



An Investigation of Lexical Choices in Translation Among EFL Students

(Investigasi Pilihan Leksikal dalam Penerjemahan pada Mahasiswa EFL)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 25 Juli 2026 Revised: 9 Agustus 2026 Accepted: 18 Agustus 2026 Keywords: Lexical Choices EFL Students Translation Indonesian-English Kata Kunci: <i>Pilihan Leksikal Mahasiswa EFL Penerjemahan Bahasa Indonesia-Bahasa Inggris</i>	This study aims to (1) identify and describe the characteristics of lexical choices in EFL students' Indonesian-English translations and (2) investigate the factors influencing students' lexical choices during the translation process. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, involving 20 fourth-semester EFL students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo enrolled in a Translation and Interpreting course. Data were collected through handwritten translations of an argumentative text and semi-structured retrospective interviews with five selected participants. The translation products were analyzed using Baker's (1992) framework of meaning, comprising propositional, expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning, while interview data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The findings showed that students generally preserved propositional meaning but experienced greater difficulties with expressive, presupposed, and evoked meanings, particularly in conveying evaluative nuances, producing natural collocations, and maintaining appropriate register. Five interconnected factors influenced students' lexical choices: limited vocabulary mastery, reliance on dictionaries and machine translation, cognitive factors, limited contextual understanding, and register and source language influence. All five interviewed students reported using Google Translate or DeepL, while four out of five did not consider alternative lexical choices. These findings highlight the need for translation instruction that develops collocational awareness, contextual understanding, register awareness, and critical evaluation of machine translation output. Abstrak Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk (1) mengidentifikasi dan mendeskripsikan karakteristik pilihan leksikal dalam terjemahan bahasa Indonesia-Inggris mahasiswa EFL dan (2) menginvestigasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi pilihan leksikal mahasiswa selama proses penerjemahan. Penelitian ini menggunakan data pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan 20 mahasiswa EFL semester empat di Universitas Negeri Gorontalo yang mengikuti mata kuliah Translation and Interpreting. Data dikumpulkan melalui terjemahan tulisan tangan dari teks argumentatif dan wawancara retrospektif semi-terstruktur terhadap lima mahasiswa terpilih. Produk terjemahan dianalisis menggunakan kerangka makna Baker (1992), yang mencakup makna proposisional, ekspresif, praanggapan, dan evoked, sedangkan data wawancara dianalisis menggunakan analisis konten kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa umumnya mampu mempertahankan makna proposisional, tetapi mengalami kesulitan yang lebih besar dalam mempertahankan makna ekspresif, praanggapan, dan evoked, khususnya dalam menyampaikan nuansa evaluatif, menghasilkan

kolokasi yang alami, dan mempertahankan register yang sesuai. Lima faktor yang saling berkaitan memengaruhi pilihan leksikal mahasiswa, yaitu keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata, ketergantungan pada kamus dan penerjemahan mesin, faktor kognitif, keterbatasan pemahaman kontekstual, serta pengaruh register dan bahasa sumber. Seluruh lima mahasiswa yang diwawancarai melaporkan menggunakan Google Translate atau DeepL, sementara empat dari lima mahasiswa tidak mempertimbangkan pilihan leksikal alternatif.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translation is the process of transferring meaning from one language to another, requiring careful consideration of linguistic, cultural, and contextual factors to ensure accurate message conveyance. Within this process, lexical choice, the selection of specific words or phrases to convey meaning, plays a fundamental role because the words selected determine the accuracy, clarity, and nuance of the translation (Stede, 1993). Giaber (2015) emphasizes that appropriate lexical choices retain the original meaning and are easily understood by target readers, while inappropriate choices can lead to meaning distortion and cultural misunderstanding. In the specific context of Indonesian to English translation, this complexity intensifies due to structural and cultural differences between the two languages (Napu & Hasan, 2019).

Previous research on lexical choices in translation has explored various dimensions. Barua et al. (2024) and Nguyen and Chiang (2017) focused on technological approaches such as neural machine translation and automated lexical selection. Ramli (2019) investigated lexical distortion in Indonesian-English translation, identifying misselection as the dominant error type, while Hassan (2020) conducted a pragmatic analysis of lexical choices in translating Quranic rhetoric. From a psycholinguistic perspective, Rababah (2022) and Oppenheim (2024) examined cognitive strategies in language production. However, these studies have not specifically examined how EFL students—who are still developing their English proficiency—make lexical decisions when translating from Indonesian to English, nor have they investigated the factors that influence students' lexical decision-making processes during translation tasks.

This gap is particularly significant in the context of English language education in Indonesia, specifically at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. Classroom observations and research by Hasan et al. (2019) indicate that EFL students frequently experience difficulties in selecting appropriate lexical equivalents. Students often rely on literal translation, limited vocabulary knowledge, and intuitive choices without fully considering contextual nuances. Napu and Hasan (2019) found that beginner translator students tend to translate without reading the entire text first and often copy word-for-word, indicating that students' translation competence does not always align with expected performance standards. These conditions demonstrate that lexical decision-making remains a critical issue in Indonesian to English translation practices among EFL students.

The novelty of this study lies in addressing this gap by simultaneously investigating two interrelated aspects: (1) the characteristics of lexical choices in EFL students' translated texts, and (2) the factors influencing EFL students' lexical choices during the translation process. Unlike previous studies that predominantly focused on product-oriented error analysis or technological solutions, this research also explores cognitive processes and influencing factors such as vocabulary mastery, use of dictionaries and machine translation tools, cognitive load, and the influence of register and informal language exposure.

Based on this rationale, this study aims to: (1) identify and describe the characteristics of lexical choices in EFL students' translated texts, and (2) investigate the factors that influence EFL students' lexical choices during the translation process. This research was conducted at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo involving 20 fourth-semester EFL students enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting course. The unit of analysis consists of lexical choices produced by students when translating an argumentative text from Indonesian into English, analyzed using Baker's (1992) framework of lexical meaning, which includes propositional meaning, expressive meaning, presupposed meaning, and evoked meaning.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to investigate lexical choices in Indonesian–English translation among EFL students. A qualitative descriptive approach was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth description of the characteristics of students' lexical choices and the factors influencing those choices during the translation process (Sandelowski, 2000). The research was conducted at the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Letters and Culture, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The participants were 20 fourth-semester students enrolled in the Translation and Interpreting course. They were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: (1) they were taking the Translation and Interpreting course, (2) they were willing to participate in all stages of the research, and (3) they had basic competence in Indonesian–English translation.

The primary data consisted of students' handwritten translations of an Indonesian argumentative text discussing smartphone use in the classroom. The