision, build their awareness of other cultures, and foster positive language transfer through reflective, well-designed classroom activities (Gasca Jiménez, 2017; Iranzo, 2022).

Other authors have also asserted that the L1 use that occurs during translation can be especially productive when students’ receptive skills (e.g., listening and reading) are higher than their productive skills (e.g., writing and speaking), which is usually the case in the early stages of language learning (Topolska-Pado, 2010). Therefore, if using their L1 helps students grow their receptive skills, it is understood that the development of productive skills will follow, since both types of skills are considered interdependent (Magyar et al., 2022). Even as more researchers publicly recognize the merits of L1 use in translation, how much and when it should be used continues to be hotly debated. This chapter aims to review key moments in recent decades that have sparked a renewed interest in pedagogical translation in language teaching.

The Fallacy of Villainizing L1 Use

Much of the criticism against using pedagogical translation in the EFL classroom, particularly among proponents of the monolingual approach, is based on concerns surrounding overreliance on students' L1 and reduced exposure to the L2. However, enforcing a policy of English-only in language teaching has also had numerous detractors over the years. Some authors have argued that while on the surface this practice appears to compensate for issues related to short classroom periods and lack of opportunities to engage with the L2 outside the classroom (Lightbown & Spada, 2020), it may be more rooted in historical and ideological reasons than pedagogical (Auerbach, 1993).

Phillipson (1992), as part of his larger work on linguistic imperialism, identified several fallacies regarding the practice of teaching English, three of which appear to challenge the once unquestioned belief that the L1 is to be avoided like the plague. First, there is the monolingual fallacy that assumes English-only instruction is most effective, but which also ignores the potential of L1 use in scaffolding learning and reducing anxiety, all while recognizing learners' cultural and linguistic competencies. Next, there is the maximum exposure fallacy, which assumes that greater exposure to the L2 leads to better learning outcomes. While this practice is often justified by educators in learning contexts where the L2 is neither an official nor a de facto language used outside the classroom, it is important to note that, when done excessively without regard for quality and content, maximum exposure may overwhelm learners and hamper their understanding. In fact, it has been noted that studies have yet to document long-term advantages for restricting all language interaction to L1 (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). Lastly, there is the native speaker fallacy, which assumes instructors whose first language is English are inherently better equipped to teach than their non-native counterparts. Aside from perpetuating inequalities

in hiring practices and status within academic institutions, this assumption ignores the value of non-native and multilingual language instructors who may be more familiar with their students' L1 backgrounds and cultural experiences, and able to apply multilingual learning strategies (Brown, 2021; Zhang & Solarz, 2022).

Additionally, studies have found that students and professors, particularly those in university, may prefer a learning environment that allows judicious L1 use at least part of the time to help reduce cognitive overload and clarify complex concepts related to grammar and vocabulary, which is impossible with a monolingual instructor (An & Macaro, 2022; Bruen & Kelly, 2014; Chugai & Synekop, 2025).

Multilingual Approaches to Language Learning

Macaro (2014) argues that deciding between an immersive, target-language-only approach and a multilingual approach to language learning that allows the use of other languages is a major central issue faced by EFL researchers, educators, and policymakers.

Traditional EFL teaching often assumes that the L1 interferes with English and should therefore be excluded. Instead of seeing languages as isolated systems that must be kept separate, multilingual approaches recognize that learners' linguistic toolboxes are interconnected and that first (L1) and other languages can be powerful resources in learning English that should be nurtured rather than stifled (Smagul, 2024). In this sense, learners naturally draw on their full linguistic knowledge, i.e., their expertise in their L1 and possibly other languages, to make sense of a new language by transferring certain strategies and skills, such as reading comprehension, vocabulary learning, and grammar patterns, before verbalizing in the L2 (Storch & Wigglesworth, 2003).

An L2-only policy in the EFL classroom is often rooted in the desire to maximize exposure to the target language, particularly if classroom time is limited to only a certain number of hours per week. However, a growing body of quantitative and qualitative research questions the wisdom of monolingual or L2-only approaches in language teaching, with some advocating for a more active, strategic role of the L1 through a multilingual approach. Although there is often concern that bringing the L1 into the EFL classroom might cause confusion among students or poison their learning, studies have shown the constant presence of the L1 in learners' minds, even when they have been told to disregard it, can serve as a bridge to comprehension and facilitate richer information exchange and more effective communication (Lightbown & Spada, 2020).

Support for strategic L1 use can be found in studies comparing group interactions where learners alternate between their L1 and the L2 with those conducted exclusively in monolingual environments. In a quasi-experimental study of beginner French and Arabic learners in the U.S., Brown (2021) compared the learning outcomes of control and experimental groups exposed to monolingual and multilingual pedagogical language strategies, respectively, led by multilingual instructors over a ten-week period. While only the Arabic multilingual group showed statistically significantly higher scores compared to the monolingual group, the study nonetheless concluded that all language groups appeared to have received sufficient L2 input, output, and interaction. Another study in Turkey (Muhammet & Derin, 2020) examining English speaking skills development among high school students found that students who had received some exposure to L1 outperformed their L2-only peers in low and high intermediate levels.

Other studies in language classrooms where the L2 is a different foreign language, such as Spanish, have also found that translation activities are highly effective for developing skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and writing, particularly among students with a higher level of L2 competence, through the use of proper scaffolding strategies (Sánchez Cuadrado, 2017; Ureña Tormo, 2024). This strategic use of L1 appears to reduce cognitive strain, thereby enabling learners to devote greater attention to the structural and semantic aspects of the L2 (Bruen & Kelly, 2014). In addition, it has also been suggested that multilingual pedagogical approaches may also strengthen multilingual identities (Garcia, 2017).

It is important to recognize that learners from majority language groups—such as Spanish speakers in Ecuador or Colombia—also encounter challenges when studying English as a foreign language in classrooms where both their peers and professors speak the same L1. In these contexts, the primary difficulty lies in preventing the dominant language from overshadowing meaningful engagement with the L2, particularly when learners' proficiency in the new language remains limited. For these majority language learners, however, strategically drawing on the L1 through metalinguistic discussion or selective group work can acknowledge existing information while keeping the emphasis on developing and using the L2 (Ballinger et al., 2017).

Within the discussion of L1 use in the EFL classroom, translation has traditionally been frowned upon because it is often seen as a barrier to thinking in English. Multilingual approaches see L1 as a natural, useful strategy since drawing comparisons between expressions, idioms, and grammar in different languages promotes awareness of similarities and differences while supporting accuracy. Therefore, it stands to reason that encouraging students to use their L1 through translation activities allows them to flex their linguistic prowess (Couto-Cantero & Fraga-Castrillón, 2023); it also recognizes the value of translanguaging, which is the practice of fluidly

using all of one's languages to learn and communicate (Cenoz, 2019). In EFL classrooms, this may mean asking students to brainstorm in their L1, compare structures across languages, or discuss meaning before expressing it in the L2. Rather than a bad habit, using the L1 strategically can serve as a legitimate tool for deeper processing and better communication.

Translation as Mediation

From a Vygotskian perspective, human contact with the world does not take place in a direct manner; interactions with other humans and environments are made possible through signs—also known as mediators—that can take the form of language and symbols carrying a more social quality than individual. Such mediators support the processing of external experiences to achieve a more abstract understanding that ultimately shapes internal thoughts and behaviors (Wertsch, 2007). In an evolving sociocultural view of learning (Lantolf, 2000), mediation has come to be understood as a bridge to meaning that can involve different tools ranging from technological devices to other languages. In this sense, it stands to reason that the act of translation is one of mediation, as it facilitates the transfer of meaning from one language to another by helping break down complex matter into more manageable portions and adapting input (North, 2016).

Despite early theoretical support for translation as a mediation tool, albeit indirectly, alongside other scaffolding strategies in the education field, its long-standing, nefarious reputation due to its association with GTM and L1 use has prevailed over the decades. However, its armor was further weakened with the release of the 2018 version of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) guidelines, which included references to translation and interpretation as part of language mediation (Carreres et al., 2017; Iranzo, 2022). According to the CEFR, language mediation is a means of

facilitating communication between people who cannot do so directly, particularly if there is a linguistic or cultural gap. However, language mediation strategies go beyond simply speaking or writing in a second or foreign language; they involve interpreting, adapting, and relaying meaning in a way that makes it understandable to someone else. Thus, activities such as paraphrasing, summarizing, and reprocessing texts can be incorporated into class curricula, thus further positioning translation as a beneficial activity in language learning (Council of Europe, 2018).

Mediation in language learning requires pre-planning to organize resources and careful analysis of how to carry out a particular task. For example, in the process of interpretation, a mediator must be able to simultaneously preview what information lies ahead as well as process what has just been said to adapt a message. If learners cannot express ideas in the L2, using their L1 may help fill in gaps in understanding and avoid communication breakdown. Interestingly, while many would accept this process as a form of translation, some authors continue to resist using the word, opting instead to use the term mediation and treat it as if it were a separate activity. While mediation can indeed cover a broader scope of activities beyond language transfer, other authors have highlighted the impossibility and illogicality of disassociating the two terms since translation is intrinsically tied to communicative and cultural contexts to ensure meaning, feelings, and concepts are understood in addition to words (Carreres et al., 2017; Liddicoat, 2016).

The Covid-19 Pandemic and the Growing Ubiquity of Online Tools

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on education worldwide and contributed to the reemergence of pedagogical translation in the EFL classroom in several ways

(Gamage et al., 2022; Hargreaves, 2021; Linling & Abdullah, 2023). With many classes pushed online, face-to-face interaction was limited, and direct communication in English was often constrained by technology (Almahasees & Qassem, 2022; Salazar Carranco & Paredes Rodríguez). Thus, speaking and real-time communication, key elements of communicative language teaching, were harder to implement effectively due to the lack of physically present speaking partners as well as instructors (Khan et al., 2021). This was especially true in large classes or where internet access was unstable (Schaffner & Stefanutti, 2022).

This shift emphasized written tasks and asynchronous learning activities, where translation became a compromise. With the absence of an instructor in online EFL classes, translation became a practical and accessible tool that did not have a detrimental impact on students' learning. To keep learners engaged, instructors at all education levels became more open to written exercises and flexible pedagogical strategies, including translation tasks that kept learners engaged and able to deliver assignments that could easily be assessed remotely. In this setting, translation became a practical method for checking understanding, especially in asynchronous tasks (Khan et al., 2021). Since many students were learning more independently without immediate teacher support, translation served as a coping mechanism that helped bridge the gap between students' L1 and the L2, thus making instructions, vocabulary, and grammar easier to understand in a remote context, all while reducing anxiety (Badda & Pavón Vázquez, 2024).

While digital devices and learning platforms were starting to make an appearance in EFL teaching prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, they were not widely used to their full capacity for multiple reasons, including lack of experience among educators and resources (Abata Checa & Pullupaxi Tamayo, 2024; Stockwell & Wang, 2023). It wasn't until mandatory remote learning that their use became

significantly amplified to the point of creating dependency among students as a matter of survival (Badda & Pavón Vázquez, 2024). Students became accustomed to using personal devices, such as phones, tablets, and laptops, for everything from attending classes to doing homework, and to understand and produce English assignments, especially when immediate help from a teacher wasn't available (Moorhouse et al., 2023). Post-pandemic, many schools adopted or invested more significantly in hybrid or tech-integrated models, continuing to use platforms and tools introduced during lockdown (Sulaiman et al., 2023). Thus, it can be said that this normalization blurred the line between distracting and educational smartphone use, making it more acceptable in language classrooms as it offered easy access to online dictionaries, grammar apps, flashcard tools, and online machine translation (OMT) tools such as Google Translate, DeepL, and built-in browser translation.

Attitudes and experience among educators have changed since the early days of the pandemic, most notably in the adoption of a more pragmatic, if not resigned, approach to classroom management when it comes to digital tools, particularly those powered by generative AI (Stockwell & Wang, 2023). Instead of fighting smartphone use, some educators have begun incorporating them pedagogically, that is, asking students to compare OMT and human translations, reflect on errors in OMTs, and revise or improve their output (Ata & Debreli, 2021). This has been said to have increased autonomy and just-in-time learning, since smartphones allow for on-the-spot translation, giving students the power to clarify meaning independently without breaking the flow of learning (Khan et al., 2021).

Certainly, the pandemic disrupted the EFL classroom and revealed some limitations of purely communicative methods, especially in digital or asynchronous formats. Pedagogical translation reemerged, perhaps unexpectedly, as a practical, flexible tool that supported comprehension, vocabulary

acquisition, critical thinking, and language accuracy, which are all essential in a remote or hybrid learning context. It also aligned well with increased digital tool use and the growing calls to re-evaluate the role of the learner's first language in the EFL classroom.

Renewed acceptance (or resignation) of Pedagogical Translation

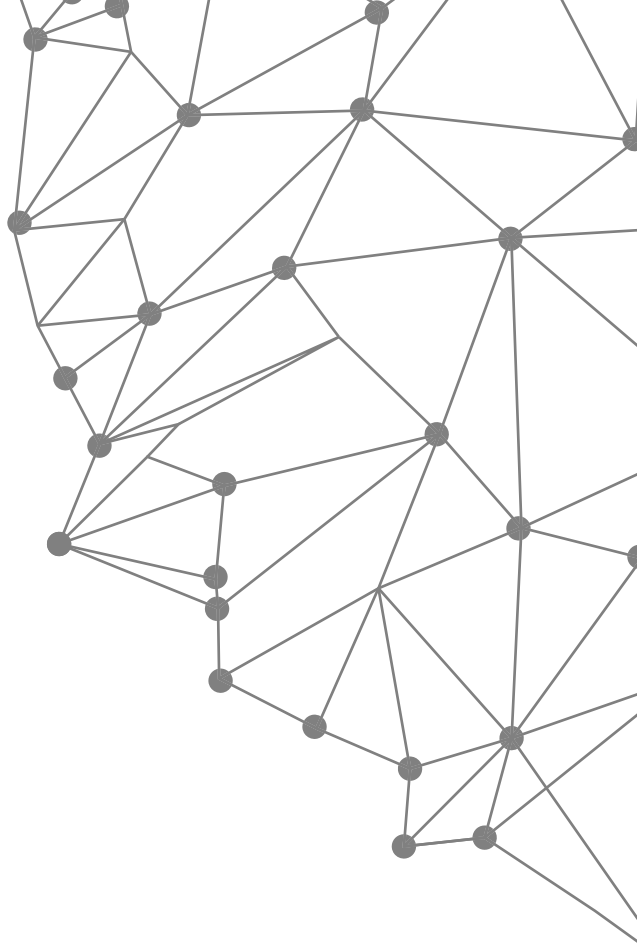
The reappearance of translation in EFL pedagogy should not be understood as a revival of past practices, but rather as a response to the changing needs of learners and the evolving perspectives of educators, whether they like it or not. The long-standing stigma attached to L1 use, largely rooted in the fallacies of monolingual teaching, appears to be gradually giving way to deeper understandings and acceptance of how languages interact in the classroom. What once was cast as an obstacle in achieving authentic communication is now slowly becoming recognized as a resource that is, in fact, communicative (Cerezo Herrero, 2024).

The turn toward multilingual approaches has been central to this change, certainly spurred by the ubiquity and normalization of online machine translation tools and AI-powered apps. By repositioning learners' L1 as part of their linguistic toolbox rather than as a nuisance, translation can be accepted as a natural and inevitable productive classroom practice. Instead of forcing learners to relegate their L1 to the background, strategic translation tasks encourage them to compare structures, negotiate meaning, and refine their understanding of grammar and vocabulary, thereby strengthening both receptive and productive skills.

Equally important is the recognition of translation as a form of mediation. From a sociocultural perspective, translation is not merely a linguistic exercise but a tool that enables learners to process and adapt meaning, bridging linguistic and cultural divides. This perspective aligns with

developments in frameworks such as the CEFR, which highlights mediation as a key competence in language learning, situating translation alongside other meaning-making activities like paraphrasing and summarizing.

In this context of broader thinking regarding teaching philosophies, educators would do well to recognize translation not as an outdated or harmful activity but as a modern, effective pedagogical strategy (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). When paired with digital tools such as OMTs, translation can serve as a productive scaffolding technique if it is balanced with other tasks that promote communicative competence in the L2 (Badda & Pavón Vázquez, 2024). In this light, pedagogical translation is not a return to old habits but a way forward to helping learners engage more meaningfully with a language.



CHAPTER 2: **THE WHO**

CHAPTER 2: THE WHO

The Role of EFL Teachers as Gatekeepers and Decision Makers

In recent decades, language education has slowly turned toward multilingual teaching practices that challenge long-standing beliefs in the superiority of monolingual practices. In this monolingual mindset, a learner's first (L1) and second languages (L2) have traditionally been kept separate, albeit artificially (Lasagabaster, 2017).

Whereas traditional communicative approaches have often villainized the learner's L1 as an obstacle to be minimized at all costs (Pavón Vázquez & Ramos Ordóñez, 2018; Phillipson, 1992; Ross, 2000), past and recent research has reframed it as a learning aid that can foster greater comprehension and intercultural awareness (Badda & Pavón Vázquez, 2024; Garcia, 2017). At the heart of this reframing lies pedagogical translation, which is the use of translation, code-switching, and students' L1 as strategic tools to support the acquisition of a second or foreign language (L2) and foster linguistic, cultural, and communicative competence. Meaning, tools that have been commonly used by bilinguals (Gablasova, 2014; Lasagabaster & García, 2014).

The perceptions and roles of language instructors are essential in this discussion. On the one hand, many teachers, under monolingual doctrine influence, are still wary about using translation in their classes, mostly out of fear that it may backfire and instill dependency on the L1 (Lasagabaster, 2017). On the other hand, teachers are also pragmatists and thus are fully aware of the futility of prohibiting students from engaging in mental translation, particularly in light of the benefits of explicit comparisons between the L1 and L2 for certain terms and grammatical structures (Ducar & Houk Schocket, 2018). Ultimately, teachers decide whether

translation is banned from the classroom altogether, tolerated in small doses, or fully embraced, and their practices will likely be influenced by their professional experiences and institutional policies or lack thereof (Alvarez et al., 2025; Lasagabaster, 2017). Another concern is the ubiquity of digital tools such as online machine translators (OMTs) and other AI-powered applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, and CoPilot, among others, which are increasingly used by students inside and outside the language classroom.

The main issue, then, is not whether translation and L1 use should be present in the language classroom, but the role of teachers in deciding how and when to use them strategically and for what purpose (Gierlinger, 2015; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017). This requires framing translation as a means to an end, whether to support learning, negotiate meaning, or encourage students to use every linguistic tool they have at their disposal. However, to accomplish this, language teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which strongly shape their pedagogical practices and classroom management, should be included in any discussion or research that aims to adapt and improve pedagogical practices (Lasagabaster, 2017; Zhang & Liu, 2013).

With the goal of adding to the discussions on this issue in Latin America, this chapter aims to gain insights into the views and practices involving L1 use and translation among EFL teachers and professors in multiple educational settings in Ecuador. The following research questions were posed:

1. What favorable and unfavorable perceptions do teachers hold regarding the use of L1 and translation in the EFL classroom?
2. How do teachers' attitudes toward L1 and translation vary across different educational levels and institutional contexts (e.g., public vs. private, elementary vs. higher education)?

3. What factors (e.g., curriculum requirements, training, institutional expectations) shape teachers' decisions to use or avoid L1 and translation in their classroom instruction?

Literature Review

Functions for L1 use in language classrooms

A review of the literature on L1 use and translation in different settings and classroom methodologies reveals several similarities. For instance, classroom practices involving L1 use in the CLIL classroom have been classified as regulative and instructive registers. According to Gierlinger (2015), regulative register covers actions intended for classroom management and addressing student behaviors and feelings, while instructive register refers to actions aimed at ensuring understanding, such as clarifying concepts and vocabulary. Other studies evaluating EFL teacher beliefs have reported that L1 is frequently used for emergency situations such as providing instructions and translating unknown words, as well as verifying student comprehension, explaining complex grammar issues, praising student efforts, fostering a positive classroom environment, increasing student participation, and reducing classroom anxiety (Algazo, 2020; Lasagabaster, 2013; Tanrıseven & Kırkgöz, 2021). In some EFL contexts, studies have shown translation to students' L1 is useful to mitigate misunderstandings of certain English words considered taboo in other cultures (Algazo, 2023), as well as a way to promote socialization through jokes or discussing current events with students in their L1 (Purnama et al., 2022). Table 1 classifies the different functions found in the literature as either regulative or instructive register.

Regulative/disciplinary register	Instructive/pedagogical register
Manage classroom lessons	Provide instructions
To optimize class time	Explain vocabulary
Maintain classroom discipline	Explain complex grammar
Reduce student anxiety and disconnection among low-level students	Provide feedback on errors
Elicit responses from learners	Clarifying meaning and false cognates/taboo words
Encourage and motivate learners	Offer linguistic comparisons to enrich learning
Foster a positive classroom environment and socialization	Foster debate

Source: Adapted from Gierlinger (2015)

Table 1. *Common functions of L1 use in foreign language classrooms*

General Perceptions of L1 Use and Translation

Teachers' perceptions regarding L1 use and translation are complex and may even be contradictory. Many educators strive to balance their beliefs regarding ideal teaching situations where L2 exposure is maximized with pragmatic acceptance that L1 and translation are a necessary and beneficial practice depending on the context.

In CLIL contexts in Spain, some studies have found that despite outward support for a monolingual classroom approach, many teachers have come to acknowledge a change from a "purist" to a more "flexible" stance on L1 use in their daily practice (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017, p. 11), particularly to ensure understanding and save time in the classroom. However, these practices are not always strategic, consistent, or based on guidelines, as evidenced by other studies that have found resistance to using L1 for tasks such as assessment (Gablasova, 2014; Pavón Vázquez & Ramos Ordóñez, 2018).

There is also recognition that the strategic, deliberate use of their students' L1 serves multiple pedagogical purposes, ranging from clarifying concepts and creating deeper linguistic analysis without blocking L2 acquisition. However, while many studies point to an overall agreement that exposure to L2 should be maximized, in practice, this exposure varies depending on teachers' personal and professional experiences, beliefs, and, in some cases, intuition (Méndez García & Pavón Vázquez, 2012). That said, there is little evidence of explicit training or guidance on multilingual classroom strategies offered to language teachers, which often results in a lack of clarity at an institutional level (Lasagabaster, 2017, p. 263). These contradictions suggest more attention should be placed on establishing institutional policies regarding pedagogical L1 use, which would offer guidance to teachers (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017), particularly

in cases where institutions continue to enforce monolingual policies in language classrooms.

Attitudes of teachers in different educational settings

Teachers of young learners commonly report using L1 more often for instructions, classroom management, grammatical explanations, and to maintain attention and comprehension. In Ecuadorian public schools, many teachers feel the use of students' L1 (Spanish) is important to teach grammar, provide context and feedback to young learners at a lower language level, as well as to avoid frustration (Intriago & Hidalgo, 2022; Sevy-biloon et al., 2020).

Another issue of concern is students' backgrounds, particularly the significant differences between students from rural and urban areas. Compared to their urban counterparts, students in rural areas tend to have a lower language proficiency and performance due to factors including lower socio-economic conditions, lack of parental support, and school resources (Anggela et al., 2024). This is also reflected in the Ecuadorian context, where English is often perceived as irrelevant in rural communities since it fails to offer immediate, tangible benefits (Izquierdo et al., 2021; Lucero Chillagana et al., 2023). In these scenarios, the use of L1 to build rapport with students and understand their realities may be essential.

University language instructors tend to be more divided in their perspectives and practices. While some value L1 for clarifying complex academic registers or content, others maintain strict L2 use to develop academic discourse competence, which may be of significant value in communities where perfection or near perfection of English as a foreign language is expected. Stricter adherence to L2 use also occurs in classrooms with higher-proficiency students who are assumed to be proficient enough not to require clarifications regarding instructions in their L1. A study of Turkish EFL

learners found that while university level instructors frequently use the L1 with lower-level students, they purposely avoid it with higher level students to push them toward a more advanced level of proficiency (Debreli, 2016). This practice has also been found in studies on L1 use in EFL classrooms in Ecuador, where achieving a B1 in English is a requirement for graduation from university (Cadena Murga et al., 2018). A study by Payne and Contreras (2019) found that lower-level public university students in Ecuador expect their L1 to be used in the EFL classroom to some degree, regardless of classroom size; on the other hand, higher-level students prefer not to engage in translation exercises, which reflects a decreased dependency on their L1 as their L2 proficiency grows.

Factors in deciding to use L1 and translation

The literature shows varying reasons that impact the decision to use students' L1 in EFL classrooms. In a review of 55 studies on L1 use in the EFL classroom, Shin et al. (2019) determined several categories of factors influencing L1 use: "individual student-teacher factors, classroom factors, and institutional factors" (p. 5).

In the case of student factors, the authors found that age and language proficiency have a significant influence on the use of L1. Student age can also be a factor that influences teachers' decisions to use their L1. According to a study evaluating 96 secondary students in Cyprus, the younger the age, the higher the use of L1 by their teacher (Tsgari & Diakou, 2015). While some studies have shown little to no L1 use among higher-level students (Debreli, 2016; Payne & Contreras, 2019), others have found the opposite, particularly in cases of higher-level students using their L1 for paraphrasing rather than direct translation (Lin & Yu, 2013). Studies have also found that a teacher's perception of their

own language proficiency may influence their decision to use the students' L1 to avoid making grammatical mistakes or avoid potential embarrassment (Smagul, 2024).

In terms of classroom factors, L1 tends to be used for less complex activities and to provide instructions or "procedural" and "off-task" talk (Shin et al., 2019, p. 5). In CLIL classrooms, L1 use is less frequent than in EFL classrooms, but is still used nonetheless for class activities that become more familiar the second time they are performed (García Mayo & Hidalgo, 2017).

While one single factor does not fully dictate the choice of when and how much L1 is used by teachers, institutional factors such as time constraints, curriculum, policy, and institution type (such as public versus private) also play a role with varying outcomes. Policies that favor monolingual approaches as well as other realities such as class sizes and limited teaching resources may cause struggles with authorities, and even create feelings of guilt, inadequacy, or even unprofessionalism among EFL teachers (Algazo, 2023; Clancy, 2018; Payne & Contreras, 2019).

Methodology

Participants

To gain insights into the perceptions and practices of Ecuadorian language teaching professionals, the study followed a non-experimental, quantitative approach. To this purpose, a convenience sample was used, made up of 31 EFL teachers from diverse educational backgrounds and institutions in Ecuador. A list was compiled with contacts within the professional and academic networks of the authors, which included a cohort of master's degree students in teaching English as a Foreign Language, as well as teachers from higher education institutions (HEI) across the country,

who were invited to participate through the head office of their respective language departments.

Participants represented a range of teaching experience, from novices with fewer than four years to highly experienced instructors with over twenty years in the classroom. Their academic qualifications ranged from bachelor's to master's degrees, with many specializing in English teaching, applied linguistics, or education. Teachers were employed across different institutions, including elementary and secondary schools, as well as universities in both the public and private sectors. All participants were granted anonymity as they were not asked to provide their names or the names of their places of work.

Instrument

The study employed the MultiTeachViews questionnaire (Smagul, 2024), developed to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward multilingual teaching practices, with a particular focus on the use of learners' L1 and translation in the classroom. The instrument was a survey containing four main content areas: Advocacy of L1 and Translation (8 items), Opposition to L1 and Translation (8 items), L1 and Translation Practices (7 items), and Teacher Training and Institutional Influences (8). In addition to the four main sections, the instrument also included six demographic profile questions to gather information on participants' teaching experience, language level proficiency, educational qualifications, institution type, student language levels, and average class sizes. Each item allowed respondents to select their level of agreement according to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The instrument was previously validated by Smagul (2024) through expert review and think-aloud protocols with in-service teachers to ensure clarity and content

appropriateness. Reliability analysis was conducted with a pilot sample of 100 high school-level teachers in Kazakhstan who had varied professional experience, language proficiency levels, school settings (private and state schools), and academic levels ranging from undergraduate degrees to PhDs. The analysis produced satisfactory Cronbach's alpha values ($\alpha = .75-.86$), confirming the instrument's internal consistency and suitability for research in applied linguistics and second language acquisition.

According to Smagul (2024), the instrument may be adapted to include professionals from higher education institutions (HEI) by considering characteristics related to this context, such as substituting the term school for university and adding further options considering this context. As the original instrument already featured private and public as two possible school categories (in addition to international), the authors of the present study expanded the options by adding elementary, high school, private language learning centers, and HEI in both the public and private sectors (in Ecuador, international schools, whether elementary or secondary, are typically private education institutions). Other adaptations included reducing the number of statements in the last content area of the survey (Teacher Training and Institutional Influences) from eight to six, which was done by merging three separate questions on the presence of bilingual vocabulary lists and written and spoken translation exercises in classroom textbooks into a single all-encompassing item.

The final adapted version of the survey used for the study featured 35 items spread across all four content and demographic areas (see Table 2). It was then uploaded to the Survio platform, where it could be sent via email to participants. Responses were received between March and September 2025. Data were later analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and average scores) to identify trends across the sample.

Content area	No. of items
Demographic data	6
Advocacy of L1 and Translation in Language Teaching	8
Opposition to L1 and Translation in Language Teaching	8
L1 and Translation Practices	7
Teacher Training and Institutional Influence	6
Total	35

Table 2. *Survey content areas and items*

Reliability Testing

While the original instrument had been previously tested in a high school environment, the authors opted to retest its reliability after making adaptations for HEIs by conducting a Cronbach's alpha test in Jamovi, an open-source statistical software package. Cronbach's alpha is commonly used in science education research as a measure of instrument reliability; however, it has been suggested that studies should also report the multidimensionality of the instrument undergoing testing as well as the number of items or scales included (Taber, 2018).

While the results of the 2025 test showed similar overall reliability values ($\alpha=0.74$) as the first test conducted by Smagul (2024), further analysis of each of the instrument scales showed the first two to be highly reliable, while the translation practices scale was moderately consistent. The last scale, teacher training and institutional influence, received the lowest score (see Table 3).

Area	Test interpretation
Advocacy of L1 & Translation	$\alpha \approx .92$ (excellent)
Opposition to L1 & Translation	$\alpha \approx .86$ (very good)
L1 & Translation Practices	$\alpha \approx .64$ (acceptable)
Teacher Training & Institutional Influence	$\alpha \approx .46$ (low)

Table 3. *Updated instrument reliability scores*

The lower reliability score for the fourth scale was viewed as the possible result of merging three questions perceived as similar into one. Also, the subscale itself measured a more diverse set of influences on teacher perceptions (i.e., personal instructional practices and thoughts about what other teachers may feel about using L1), which means more than one construct was measured. Therefore, the results in this scale were interpreted with caution.

Results

This section presents the findings of the survey conducted with 31 EFL teachers, followed by an analysis of how these results relate to broader debates in language pedagogy and translation. The data are organized around teacher profiles, classroom practices, and attitudes toward L1 and translation. Each set of results is examined not only in terms of statistical trends but also considering the role of teachers as the central agents, that is, the *who*, in pedagogical translation.

Teacher profiles

Participants (n=31) ranged from novice teachers with less than five years of teaching experience to professionals with more than 20 years of experience in the EFL classroom (see Figure 1). Most held a bachelor’s degree, with a significant number possessing master’s degrees in fields such as English teaching or applied linguistics (see Figure 2). Respondents’ places of work were distributed across public and private universities, as well as language centers. There was a nearly even split between public and private sector teacher respondents (Figure 3). Teachers reported working with learners at beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, though the largest group indicated beginner and intermediate students as their primary audience (Figure 4). Most teachers manage class sizes of approximately 21 to 30 students (Figure 5).

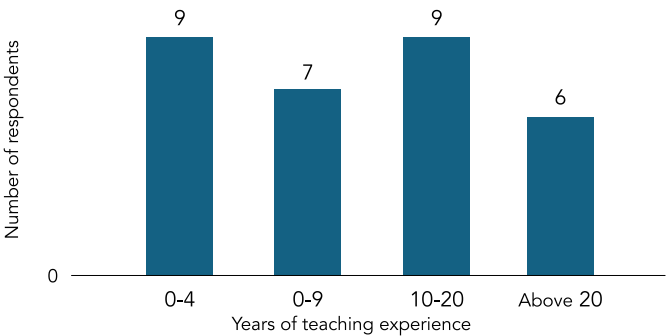


Figure 1.*Teaching Experience of EFL Teachers*

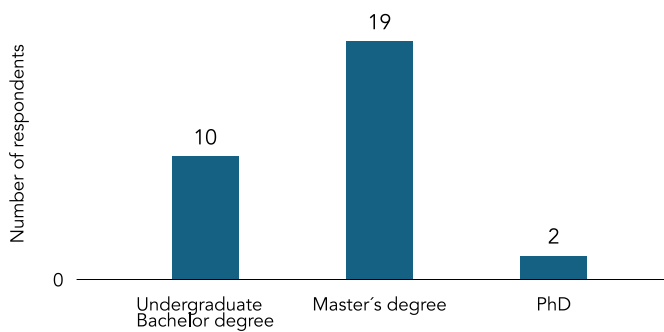


Figure 2. Education Levels of Teachers

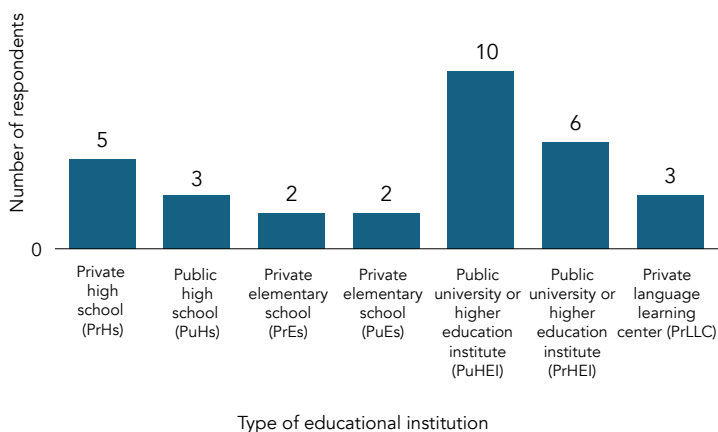


Figure 3. Education Levels of Teachers

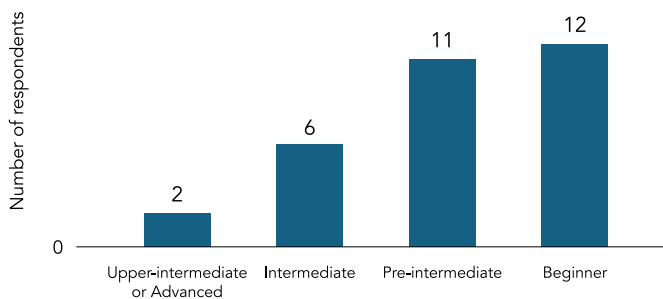


Figure 4. Language Levels Taught by Teachers

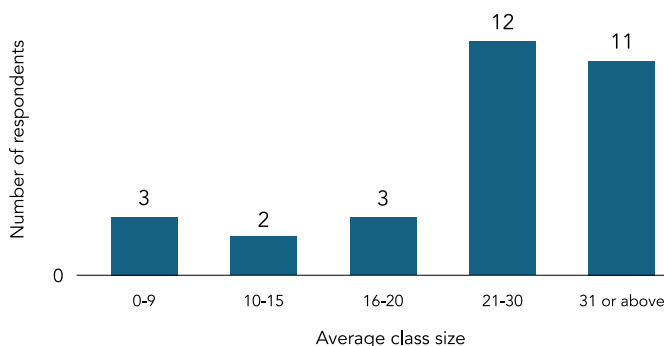


Figure 5. *Average Classroom Sizes*

Advocacy of L1 and Translation in Language Teaching

The first section of the survey probed participants’ views on common uses and rationales for L1 and translation activities in the EFL classroom, including vocabulary acquisition, grammar explanations, and collaborative learning. As a group, teachers reported more favorable views on using L1 and translation selectively to help reduce classroom anxiety, improve students’ understanding of how languages work, and promote collaboration in the classroom (see Table 4).

Public elementary school educators expressed the most positive views, particularly in using translation to alleviate student stress (5.0) and reinforce vocabulary (5.0). Teaching professionals in higher education institutions, in contrast, held the least favorable views, particularly regarding the assertion that L1 use promotes a variety of classroom activities.

	Translation helps learners memorize new words	Spoken translation tasks improve fluency	Written translation tasks improve accuracy	L1 helps learners work together	Translation helps understand how languages work	Translation helps understand how languages work	L1 use allows more varied classroom activities
PrES	4.00	4.00	3.50	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.00
PrHS	3.60	2.60	3.00	3.80	4.40	4.40	4.20
PrLLC	4.33	4.00	3.00	3.67	4.00	4.00	4.00
PrHEI	2.83	2.50	2.83	3.17	3.50	3.33	2.50
PuES	5.00	3.50	4.50	4.50	4.00	5.00	3.00
PuHS	3.00	2.67	3.33	3.67	3.33	3.33	3.33
PuHEI	2.50	2.50	2.30	2.90	2.80	3.00	1.90
Total Average	3.23	2.84	2.90	3.35	3.45	3.61	2.87

Table 4. *Favorable Perceptions of L1 use and Translation in the EFL Classroom*

Opposition to L1 and Translation in Language Teaching

The next group of questions showed private elementary and private high school teachers held the strongest perceptions of translation as an inauthentic exercise that negatively impacts learners' listening skills as it interferes with English. Public elementary school teachers, on the other hand, rated these aspects as less negative, even as they recognized L1 use reduces learners' opportunities to practice English practice in class (4.0) (see Table 5).

	English should be the only language used in class	L1 use reduces English practice in class	Translation is old-fashioned	Translation tasks are boring for learners	Translation is an artificial/inauthentic EFL exercise	L1 use negatively impacts listening skills	Translation is irrelevant outside the EFL class	L1 use hinders learning/interferes with English
PrES	3.00	3.00	3.00	3.00	4.00	3.50	4.00	4.00
PrHS	3.40	4.00	3.80	3.40	4.00	3.80	3.80	3.80
PrLLC	2.67	3.67	3.33	3.33	3.67	3.33	3.00	2.67
PrHEI	3.50	3.83	2.83	4.00	3.00	3.33	2.83	2.83
PuES	3.00	4.00	1.50	3.50	3.00	3.00	2.00	2.00
PuHS	4.00	3.67	2.33	3.00	3.00	3.33	3.33	3.00
PuHEI	4.10	3.60	3.60	3.10	3.30	3.30	3.00	3.00
Total Average	3.58	3.71	3.16	3.35	3.39	3.39	3.13	3.06

Table 5. *Unfavorable Perceptions of L1 use and Translation in the EFL Classroom*

Perceptions of L1 and translation practices in language teaching

The notion of L1 use as being more appropriate for classes with lower-level or beginner level students was the highest among public elementary school teachers (5.0), followed closely by instructors at private language learning centers (4.67) and private high schools (4.60). Translation was also considered useful for vocabulary teaching and cultural expressions, though opinions varied regarding its role in grammar teaching or instruction for younger learners. Regarding the latter, there was little difference in the opinions of private elementary school teachers (1.50) and their counterparts from the public sector (2.0). As a group, private elementary school teachers had the least favorable opinions on this scale (see Table 6).

	L1 use is more appropriate with lower-level learners	Translation is appropriate for vocabulary teaching	Translation is effective in teaching cultural expressions	L1 use is appropriate in English grammar teaching	L1 use is more appropriate with younger learners	L1 use is appropriate for classroom activity instructions	L1 use is more appropriate with larger classes
PrES	3.50	3.00	1.50	2.00	1.50	3.00	2.50
PrHS	4.60	3.60	3.60	3.80	3.60	4.20	4.20
PrLLC	4.67	3.33	4.33	3.00	3.33	3.67	3.00
PrHEI	3.67	3.00	3.50	3.00	2.00	4.00	2.33
PuES	5.00	5.00	3.50	4.50	2.00	3.00	3.00
PuHS	3.67	4.00	4.00	4.00	3.00	3.67	3.67
PuHEI	4.30	2.70	3.10	2.80	2.40	2.20	2.10
Total Average	4.19	3.26	3.39	3.19	2.58	3.26	2.81

Table 6. *General Perceptions of L1 and Translation Practices in Language Teaching*

Influential factors in teachers' decision-making regarding L1 use and translation

As previously mentioned in the methodology section, the questions included in this subscale generated the lowest reliability score. While the results will be interpreted with caution, there are nonetheless several key takeaways from this subscale. First, teachers' decisions on whether and how to incorporate L1 were shaped by several factors (see Table 7). Many noted that colleagues and curricular policies promoted English-only practices, even as they acknowledged the conscious use of translation in class, particularly in public elementary schools (4.5). Second, while private institutions reported more exposure to professional discussions of L1 use, many responses indicated that textbooks rarely integrated translation tasks, with a low average rating of

1.65. Except for public elementary school teachers (1.50), all other professionals surveyed reported a general expectation among their colleagues that EFL classes should be taught in L2.

	My colleagues feel classes should be taught only in English	I sometimes use translation consciously to teach in my class	I try to exclude L1 because the curriculum requires classes be taught only in English	My pre-service teacher training encouraged L1 use in class	I have heard discussions about L1 use in EFL at teacher meetings or conferences	Our textbooks include certain translation tasks
PrES	3.50	3.00	3.00	3.00	2.50	1.50
PrHS	4.00	3.80	4.20	3.60	3.80	1.40
PrLLC	4.67	4.00	4.33	3.00	4.33	1.67
PrHEI	4.33	3.17	3.33	2.50	2.33	2.17
PuES	1.50	4.50	2.50	3.50	2.50	1.50
PuHS	4.67	4.00	3.00	3.00	3.67	3.00
PuHEI	4.00	3.20	3.10	2.60	2.80	1.10
Total Average	4.00	3.52	3.39	2.90	3.06	1.65

Table 7. *Factors in Decision-Making Regarding L1 Use and Translation in Classroom Instruction*

Two main patterns stand out in the results of the survey. First, teachers working in lower grade level institutions (especially in public elementary schools) appeared to be most supportive of translation and L1 use, valuing it as a tool to help reduce anxiety and support vocabulary learning. Second, skepticism was more prevalent in professionals from both public and private universities, where translation was perceived as more inauthentic and potentially detrimental to student learning objectives.

Discussion

This retesting of the instrument highlights the important role of the teacher or instructor as the “who” in pedagogical translation. Teachers are not merely passive executors of pedagogical methods or institutional policies; rather, they must often negotiate a delicate balance between the theoretical and institutional ideals of L2-only language teaching and the realities of their classrooms. The data from Ecuador show that teacher beliefs and decisions are central in determining whether L1 and translation are treated as legitimate pedagogical resources or as a practice to be minimized. Therefore, the following section addresses each of the research questions posed at the onset of this study.

RQ1. Teachers’ favorable and unfavorable perceptions

The findings reveal that teachers hold generally favorable views on translation for vocabulary building, grammar clarification, and reducing learner anxiety, particularly among students with lower proficiency levels, views that align with other study findings (Debreli, 2016; Payne & Contreras, 2019). Teachers of students at lower educational levels, particularly in public elementary schools, appear to be the strongest supporters of translation, particularly for lower-level students as a tool to help reduce anxiety and frustration, which is consistent with the findings of other studies examining the perceptions of public school English teachers (Intriago & Hidalgo, 2022; Sevy-biloon et al., 2020). At the same time, many teachers in the private sector appeared to be more cautious out of concerns that translation may be too artificial or potentially harmful to their students’ L2 progress. This conflict between monolingual ideologies and more flexible classroom practices is also reflected in other studies on L1 use in a context where maintaining, or the perception of needing to maintain, a

monolingual approach continues to be a concern (Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017; Lasagabaster, 2017).

RQ2. Attitudes across educational levels and contexts

In public elementary schools, the results suggest that teachers seem to accept translation as a practical necessity to meet learning objectives in their classrooms. They use their professional judgment to address learners' immediate needs, thereby confirming the teacher's role as a facilitator of access. This judgement is also found in studies on the realities of students who attend public schools in Ecuador, both in rural and urban areas, who may face additional obstacles when learning English, considering their socio-economic and family environments (Alvarez et al., 2025; Izquierdo et al., 2021; Lucero Chillagana et al., 2023).

In contrast, university teachers expressed more skepticism, often viewing translation as inauthentic or harmful to listening and speaking skills. This reflects the persistence of English-only ideologies (Phillipson, 1992) that stress the need to ensure total exposure to the L2, despite evidence suggesting that strategic L1 use can be beneficial for learners. These English-only norms seem to be supported by the respondents, who mention that the curriculum and textbooks appear to adhere to these practices. This points to a disconnect between institutional policies and classroom practices: while teachers recognize the usefulness of L1 use and translation, their academic environment often discourages these practices, perhaps even unofficially. This contrast illustrates how teachers may opt to act as policy executors or pragmatic negotiators who work around policies to meet their students' realities (Debreli, 2016; Payne & Contreras, 2019).

RQ3. Factors shaping teaching decisions

The data shows teacher decision-making regarding L1 use and translation is influenced by learner proficiency, age, institutional policies, and curricular requirements (Shin et al., 2019). However, it is the teacher who interprets these factors and decides how they will impact their classroom practices. Many respondents reported consciously using L1 even when their curriculum promoted English-only approaches, showing that they can and do often resist policies that seem to be out of line with classroom realities. Yet they also reported feeling pressure from colleagues and institutions, revealing the role of the teacher as an autonomous professional subject to institutional constraints. This finding is supported by Alvarez et al. (2025), who surveyed 113 public elementary English teachers across Ecuador, who found that half of the respondents were ultimately undecided on the wisdom and benefits of L1 use in the classroom, aside from helping manage classroom anxiety. The authors also found another aspect affecting this decision-making process: the lack of language teaching experience in primary schools, which can add additional layers of complexity and challenges.

Conclusion, study limitations, and pedagogical implications

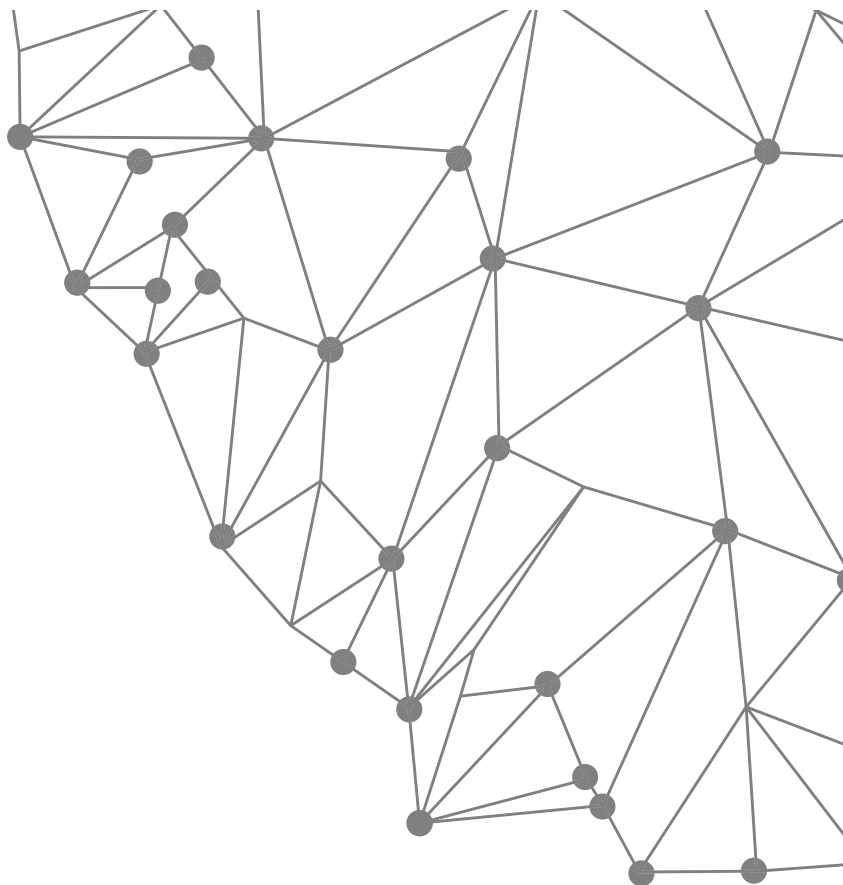
The study highlights the central role of teachers in mediating the use of L1 and translation in EFL classrooms in Ecuador. Teachers' attitudes reveal ambivalence: while they acknowledge the benefits of L1 in reducing anxiety, clarifying meaning, and supporting beginner learners, they also voice concerns about authenticity and overreliance. Importantly, these perceptions vary across educational levels and institutional contexts, reflecting the diverse realities teachers navigate.

By focusing on the who in pedagogical translation, this study shows that teachers are not merely implementers of methodology but active agents of mediation. They balance competing demands, including student needs, institutional policies, and professional ideologies, all while making decisions largely based on context. At the elementary level, teachers often adopt a flexible stance, while at the higher education level, instructors lean toward more restrictive approaches aligned with academic expectations, although these appear to be more rooted in perceptions than in official institutional policies. These variations are supported by studies examining teachers' leading role in determining how and when pedagogical translation takes place in language classrooms (Lasagabaster, 2017; Doiz & Lasagabaster, 2017).

As for study limitations, the small sample size is a significant limitation, as it did not include an equal number of teacher respondents from each category (elementary, secondary, and higher education). Therefore, future studies on the issue could focus on a more equal number of respondents from different teaching environments, which would allow for a deeper analysis and understanding of the impact of their teaching contexts on their practices. In addition, the low reliability score obtained for the fourth subscale of the instrument may call for further fine-tuning of the questions, possible creation of a fifth subscale, and retesting with a larger sample size to improve reliability.

In terms of implications for EFL teaching, the study highlights the need for more teacher training programs in general, particularly in the public sector (Orosz et al., 2021). Given the ambivalent feelings and lack of clarity expressed by some participants, such programs would do well to include well-founded principles on how to use L1 rather than leaving teachers to rely on intuition or on-the-spot decision making. For example, offering guidelines on managing intervals to allow students to process teacher speech and how to implement translanguaging strategies that go beyond eliciting word-to-

word equivalencies (Shin et al., 2019). Second, institutions could provide greater clarity on the legitimate L1 and translation use in classrooms, which supports teachers as they make more strategic decisions rather than placing them at odds with the expectation of monolingual classroom policies or the perception that they are the most effective.



CHAPTER 3: **THE WHAT**

CHAPTER 3: THE WHAT

What EFL Teachers Should Know About Pedagogical Translation

For many EFL educators in Latin America, the word translation conjures mental images that go beyond classroom pedagogy; it is often entwined with colonial language views, institutional policies stemming from North American and European contexts, and uneven access to resources. In these contexts, translation is both a classroom tool and a mode of survival among learners and teachers as they negotiate meaning in unequal educational systems. It should come as no surprise, then, that translation has always been present in language learning in Latin America in one form or another. It has endured quietly in the background for years, only to be brought to the forefront thanks to the increased use of online machine translation tools (OMTs) and AI-powered apps, albeit with some conflict in settings that continue to favor a monolingual approach to language learning.

This chapter addresses what EFL teachers in Latin American contexts need to know before integrating pedagogical translation strategically and responsibly into their classrooms. Rather than questioning whether translation should be allowed at all, the focus is on how translation functions pedagogically in situations where class sizes are large, instruction hours are limited, use of AI is rampant with little oversight, and opportunities to practice English outside the classroom are minimal.

What Pedagogical Translation Is and Isn't

Cerezo Herrero (2024) defines pedagogical translation as a deliberate and structured approach to using translation activities in foreign language teaching to enhance linguistic and intercultural competence. The author emphasizes that such activities should be communicative, appropriate to the context, used deliberately, and aligned with the specific needs of learners. To understand how, it is important to make the distinction between professional translation and pedagogical translation and why the two are evaluated in the same way.

According to Pintado Gutiérrez (2021), professional translation is an end in itself. It belongs to the field of translation studies and aims to produce a viable translated product. Pedagogical translation, on the other hand, is a means. As a mediating learning activity, it belongs in the field of language studies and aims to foster language competency through specific tasks, not sporadic or spontaneous L1 use to explain instructions or vocabulary. In other words, while the former aims to train learners for translation and interpretation work in a professional capacity, the latter serves as a teaching tool that helps learners to bridge their first language (L1) and the new language (L2) to foster greater understanding, build awareness, and enhance creativity. Other authors, such as Floros (2021), assert that pedagogical translation simulates professional translation in a controlled environment and is therefore not that different. However, regardless of how strong the distinction is made, what holds true is that when translation is no longer considered a forbidden practice, it becomes a strategic activity that, when used thoughtfully, can support language development and spark curiosity in learners (Sánchez Cuadrado, 2016).

These different levels of distinction are important in Latin American EFL contexts, where teachers frequently report feeling somewhat delegitimized professionally when they use translation in their classrooms. This is because many

administrators and even fellow colleagues view translation as evidence of pedagogical weakness or insufficient English proficiency instead of as a legitimate instructional strategy (Moscoso Amador & Vega, 2025). However, if educators and administrators believe that engaging in translation is simply allowing L1 use (e.g., translanguaging and codeswitching) in the classroom for specific purposes, such as clarifying instructions, then these beliefs are not surprising since such practices lack a purposeful pedagogical design.

Therefore, reframing translation as a learning scaffold rather than a crutch is not merely a methodological clarification; it involves political and professional repositioning. First, as Cerezo Herrero and Pérez-Sabater (2024) argue, pedagogical translation should be separated from its past as a mechanical exercise from the Grammar–Translation Method era and be understood as a structured, classroom practice that can align with learning objectives. This is especially true in Latin American language classrooms, where learners often balance multilingual identities shaped by Indigenous languages and regional varieties of Spanish. Second, pedagogical translation must be clearly distinguished from professional translation since the former is a process, and the latter is a product. Third, it must also expand beyond codeswitching and translanguaging, which are valid multilingual practices that can create an environment conducive to engaging in planned translation activities, but not substitute them (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). With these distinctions and understandings in place, pedagogical translation can start to serve as a mediational tool that complements communicative classroom approaches by calling on learners to use their full linguistic toolkit instead of artificially hiding it.

Theoretical Foundations of Translation

The pedagogical value of translation can be supported by several well-established theoretical foundations that have evolved from early structuralist views to contemporary communicative frameworks. The first systematic attempt came from Contrastive Analysis (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957), which proposed that differences between L1 and L2 could predict learner difficulties. While later research showed that language transfer is far more complex than originally perceived, these insights nevertheless hold their value within a more flexible framework. Modern theories such as Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990) further justify translation by linking it to awareness and comprehensible input. When learners translate, they are forced to pay attention to form, meaning, relationships, lexical gaps, and pragmatic choices, which are essential for learning. From a pedagogical standpoint, translation also aligns with socio-constructivist principles, as it frames translation as a form of mediation through which learners externalize and reorganize thought. This blend of linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural perspectives positions pedagogical translation as both theoretically grounded and pedagogically relevant.

It is important to note that translation shifts learners from the role of passive receivers to active participants who engage in analysis, which is especially relevant in learning contexts with a heavy AI presence that offers students instantaneous language outputs. Many instructors worry that AI encourages dependency and diminishes processing. However, when used pedagogically through comparison, editing, and justification of selected outputs, translation through AI-powered tools can become a source of critical engagement rather than dependency.

The Scope of Pedagogical Translation in the EFL Classroom

To understand the value of pedagogical translation, it is helpful to consider the many roles it can play in the EFL classroom (Cerezo Herrero, 2024). Translation is a bridge that can take many forms, depending on the learning objectives and the connections made by students between what they know in their L1 and the structures, meanings, and cultural idiosyncrasies of the L2.

At the vocabulary level, translation can help students learn new words quickly and commit them to memory (Sánchez Cuadrado, 2016). A simple comparison between an English term and its L1 equivalent often saves time and reduces ambiguity. For example, when learning a set of adjectives, students can translate them into their L1 to notice false friends, synonyms, and differences that might otherwise go unnoticed.

At the grammatical level, translation highlights differences between language systems. By asking students to translate short sentences from one language into another, instructors give them the chance to notice patterns, such as how verb tenses, articles, or word order operate differently. These comparisons can sharpen learners' metalinguistic awareness, giving them a broader sense of how language works (Moscoso, 2011).

At the cultural level, translation opens the door to greater reflection. Idioms, proverbs, humor, and cultural expressions rarely remain intact when translated from one language to another. Discussing why an expression does not translate directly often leads to deep conversations about worldviews, traditions, and cultural identities (Iranzo, 2022). Lastly, translation is also a creative tool. Activities such as translating a poem, re-subtitling a film clip, or adapting a song lyric for a new audience encourage learners to think beyond literal meaning. These tasks blend language practice with

imagination, making translation not only a technical exercise but also an artistic one.

As seen, the scope of pedagogical translation is broad. It can reinforce vocabulary, clarify grammar, trigger cultural awareness, and inspire creativity. What unites these applications is the understanding that translation is a means of exploration to support learning, not a test of equivalence.

Pedagogical Benefits

When used strategically, pedagogical translation offers learners benefits that cover cognitive, emotional, and cultural dimensions of learning (Cook, 2010). From a cognitive perspective, translation engages the mind at a deeper level than simple memorization (Dolas et al., 2022). When students compare how meaning is expressed in their L1 and L2, they *practice noticing*. In citing Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, Szcześniak (2024) points out that this act of noticing is an essential skill for language acquisition as it strengthens memory, builds metalinguistic awareness, and helps students see language as a system rather than a collection of disconnected words.

Affectivity is also a well-known benefit regarding translation, according to Kitanovska-Kimovska and Cvetkoski (2022). For many learners, especially beginners, stepping into a foreign language classroom can be intimidating, and translation can reassure students that their L1 can and does serve a purpose. By allowing students to use their prior knowledge, instructors reduce anxiety and create a sense of continuity, which in turn boosts motivation and confidence. Translation also encourages learners to reflect on how much culture is embedded in language. Expressions that cannot be translated directly can spark discussions about values, humor, or worldviews. In this way, translation becomes a window into intercultural competence, helping learners not

just *speak* English but also *think about* how communication works across cultures (Kohn & Weissbrod, 2023). In other words, the true goal behind pedagogical translation is to deliver an interpretation of a message that is both accurate and respectful of its context. Culturally, translation places language within systems of meaning to help learners understand how and why something is said in a certain way, and that oftentimes, there is more than one way to interpret a message. This understanding helps strengthen cognitive skills and grow cultural awareness, which supports learners in becoming competent and confident language users.

Risks and Pedagogical Issues

Along with great learning opportunities, pedagogical translation also comes with several challenges and complications that merit consideration by educators looking to incorporate it into their teaching. For starters, if translation is used too spontaneously or without a clear purpose, students may depend too heavily on their L1 instead of developing direct connections in the target language. This can slow down fluency and limit the use of English in class. Literal, word-for-word translation can create unnatural or incorrect English. Students may produce sentences that follow the structure of their mother tongue rather than that of English. Without careful guidance, translation can reinforce errors instead of clarifying them (Baker, 2018).

As well, many teachers trained in communicative or L1-focused environments worry that translation undermines the goal of thinking directly in English. If poorly managed, translation activities may reduce the amount of available speaking and interaction time in the target language. Further, not all educators feel qualified to design or assess translation tasks in the classroom. Some may fear they lack the knowledge and experience to explain subtle differences between

languages, which can lead to oversimplification or confusion. Beyond general language proficiency, educators need specific skills to implement translation tasks effectively, which will likely be exposed in the classroom (Floros, 2021). These include the ability to anticipate common transfer errors, understanding of cultural differences, and competence in creating tasks that go beyond literal translation. Educators must also feel at ease with fostering reflection, encouraging students to come up with multiple possible solutions, and ensuring translation tasks do not overshadow communicative practice. There is also the debate between the fields of language education and translator training over the role translation should play in language education, if at all (Pym & Hao, 2024). However, a starting point toward addressing these challenges is through the promotion of professional development opportunities, including workshops on contrastive linguistics, materials design, and classroom research that can provide opportunities for growth (Lasagabaster, 2017).

Issues such as these show that the problem lies not in translation itself, but in unregulated or unplanned translation. When translation is unplanned and rendered almost invisible, it cannot be measured or analyzed. When it is the result of a deliberate, planned strategy, it can be guided, expanded, or even reduced to necessary doses. Therefore, close attention must be paid to when and how translation activities do indeed scaffold learning, and when they replace them, as well as the best way to make translation tasks compatible with communicative goals. Rather than banning it altogether or overusing it, teachers can view translation as a strategic tool to be planned with clear goals and thoughtful scaffolding.

Pedagogical Translation in the Age of AI and OMTs

OMT use is widespread, often discreet, and rarely the result of explicit instruction. Many instructors have reported that institutional policies tend to frame AI and translation as forms of academic dishonesty rather than as pedagogical tools (O'Neill, 2019). In Latin America, this disconnect is particularly pronounced. While students routinely rely on free, easily accessible translation tools to compensate for limited exposure to English outside the classroom, teachers are rarely given institutional guidelines on how to integrate these tools in the classroom. This results in a gap in which translation occurs anyway, but without mediation or critical thinking, and no clear guidelines on whether AI-generated translations should be accepted as complete answers, works in progress, or versions for further analysis, or all three.

Pedagogical translation offers a promising step toward greater clarity about the use of OMTs and other AI-powered apps that render quick translations. By asking students to compare AI output with human translations, identify errors, justify revisions, or adapt translations for local audiences, teachers can use AI as a tool to engage in critical analysis. Such practices address concerns from instructors regarding the uncritical use of AI.

Practical Considerations for Teachers and Educators

For pedagogical translation to truly serve as a scaffold to support English language learning, it must be used with purpose and deliberation. Some authors also propose that it must be executed as a social activity rather than as an individual exercise, a view that is consistent with socio-constructivist learning approaches. That is, translation exercises may be most effective when analyzed and resolved among peers with different levels of language proficiency (Floros, 2021). With

this in mind, the following considerations can help teachers integrate translation into their classrooms meaningfully to ensure their students' progress is supported:

1. Define and communicate the purpose of each translation activity. Not all translation tasks can or should have the same purpose. Prior to assigning a translation task to learners, teachers should clarify aspects such as whether the activity is meant to showcase vocabulary differences, practice grammatical structures, or spark dialogue on cultural aspects of languages. Instituting a clear, attainable goal helps avoid engaging in one-off tasks that seem mechanical. It also may help alleviate uneasiness that some teachers may feel about engaging in a supposedly forbidden practice.

2. Align tasks to learners' language levels. Learners at the early stages of language proficiency may benefit from short, sentence-level tasks where translation builds their confidence and understanding. Intermediate learners can translate paragraphs or short dialogues to practice their noticing skills, while advanced learners can be pushed beyond literal translation assignments in favor of more creative or critical activities, such as subtitling short videos or comparing other audiovisual translations done by others (Floros, 2021).

3. Combine translation tasks with other activities. Translation works best when combined with communicative practice, such as role-plays based on a text that was previously translated in class or adapting texts for different purposes. Such combinations help ensure that translation complements fluency rather than relegating it to the background.

4. Reward reflection, not perfection. As stated previously, what separates pedagogical translation from its professional counterpart is that it is a process that aims to foster greater insights about language, not render a flawless, professional-

caliber product (Moscoso, 2011). This can be achieved by inviting learners to discuss, compare, analyze, and even criticize the different solutions produced and reflect on what worked and what didn't. This reflection is usually more important than the final translation itself.

5. Offer scaffolding and feedback. As they work, students may need glossaries, guided examples, or comparisons and analogies. Feedback from teachers should focus on the multiple ways certain phrases or words can be translated and why some options are more appropriate than others, or more natural. This type of feedback uses errors as pathways to critical thinking.

6. Search for opportunities to link translation with culture and identity. In any given EFL classroom, students may have different L1s and dialects. Therefore, translation tasks should consider this diversity and avoid assuming a direct L1-L2 correspondence. Where possible, tasks can be designed to leverage students' cultural backgrounds, such as translating a common phrase or legend from their L1 into English and then explaining the changes in meaning. In addition to building linguistic skills, activities like these also validate learners' personal experiences (Vega & Moscoso, 2019).

7. Clarify the role of translation as a tool instead of substitution. In educational contexts that encourage an English-only classroom and where exams and final grades are necessary for academic advancement, pedagogical translation works best when used as a formative process rather than a summative evaluation. This way, it can be perceived as a planned exercise that is part of the curriculum.

These considerations are consistent with studies on the informal use of AI and translation, often without institutional recognition. Pedagogical translation does not introduce a

foreign practice; rather, it formalizes and legitimizes strategies that teachers and learners have long been using to survive and progress. By keeping these considerations in mind, instructors can deploy translation as a flexible and dynamic teaching tool to help learners shift between languages and worlds with confidence.

Bridging to the How

Pedagogical translation, when understood in its proper context and with its differences from professional translation, is neither the oldest of outdated methods nor a threat to communicative teaching. It is a flexible, purposeful tool that allows learners to connect their linguistic knowledge, expand their awareness, and explore the cultural dimensions of language. As seen, translation can serve multiple roles in the EFL classroom. While it does carry certain risks, they shouldn't be used as a justification for avoiding translation altogether. Instead, a balance between the risks and benefits of translation can be achieved when combined with deliberate, pedagogical intention.

This chapter has argued that pedagogical translation is not a throwback to outdated methods or forbidden territory, but a practical response to current multilingual and AI realities in the EFL classroom. Understanding what pedagogical translation entails and what it doesn't, as well as its benefits, risks, and theoretical underpinnings, is key to understanding how it can be used strategically, not fearfully. The following chapters move from key considerations and theoretical foundations to real-world applications, starting with audiovisual translation to analyze how guided translation can serve as a bridge between languages, technologies, and cultures.



CHAPTER 4:
THE HOW
PART 1

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Translating the Silver Screen in the Age of AI: A Critical Analysis of the Film Emilia Pérez

Introduction

In a globalized world, cinema offers more than entertainment; it acts as a cultural time capsule, a mirror, and often, a bridge across differences. Whether it's watching a French film, a Japanese anime, or a Nigerian drama, the experience is shaped not only by the story itself but by the way it is translated. While subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over techniques allow audiences to access films in languages they do not speak, these modes inevitably alter something in the process (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2020). What is gained in accessibility often ends up lost in tone and emotional veracity. According to Venuti (2017), translation, especially in cinema, is never neutral; it is a cultural negotiation between fidelity to the original and intelligibility for the viewer (Chiaro & De Bonis, 2020).

In recent years, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful player in this medium. With astonishing speed, AI-driven tools can now generate subtitles, dub voices, and even mimic actors' speech patterns in other languages (Shahmerdanova, 2025). For educators, translators, and creators, this presents an extraordinary opportunity, challenge, and risk. AI allows for broader access, faster localization, and new possibilities in language learning and cross-cultural understanding. It facilitates translation, enabling content to go further and reach more people (Gambier, 2016).

However, AI is not magic. It lacks intuition, cultural sensitivity, and emotional intelligence (Baker, 2018). While it can develop grammar and syntax with increasing sophistication, it often fails with tone, humor, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded meaning. A machine

may translate words, but it cannot fully capture intentions, hesitations, or unspoken language that shape human communication, especially in cinema, where silence, gesture, and context are often more significant than the dialogue itself (Chiaro & De Bonis, 2020).

AI can assist, accelerate, and even enhance aspects of translation, but it cannot replace human translators. The act of translating a film is more than linguistic conversion; it involves interpretation, ethics, and aesthetics. It requires decisions about what to preserve, what to adapt, and how to remain faithful not just to the words, but to the *world* they come from (Fernández-Costales et al., 2023).

When translating idioms, humor, dialects, silences, or specific intentions, AI may often render neutral or flatten affective or socio-cultural depth. A Korean expression loaded with class connotation or a French line infused with lyrical rhythm may be syntactically explained by AI, but its discourse or poetic essence is frequently diminished. Even with adaptive training on culturally diverse datasets, AI systems struggle with context-dependent restraints that human translators produce instinctively (Zhang & Doherty, 2025).

Moreover, the ethical dimensions of translation, particularly when dealing with marginalized voices, regional dialects, or historical trauma, require not just linguistic fidelity but also cultural loyalty. Translators must consider questions of representation, omission, and appropriation, particularly in postcolonial or indigenous contexts (Fernández-Costales et al., 2023). These are judgments that AI, driven by algorithmic optimization, cannot make autonomously.

This chapter examines the immersion of AI in film translation, particularly within the framework of English language education. Considering case studies from Japanese, Nigerian, and Latin American cinema, it explores how translation operates as a site of cultural negotiation and identity formation. The intention is to offer pedagogical strategies for integrating translation into the EFL classroom, encouraging

students to become not only consumers of translated content but also active participants in its reinterpretation.

Types of Translation in Film

The translation of cinema across linguistic and cultural borders occurs through a variety of forms, each with distinct technical, aesthetic, and ideological implications. These modes, which include subtitling, dubbing, and voice-over, are not simply mechanisms of language transfer (Iturregui-Gallardo & Matamala, 2020); they are interpretive acts that set meaning, reception, and identity.

Subtitling

Subtitling remains the most widely used mode of audiovisual translation. It involves superimposing written text—translating spoken dialogue and sometimes on-screen written material—onto the visual frame in real time. This form of translation enables access across linguistic borders while preserving the original auditory experience, allowing viewers to hear the actors' voices, intonations, and emotional delivery (Alaa & Al Saw, 2023).

However, subtitling is shaped by inherent spatial and temporal context. Screen space is limited, typically allowing no more than two lines of text per subtitle (Malenova, 2017). Therefore, these lines must also be timed precisely to match speech without overwhelming the viewer's reading speed. The result is a process of linguistic condensation in which humor, idioms, discourse markers, and character-specific speech registers are often simplified or omitted altogether.

Despite its limitations, subtitling carries significant pedagogical and cultural value. It facilitates language learning by exposing audiences to authentic speech in context and can preserve the emotional and auditory touches that are

decisive to character development and cultural environment. In this way, it functions not only as a linguistic tool but also as a medium of transcultural listening (Chiaro & De Bonis, 2020).

AI vs. Human Subtitling

The rise of artificial intelligence in media translation has introduced new dynamics to subtitling practices. Perhaps it is a question of depth. AI-generated subtitles, typically created through a combination of Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) and Machine Translation (MT), offer unprecedented speed and scalability. Within seconds, a film can be transcribed and translated into multiple languages, making audiovisual content more accessible than ever before. Yet, this efficiency often comes at the expense of meaning. AI struggles with several issues, including the following:

- **Contextual interpretation:** sarcasm, irony, idioms, homonyms, and culturally embedded references often result in mistranslations or flat versions (Gambier, 2023)
- **Register and tone:** AI tends to produce linguistically neutral or extremely literal subtitles, missing emotional signals or stylistic layers (Boiko, 2025).
- **Timing and rhythm:** Though increasingly accurate, AI timing lacks the precision needed to align subtleties of pause, pacing, or dramatic tension with visual cues (Boiko, 2025).

In contrast, human-created subtitles are the product of interpretive labor. Translators act not only as linguistic converters but as cultural mediators (Boiko, 2025). In this sense, they make multiple context-sensitive decisions, such as adapting translations to the audience's background and the

film's aesthetic style. In addition, they apply ethical judgment, particularly when deciding if and how to maintain ambiguity and when not to simplify complex cultural elements. From a more technical perspective, they apply narrative sensitivity, using timing, line breaks, and word economy to maintain emotional flow and storytelling rhythm.

Thus, while AI subtitles may suffice for surface-level comprehension, human-generated subtitles are essential for preserving cinematic integrity, emotional refinement, and cultural specificity (Fernández-Costales et al., 2023). In subtitling, as in translation in general, AI may serve as a powerful assistant but not a substitute for the human touch where artistic and cultural meaning is at play.

Dubbing

Dubbing, unlike subtitling, replaces the original spoken dialogue of a film with a translated version performed by voice actors in another language (Agulló Garcia et al., 2024). This mode of translation provides a seamless and immersive viewing experience, particularly for audiences less accustomed to reading subtitles or for markets that culturally prefer localized audio. However, while dubbing may reduce the visual-cognitive load for viewers, it introduces a different set of technical, narrative, and cultural challenges. At its core, dubbing requires precise lip synchronization (lip-sync), where translated speech must align with the on-screen actors' mouth movements. This demand often forces alterations to sentence structure, pacing, and even content to achieve visual coherence. In doing so, dubbing can endanger the integrity of the original vocal performance, replacing the actor's tone, cadence, and emotional delivery, which are key components of character identity and storytelling (Napoli, 2020).

Moreover, dubbing carries significant sociolinguistic consequences. The replacement of original voices can

ignore subtle cultural elements such as dialects, jargon, and regionally or age-specific speech (Agulló Garcia et al., 2024). These are often central to the construction of a character's social position, ethnic background, or emotional state. Voice selection itself is also an interpretive act: the choice of who "speaks" for a foreign character in a new language version is rarely neutral (Chiaro & De Bonis, 2020).

AI vs. Human Dubbing

The emergence of AI-powered dubbing using technologies such as text-to-speech (TTS), automatic translation, and voice cloning, has made it possible to automate dubbing across multiple languages at record speed. According to Spiteri Miggiani (2021), these systems offer rapid scalability, ideal for streaming platforms for global release, as well as voice cloning capabilities that can replicate vocal tone and inflection across languages to preserve a sense of continuity. In addition, AI-powered dubbing also offers consistency in tone, volume, and pronunciation, especially useful for standard or corporate audiovisual content.

Yet, despite these advantages, AI-powered dubbing remains limited in emotional and cultural depth, which has received its fair share of backlash. It often fails to convincingly render emotional modulation, such as sarcasm, irony, hesitation, or dramatic increase. Similarly, it scores low on narrative pacing, especially in scenes where silence, timing, or intensity plays a key narrative function. And since voice acting is deeply embedded in regional and linguistic contexts, AI-powered dubbing has yet to completely fulfil audience expectations for adherence to cultural performance norms. While dubbed films and shows may still be entertaining for viewers, signs of dubbing are still perceptible; poor quality dubbing, however, will often detract from the viewer experience (Bigioi & Corcoran, 2023).

In contrast, human dubbing is an act of interpretive performance. Voice actors bring their own training, intuition, and cultural awareness to the translation process. They personify their roles, adjusting their vocal delivery to reflect context, character psychology, and genre. Human adapters work with linguistic and artistic flexibility, rephrasing dialogue to align with mouth movements while retaining meaning and tone. Lastly, directors and actors collaboratively tune performances to match audience expectations, cultural humor, and emotional tone. Thus, while AI may simulate speech, only human dubbing performs it with all the subtlety, creativity, and narrative judgment that cinematic translation demands. AI tools may assist in pre-production or provide drafts, but they cannot replace the culturally sensitive and emotionally resonant work of professional voice actors and translators.

Voice-Over Translation

Voice-over translation is most commonly applied in documentaries, newsreels, and non-fiction programs, where the translated voice is set over the original audio, which remains partially audible. This technique differs from dubbing in its transparency: the presence of the original voice suggests authenticity, allowing the audience to perceive the cadence, emotion, and tone of the source speaker even as they receive translated content (Iturregui-Gallardo & Matamala, 2020). While the format implies objectivity, particularly in factual or journalistic genres, it often reframes or filters the original speaker's intent. The translated voice can project a tone, style, or emphasis that differs from the original.

AI vs. Human Voice-Over

The rise of AI-powered voice-over tools, including ASR, machine translation (MT), and TTS synthesis, offers fast and scalable voice-over solutions (Pérez-González, 2019). These systems can automatically identify speech, translate it into the target language, and overlay a synthetic voice all within minutes. AI-generated voice-over offers efficiency in producing multilingual versions for global media as well as uniformity in tone and pacing, especially for scripted, non-dramatic content. By eliminating the need for voice actors or studio time, these tools also offer a cost-effectiveness that is difficult to replicate.

That said, the limitations of AI in this context are significant. Listeners and viewers often complain about flat tones or monotones created by AI-generated voices that lack emotion, sounding neutral or robotic, regardless of the speaker's original intent or demands of the content. This can also lead to cultural insensitivity, as AI-voices lack awareness of social cues, accent distinctions, and may even distort meaning by using inappropriate tones. Furthermore, in scenarios where the original speaker's identity is vital—such as testimonies, activist narratives, or indigenous voices—AI voice-overs may distort the message (Kuligowska et al., 2018).

In contrast, human voice-over artists and translators bring interpretive awareness to the task by matching vocal style to context, whether it be calmness, urgency, emotion, or irony, to honor the source speaker's intent. The source speaker's intent. Humans are also able to contextualize meaning, accounting for regional idioms, tone shifts, and cultural references (Perez-Gonzalez, 2018). While AI voice-over technologies can replicate speech patterns and accelerate access, they struggle to interpret and honor the speaker's full communicative intent. Human voice-over, by contrast, remains an act of cross-cultural mediation,

capable of navigating the fine line between translation and appropriation (Gambier, 2023).

Case Studies: Translation as Cultural Negotiation

Concrete examples help illustrate how translation negotiates meaning, often at the expense of cultural richness.

- **Japanese Cinema:** The aesthetic concept of *wabi-sabi*, or the beauty of imperfection and impermanence, often appears in dialogue and pacing. Honorifics (-san, -chan, -sama) that reflect social hierarchies and intimacy are often lost in English subtitles, rendering flattened character relationships (Almeida Santos & Humblé, 2023).
- **Nigerian Nollywood Films:** Subtitling is preferred in multilingual African contexts, while dubbing dominates international markets. This shift alters perceived authenticity, privileging Western accessibility over indigenous vocal expression (Mpofu, 2021).
- **Amélie (France):** The film's poetic rhythm and imaginative internal monologues proved challenging to subtitle. The resulting English translation conveys plot but often loses stylistic texture, diminishing its literary charm (Martínez Sierra, 2022).

These examples demonstrate that translation, even before the age of modern machine translation tools, has never been neutral or automatic; it reflects choices, ideologies, and power dynamics. Every subtitled word or dubbed voice is a negotiation between fidelity, accessibility, and cultural ethics. Thus, even in the age of AI, translation still requires a human touch to preserve cultural and aesthetic integrity.

Classroom Applications

Cinema as a Language Lab

For educators, cinema provides a rich, multimodal platform for exploring language, culture, and identity. Translation becomes not only a teaching tool, but a subject of analysis through different classwork assignments. For instance, comparison exercises allow students to compare official translations to AI-generated ones and identify omissions, shifts in tone, or changes in meaning. Depending on the type of film, they can also deepen their linguistic awareness by examining how idioms, slang, humor, or silence are translated. More advanced assignments can involve recreating subtitles with a focus on culture to encourage students to balance fidelity with clarity and tone. Cinema, in this sense, becomes a language laboratory where linguistics, aesthetics, ethics, and global citizenship converge (Shahmerdanova, 2025).

Analysis of Translation and Linguistic Issues in the Film *Emilia Pérez* (2024)

Jacques Audiard's *Emilia Pérez*, released in 2024, became one of the most discussed international films of the decade, not only for its narrative audacity — a queer, trans-centered crime musical set in Mexico — but also for the controversies surrounding its translation and cultural representation. The film centers on a male Mexican drug lord, who goes under the knife for gender-affirming surgery to emerge as a woman who later tries to reconnect with the children she had with her former wife. The film had already received accolades at the Cannes Film Festival upon its release before making history by earning 13 Academy Award nominations, the highest ever for a non-English language film. However, it soon became the target of widespread criticism, vitriol, and even parody for issues including casting, damaging, and unrealistic depictions

of Mexico and the LGBT community (Coyle, 2025; Peate, 2025).

While the film's French director, Jacques Audiard, conceived the project in French, the film is performed primarily in Spanish, a choice that immediately raised questions of linguistic authenticity. Critics in Latin America highlighted the awkward grammar, simplistic vocabulary, and unidiomatic phrasing of the Spanish dialogue and lyrics (Marín Bascuñán, 2025; Pardo, 2025). Several reviewers noted that songs such as "*Todo y Nada*" and "*Mi Camino*" sounded artificial, even if and mostly because they were "run through Google Translate" (Zavala, 2025).

This critique reveals not only a technical weakness in translation but also the absence of poetic adaptation, central in musical cinema. As *El Mostrador* (Marín Bascuñán, 2025) observed, the film failed to employ basic Spanish prosodic strategies (e.g., *sinalefa*, *sinéresis*) that would have given fluidity to sung verses, producing instead a stilted rhythm that alienated native speakers since it sounded inauthentic and awkward, versus the fluidity expected by native speakers of Spanish.

Subtitling and lyric mistranslations, e.g., "*bienvenida*" mistranslated as "*you're welcome*," and the poorly translated, yet Oscar-winning song "*El Mal*," highlighted a lack of linguistic care in a film that was supposed to speak directly to Spanish-speaking communities (Mier, 2025). For many viewers, particularly in Latin America, the film symbolized Hollywood's carelessness with non-English languages, reinforcing a long-standing complaint about how global cinema treats linguistic authenticity.

Cultural Mediation and Authenticity

Unlike other transnational productions that rely heavily on local cultural consultants, *Emilia Pérez* appears to have

neglected Mexican input. No evidence has surfaced of Mexican linguists, translators, or lyricists being hired to oversee authenticity (Besson, 2025; Pardo, 2025). Mexican cinematographer Rodrigo Prieto noted that “everything feels inauthentic, especially when the subject matter is so important to us Mexicans” (“Inauthentic” Mexican Portrayal In Emilia Pérez, 2024). More fuel was poured over the fire when Audiard admitted that the songs depicted in the film were written originally in French and later translated into Spanish—albeit poorly, according to critics (Emilia Pérez’s Spanish ignites criticism, 2025).

Casting choices reinforced this impression. Lead roles went to Karla Sofía Gascón (Spanish), Zoe Saldaña (American of Dominican descent), and Selena Gomez (American of Mexican descent). While Gascón’s performance was widely praised, Gomez was singled out for her poor Spanish pronunciation, which was notoriously lambasted by Mexican actor Eugenio Derbez as “indefensible” (Muer & Richardson, 2025). Audiard defended the film as an operatic, stylized interpretation of Mexico rather than a realist representation. In interviews, he admitted that Mexico’s “ordinary” landscape did not fit his artistic vision, which led him to shoot in Paris soundstages instead. Later, Audiard publicly apologized to Mexican viewers for any offense caused (Jacques Audiard apologises, 2025).

Fame Through Innovation and Controversy

Cultural controversy created by debates around mistranslation, casting, and authenticity has made *Emilia Pérez* a case study in the ethics of cross-cultural filmmaking. While there is no evidence of AI-powered translation, the absence of Mexican linguistic and cultural expertise made the film a target for charges of artificiality, misrepresentation, and outright linguistic absurdity. That said, the film provides an interesting

opportunity to foster critical thinking and analysis in the language classroom, most notably by calling upon learners to conduct a deep analysis of the more notorious translations used in the film and develop more linguistically and culturally appropriate substitutions. Table 8 shows examples of mistranslations that distort the Spanish language.

Mistranslation	Explanation	Cultural Damage Impact
"Bienvenida" vs. "de nada"	Incorrect literal translation of "You're welcome"	Feels unprofessional, misrepresents basic conversational Spanish.
"Cerró la llave"	Wrong phrase for blocking access—should be "bloqueó la clave"	Breaks logical and linguistic coherence.
Selena Gomez's Spanish accent and register	Unconvincing portrayal and mismatch with character backstory.	Distracts native speakers and undermines authenticity.
Imprecise lyrics in song "Todo y Nada"	Forced expressions, poor rhythm, odd syntax.	Strips poetic fluency; sounds foreign to Spanish speakers.

Table 8. *Mistranslations in the film Emilia Pérez*

Regardless of whether students’ L1 is Spanish or English, a side-by-side review of the language and translations that made the final cut in the film would open the door to meaningful discussions on cultural and linguistic accuracy. That said, such an exercise would require a slight shift away from the monolingual approach to language learning that seeks to minimize the use of learners’ native language (L1) in the class-

room at all costs (Phillipson, 1992). However, this approach ignores the potential of L1 use both as a scaffolding and anxiety-reducing strategy that not only recognizes students' cultural and linguistic competencies but also as a means to foster greater information exchange (Lightbown & Spada, 2020). In fact, studies have concluded that many students, particularly at the university level, favor language classrooms that allow them to use their L1 for certain amounts of time for specific activities (An & Macaro, 2022; Bruen & Kelly, 2014; Chugai & Synekop, 2025).

AI, Translation, and Human Judgement

With the advent of AI, the field of film translation is evolving rapidly. Tools such as automatic subtitles, neural machine translation, and voice-cloning offer exceptional efficiency and adaptability. AI can transcribe and translate content in minutes, but the question is, at what cost?

Natural Language Processing (NLP) models can now attempt to imitate tone, register, and humor, generating subtitled translations that resemble conversational flow. Voice cloning technologies can retain original actor intonations, creating synthetic dubs that feel more authentic. In the classroom, AI, along with human judgment, can serve as a critical lens that enables students to compare and critique different translations quickly and insightfully (Werding et al., 2024).

However, the supposed efficiency of AI is not perfect. Machine-generated translations often lack contextual sensitivity, misrepresent tone, register, or socio-cultural nuance, and can tend to make language generic. They may also fail to faithfully represent idiosyncrasies unique to a writer's experiences. Therefore, without a critical review, much can be lost in translation, and the act itself becomes a mechanical act rather than a reflective one. For language students, this creates a need to strike a balance between linguistic accuracy

cy and authentic expression (Werdiningsih et al., 2024) since overreliance on AI may also diminish critical thinking. AI can be of help; it all depends on how it is used.

In summary, translation is never neutral; it is an act of interpretation shaped by human choices and values, as well as technological possibilities. While AI offers powerful tools to expand access, it cannot replace the cultural sensitivity and ethical judgment of the human translator. Teaching students to engage with cinema through translation cultivates not only linguistic skills but empathy, awareness, and global literacy. In a world increasingly mediated by algorithms, the human task is to translate without ignoring meaning—to preserve voices rather than neglect them.

CHAPTER 5:
THE HOW
PART 2

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Practical Pedagogical Translation Applications in the EFL Classroom

Nowadays, in the digital era, translation is no longer an isolated phenomenon but rather an everyday experience. Music is enjoyed in a variety of languages (especially English and Spanish, almost in the same percentage), and other media such as memes, videos, and podcasts are shared in seconds and viewed on international platforms. In all these forms of social interchange, translation – automatic or human- works as a filter and determines what is understood and what is lost along the way. The following chapter offers practical classroom applications that involve strategic L1 use and pedagogical translation to promote critical analysis and negotiation of meaning among students.

Translation and music

Maintaining poetic resonance

A study about the music of Bob Dylan showed that Machine Translation (MT) captures the literal meaning of the lyrics but loses the metaphors and poetic resonances that form the essence of the work (Navarro, 2024). The song in question is "*A Hard Rain's a-Gonna Fall*" (1962), first released on the album *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*. It represents one of his most well-known songs, rich in biblical imagery, apocalyptic metaphor, and poetic resonance, which is exactly why MTs struggle with it. The name of the song, which is the sentence with the heaviest meaning, is often rendered in Spanish as "*Una lluvia fuerte va a caer.*" Although semantically correct,

the translation strips away the weight of Dylan's words, reducing a powerful poetic symbol to a dull weather forecast.

This case illustrates how AI may achieve grammatical accuracy but still lose the artistic essence of lyrics, demonstrating once more the importance of humans in preserving metaphors, rhythm, and cultural depth. According to reports, up to 93% of original meaning may be lost in automatic translations of pop lyrics, mainly when metaphors or cultural expressions are abundant (Navarro, 2024).

During many professors' lessons, many students become interested in other languages aside from English, such as Italian or Korean, through music, which presents unique opportunities to build an understanding of the song lyrics. Despite warnings against attempting literal translations, curious students wonder why the words do not match, or, on the opposite side, why the lyrics make no sense. Thus, when comparing the original lyrics with automatized ones, some questions arise:

"Professor, why 'you broke me first' sounds good in English and 'me rompiste primero' sounds unnatural in Spanish?" (song by Tate MacRae).

This type of interchange shows that music is not only a space for aesthetic consumption, but also a pedagogical laboratory to reflect language, culture, and tradition. As a practical application in the EFL classroom, students may be instructed to search for a song title or short verse in English, either from their favorite artist or musical, or even one in their L1. They can then work with their classmates in building a list of suitable, contextual translations that maintain the emotional and poetic intent of the songs selected (see Table 9).

Original	Literal translation	Contextualized translation
Me muero por tus besos	I die for your kisses	I am dying for your kisses
Sin ti no soy nada	Without you I am nothing	I'm nothing without you
Mi vida eres tu	My life are you	You are my life

Table 9. Example of contextual translations

Linguistic and Cultural Analysis of Musicals: The Music of Emilia Pérez

The controversy surrounding the 2025 film *Emilia Pérez* extended well beyond its narrative and casting choices and into the musical dimension. While the film positioned itself as a socially conscious musical, its songs were widely perceived as both linguistic and cultural failures. Composed originally in French and translated into Spanish (albeit poorly, according to many critics), the film's song lyrics lacked idiomatic precision and cultural depth, producing awkward and sometimes comical results. Certain songs performed by the actors in a rap-rock style (*El Mal*), while others were delivered in a more poetic or nostalgic manner (*El Amor*, *Mi Camino*). The fact that the film was a musical made the poor translation and cultural clichés in the songs even more noticeable, since they affected not only the dialogue but also the music and the poetry that complemented the visual narrative.

The song "*Papá*" is a case in point. Intended to conjure the memory of a father by describing his smell and presence, its Spanish version includes lines such as "*Hueles a Coca-Cola Light con limón, hielo y sudor*" and "*Olías a hierbabuena, a mezcal y guacamole.*" While these phrases are intended to be evocative, they instead reinforce reductive cultural stereotypes and trivialize Mexican identity (Strauss, 2025).

Critics and audiences highlighted the song's shortcomings, noting its use of clichés and awkward phrasing, which resembled machine-translation outputs. Social media users transformed the lyrics into memes, amplifying the mockery.

This case exemplifies how poor translation and insufficient cultural consultation in artistic productions can undermine authenticity, alienate audiences, and inadvertently produce humor where none was intended. Regarding the sensory images it was meant to convey, the effect was too literal, oddly specific, and detached from emotion; and in a cultural sense, it overly relied on clichés rather than real cultural experiences.

Despite the controversies, or perhaps because of them, this case presents an opportunity to conduct a deeper linguistic and cultural analysis in the language classroom. Teachers can organize groups of students and instruct them to assume the role of bilingual lyricists/language consultants to analyze the musical song lyrics that ultimately appear on screen and then build a list of more culturally and emotionally appropriate alternatives.

Analyzing the wordplay of love songs

An extension of the previously mentioned exercise can also be carried out by inviting students to select verses from their favorite songs in different genres, this time comparing and combining the MT outputs either through AI-powered apps or online machine translators (OMTs), and human translation.

Example 1 – Love song

Original (English): *"You are the sunshine of my life."*

Automatic literal translation: *"Eres la luz del sol de mi vida."*
(Sounds rigid and weird in Spanish).

Human translation: *"Eres la luz que ilumina mi vida."* (Adapts to the poetic style and keeps an affective tone).

Example 2 – Wordplay in a Pop Song

Original (English): *"I can't get you out of my head."*

Automatic literal translation: *"No puedo sacarte de mi cabeza."* (It works, but can sound harsh or even comic in Spanish).

Human translation: *"No consigo sacarte de mi mente."* (Fluent and natural).

Example 3 – Rhythm and Rhyme

Original (English): *"Stay, don't stray, love will find its way."*

Automatic literal translation: *"Quédate, no te desvíes, el amor encontrará su camino."* (Semantically correct but lacks musicality).

Human translation: *"Quédate, no te pierdas, el amor sabrá dónde encontrarte."* (It maintains rhythm and searches for rhyme).

Translation and social media

Memes and untranslatable humor

Digital content, such as memes, reels, and TikToks, is known for its speed and brevity. Memes, in the greater part, depend on local and cultural references. As Lopez (2023) states, translating memes implies much more than only words; it requires image interpretation, word games, and communities' shared ideas. Literal translation conveys a clear risk, which implies the comprehension of double-meaning memes. A meme that relies on a joke in English (for example, a "seal

of approval” illustrated with a seal) loses all its humor if translated word for word.

AI is already rewriting the history of memes. Wired (2023) describes how iconic images circulate freely in altered versions, creating what today is known as time-traveling memes. Here, not only is text modified by the translation, but it also reshapes collective cultural memory. In media such as TikTok, automated subtitling has become widespread. But immediacy works against human translators; a joke translated literally becomes meaningless. Cultural adaptation requires speed and creativity beyond what any algorithm can guarantee.

In the language classroom, students can engage in comparative exercises to build awareness of the capacity of humans to adapt, contextualize, and sustain natural flow in social media communication, while AI often falls into literalness or cultural unawareness. The following examples require students to analyze popular memes in English and find appropriate translations in Spanish that maintain a similar effect; the exercise also calls for students to discern whether a meme or hashtag can or should truly be translated instead of borrowed.

Example 1 – Cultural Meme

Original (English): Image of a dog with the text: “*This is fine.*” (The Dog in the Fire Meme)

Automatic literal translation: “*Esto está bien.*” (Sounds strange and interferes with the cultural reference of the meme).

Human translation: leaves the text in English or adapts to “*Todo bien*” (Since the meme is already known in Spanish).

Example 2 – Humor in Twitter/X

Original (English): *"I'm on a seafood diet. I see food, and I eat it."*

Automatic literal translation: *"Estoy en una dieta de mariscos. Veo comida y la como."* (Not funny anymore).

Human translation: *"Estoy a dieta de mariscos: veo comida y me la como."* (Adapted to the word game).

Example 3 – Hashtags and abbreviations

Original (English): #TBT (*Throwback Thursday*)

Automatic literal translation: #JuevesDeRecuerdos (not really used in social media and loses the acronym in the hashtag).

Human translation: keep the hashtag in English since it is already globalized (#TBT).

Translation and regional culture

The case of dar + gerund in the North Andean Spanish dialect

Another application of pedagogical translation involves the translation and interpretation of phrases unique to a specific dialect close to students' L1. Such is the case of Northern Andean Spanish spoken in parts of Ecuador and Colombia, which exhibits the dialectal construction *dar* (give) + *gerund* to convey a polite request or favor on behalf of the speaker or a third party (Olbertz, 2008). It is part of a group of similar grammatical constructions that feature an auxiliary verb such as *mandar* (send) and *dejar* (leave) combined with a *gerund*. The construction *mandar* + *gerund* may function as a causative where the subject is more of an instigator of an action rather than the one directly responsible for it, either through loss of control or by imposition onto another person (e.g. *Le mandó*

a buscar los papeles – He/She had him/her look for the papers (Haboud, 2018). In the case of *dejar* + gerund, this construction can be used to refer to two simultaneous or near simultaneous events where the subject leaves the place where the action is occurring ("*le dejé durmiendo en el cuarto*" - I left him/her sleeping in the room) (Palacios & Haboud, 2018).

These linguistic variations, the result of cross-linguistic and socio-pragmatic transfer from Ecuadorian Kichwa, do not appear in other varieties of Spanish spoken in Latin America, much less Europe (Gómez, 2022). Therefore, these features create multiple semantical and grammatical issues in translation to English, thus creating opportunities for students familiar with the dialect to engage in critical thinking and problem-solving in both their L1 and L2.

The following examples were extracted from an in-class activity conducted by one of this book's co-authors in 2025 with 53 university students at a private university in Cuenca, Ecuador, enrolled in an upper intermediate EFL course. A lesson on the causative verbs *get*, *had*, *make*, and *let* caused confusion among the students regarding the socio-pragmatic aspect of the verbs, which only worsened when they realized their OMT outputs did not always render contextually appropriate translations.

After listening to the students' side conversations in class, the professor asked them to compile a list of the most common Andean Spanish phrases they used in their personal social interactions. The students, who were previously accustomed to blindly accepting all OMT outputs, were then instructed to work collaboratively with their fellow classmates and use a variety of OMTs and AI-powered apps to create alternative interpretations of the phrases in English and justify their choices. All discussions included inverse translations and debates in the students' L1 and L2, which enabled a deeper analysis of the contextual usage of the Andean Spanish phrases as well as their appropriate interpretation in English.

Example 1

Original (Spanish): "*Le mandó sacando.*"

OMT/literal translation: Sent taking out; he sent him taking out; he told him to take it out.

Human alternatives: He/she had him/her thrown out; he sent him out; he kicked him out (offers both an expression similar to a causative or a phrase in the active voice).

Example 2

Original (Spanish): "*Dame poniendo.*"

OMT/literal translation: Give me putting; put this for me; help me putting this.

Human alternatives: Give it to me to put away. Could you put it in there? Please put this somewhere.

Example 3

Original (Spanish): "*Mandé a hacer la tesis.*"

OMT/literal translation: I sent to do the thesis, they did my thesis.

Human alternatives: I got someone to do my thesis; I had my thesis written; I paid someone to do my thesis; I sent someone to do the thesis.

Example 3 caused considerable debate among students. While most agreed that "*mandé hacer*" most closely resembled the causative verb "had" in the sense that it is not the speaker who performs the action, they were undivided as to whether the performer of the action was paid, persuaded, or threatened to do so.

As seen with this example, engaging EFL students in pedagogical translation of non-standard constructions in their L1 by using OMTs and AI-powered apps provides rich

opportunities for context analysis and critical thinking, given the multiple interpretations in both their L1 and L2.

The case of translating Ecuadorian legends

As seen in Chapter 2, many English teachers, being the pragmatists they are, seem to agree that L1 use and translation are appropriate for lower-level students, particularly for teaching grammar and providing feedback (Intriago & Hidalgo, 2022; Sevy-biloon et al., 2020). Opinions diverge, however, when it comes to higher-level students who are assumed to have a high level of proficiency that does not warrant L1 use or translation of classroom instructions or grammar (Cadena Murga et al., 2018; Debreli, 2016; Payne & Contreras, 2019).

Indeed, students with higher proficiency levels, particularly in situations where they are taking English to fulfil a requirement, such as obtaining a university degree, may feel they have nothing new to learn as they have mastered all the necessary grammatical structures and can sustain conversations entirely in English (Moscoso, 2011). Nevertheless, there is substantial literature that positions translation as a higher order cognitive skill that can advance language learning as it uses the student's entire repertoire of knowledge and resources to faithfully render material previously produced by a third party in a different language and context (Galante, 2021; Irazo, 2022). Other authors have also highlighted the relevance of preserving multilingual students' languages and cultures through translation as a "strategically planned teaching method with objectives to aid student learning" that includes "mediation for metalinguistic awareness, cultural learning and collaboration" (Albrecht et al., 2023, p. 42).

In practice, pedagogical translation as a cognitive process can take the form of engaging advanced students

in the translation of culturally rich stories or legends written by local authors in their L1. Such a process involves first selecting a text, then dividing it into manageable sections and instructing students to translate the different parts using the translation methods of their choice under the guidance of their teacher or instructor. The process concludes with the reassembly, editing, and, depending on the resources of the institution, publication of a final product created by students (Moscoso, 2011).

Such a process was undertaken as a case study by the other co-author of this book while teaching a class with International Studies students at a private university in Ecuador in 2021. Since a B2 level of English proficiency was a requirement for enrollment into the program, most of the students already had a solid command of the English language, particularly in listening and writing. While this guaranteed students' fulfilment of the language requirement for graduation, the goal of the program was to push students toward achieving a C1 level, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Thus, 52 second year students translated a collection of short Ecuadorian folk legends from Spanish to English. The process, which spanned an entire university semester, saw the students engaging in multiple forms of translation using OMTs, physical dictionaries, group discussions, and research on how to faithfully represent the cultural context of the legends without losing the lessons conveyed in the stories. The result was a book containing a compilation of the students' translations that was peer-reviewed and released by the university's publishing house the following academic semester. An example of the translations is shown in Table 10.

Student translation	Legend in Spanish
The legend tells that many years ago, in fact, more than a century ago, there was a priest who liked to date several women after concluding his religious mass.	Se cuenta la leyenda que hace muchísimos años (de hecho, más de un siglo) había un sacerdote al que le gustaba salir con varias mujeres después de concluir sus misas.
Obviously, this type of behavior was not approved by the citizens of Cuenca. Unfortunately, no one could do anything to prevent it because the priest was a friend of the ecclesiastical authorities, who did nothing to remove him.	Obviamente este tipo de conducta era rechazada por los moradores de Cuenca, pero lamentablemente nadie podía hacer nada para evitarlo, ya que el cura era amigo de las autoridades eclesiásticas que en algún momento pudieron removerlo.
The priest continued to date several single girls until the day of his death. It is said that no one attended his funeral except the gravedigger. When the gravedigger began to throw dust on the coffin, the lid opened, allowing him to see that the body had no head.	El sacerdote siguió saliendo con varias muchachas solteras, hasta el día de su muerte. Se dice que a su funeral no acudió nadie, salvo el sepulturero. Cuando el enterrador comenzaba a echar la tierra sobre el ataúd, la tapa de éste se abrió, permitiéndole ver que aquel cuerpo no tenía cabeza.
The man finished doing his job and went to a canteen, where he told the people what had happened. Immediately, there were those who affirmed, "Surely, it was the devil who took his head to hell."	El hombre terminó de hacer su trabajo y luego se dirigió a una cantina en la que les relató a los asistentes lo sucedido. De

From that moment on, the priest's body wanders at night in hopes of recovering his head.	inmediato hubo quienes afirmaron:
Translated by Tamara Medina.	– De seguro fue el demonio el que se llevó su cabeza al infierno.
	Desde ese momento, el cuerpo del cura vaga por las noches con la esperanza de recuperar su cabeza

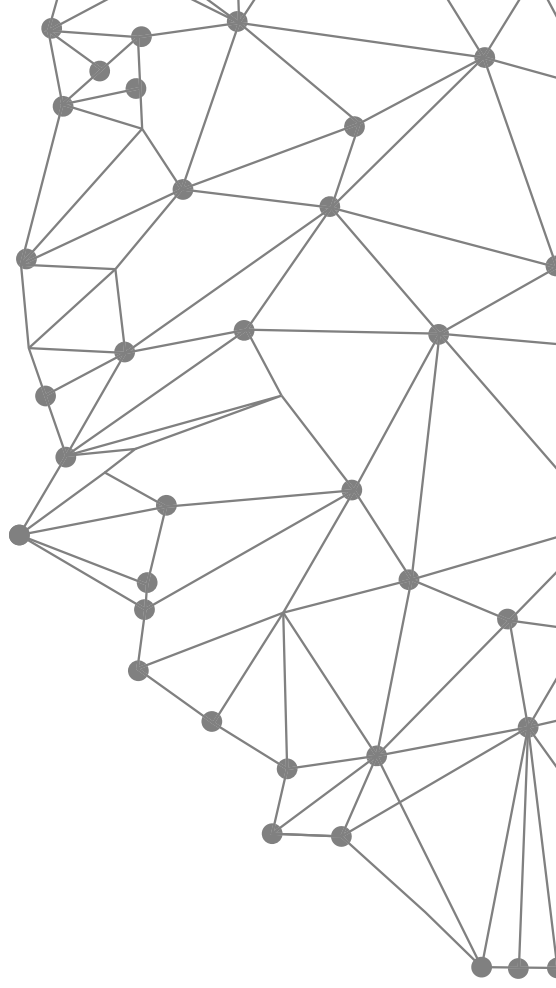
Source: Moscoso et al., (2021)

Table 10. Excerpt translation from *A Piece of Culture: The Headless Priest*

Rather than create a perfectly polished translated version, which would have required a more direct intervention from the professor, the intention behind the process was for students to produce a faithful translation of the original legend to the best of their abilities. In the example shown in Table 10, the student’s worldview is evident in the use of the modern word “dates” to refer to the priest’s outings with the young women in the story. Since the professor’s role was more that of a guide, these personal stamps in the translations were left in the final versions as a nod to the students’ work and vision.

As seen in this chapter, language teachers would do well to create spaces for critical reflection in the language classroom and not reduce translation to a mere functional procedure. Rather, through pedagogical translation, L1 use can expand beyond regulative and even instructional registers (Gierlinger, 2015). This requires the role of teachers to go beyond correcting errors or polishing AI outputs: it involves questioning how meaning travels across cultures, preserving the humor, poetry, and emotion that machines often flatten, and guiding learners to see translation as a creative, ethical, and deeply human act. In this sense, translators and educators

act not only as mediators of language but also as guardians of cultural diversity, ensuring that the voices carried through music, film, and digital content are not homogenized into neutral sound but continue to speak with authenticity and resonance.



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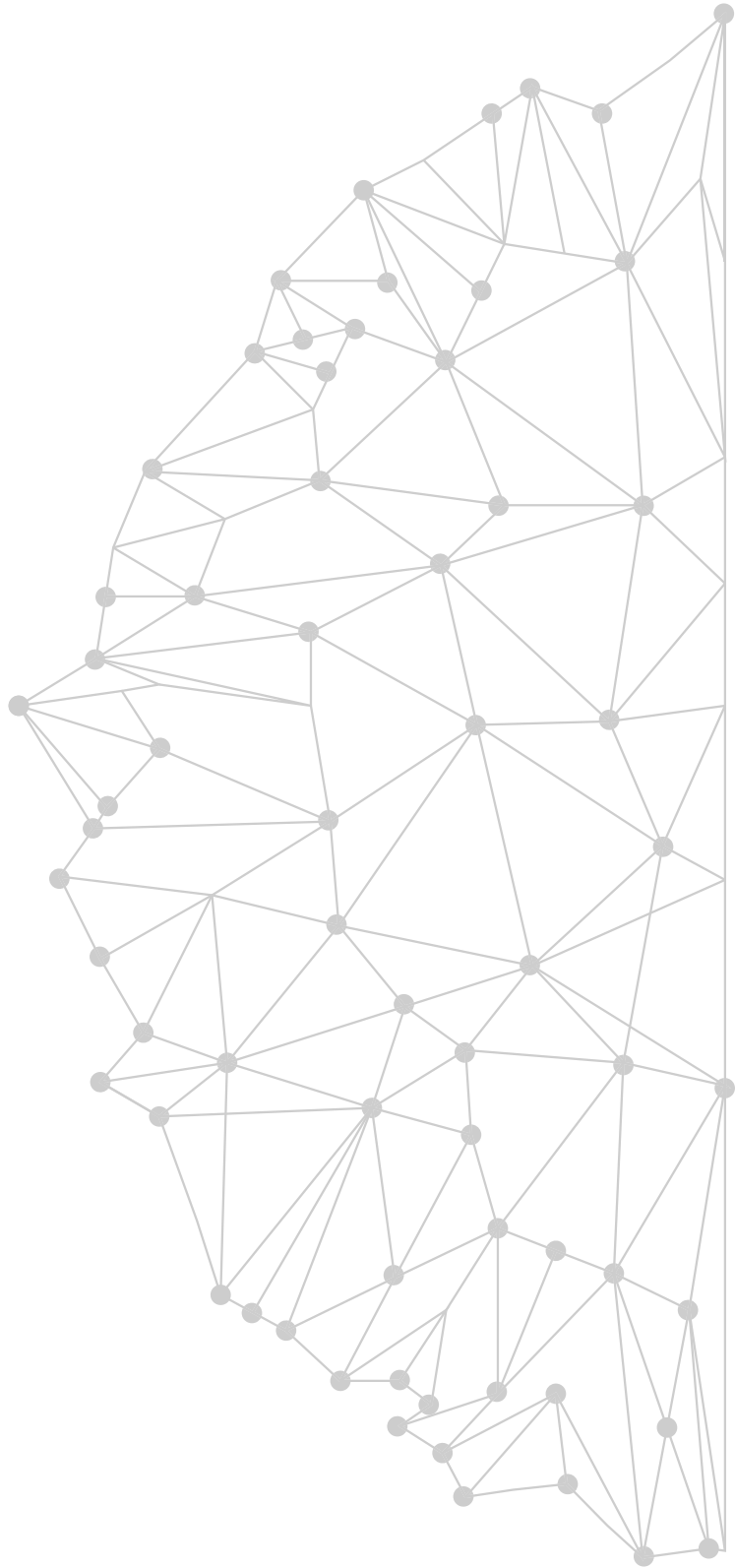
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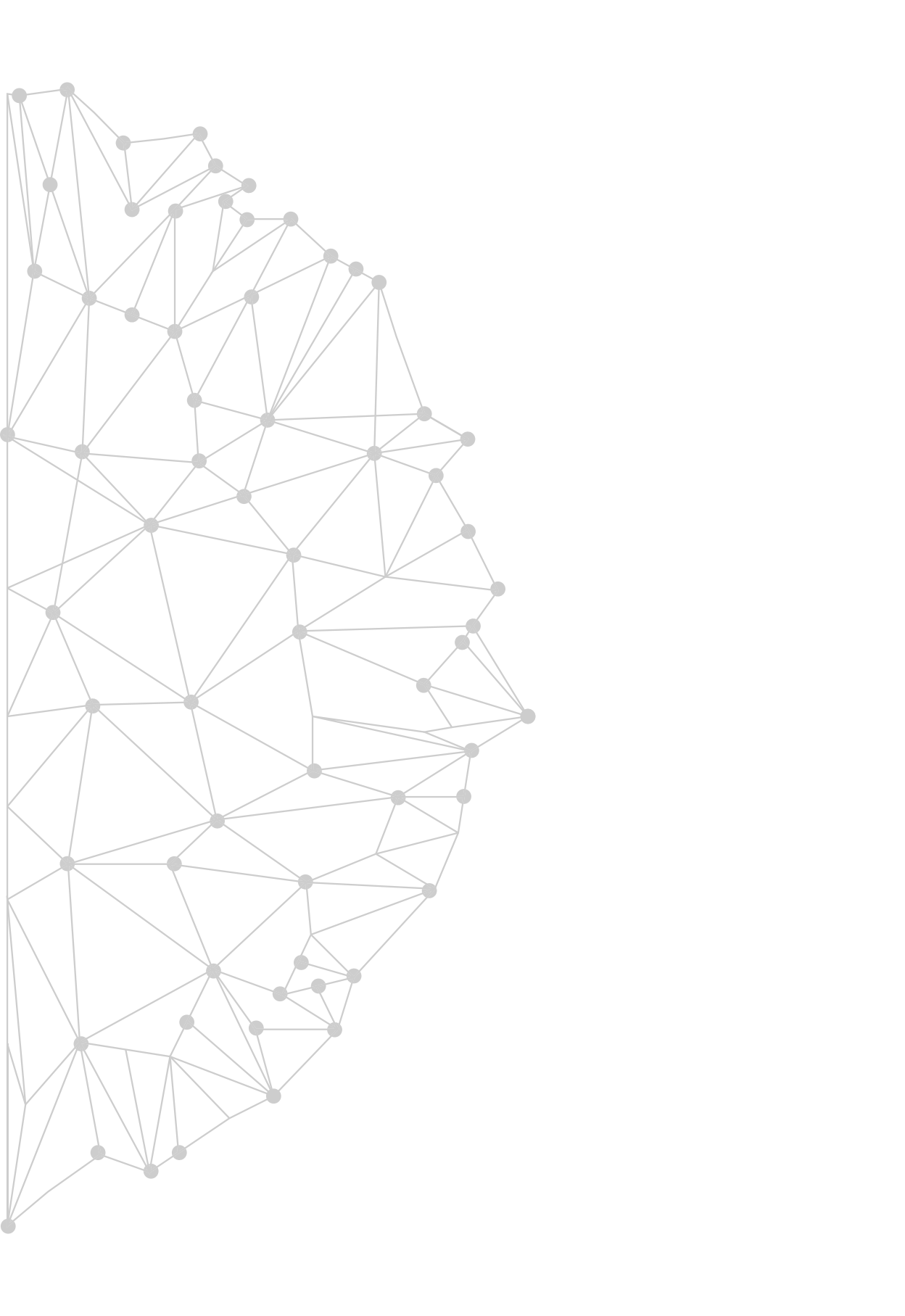
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Editora

When technology translates, teachers still matter

Translation in the EFL classroom was supposed to be dead. Buried somewhere between outdated methods and well-meaning policies that insisted students should “just think in English.” And yet, it never really left. It whispered through side comments, showed up in quick comparisons, and now lives comfortably in every student’s phone, ready to translate anything in seconds, whether it should or not.

Instead of romanticizing translation or panicking over artificial intelligence, this second book in the *Lost in Translation, Found in AI* series treats both for what they are: useful, powerful, and occasionally chaotic tools. Because anyone who has used AI for translation knows it can be brilliant one minute and completely unhinged the next. It can clarify meaning, distort tone, strip a culture of its color, and confidently fabricate things that were never there to begin with. So, rather than asking whether AI should be allowed, the book asks a more uncomfortable question: what happens when we pretend students are not already using it?

Grounded in examples from real EFL classrooms in Ecuador, this book explores how teachers manage overcrowded classes, varying proficiency levels among learners, institutional pressures, and students who have already outsourced half their thinking to AI-powered apps. Through practical classroom cases that incorporate film, music, and regional language realities, it shows what can happen when translation is taught, questioned, and used with intent.

At its core, this book avoids choosing sides. Translation is not the enemy, and AI is not the solution. But pretending either one does not exist may be the biggest problem of all. Therefore, this book is for language educators and researchers who suspect that the rules they were given do not quite match the classrooms in which they teach.

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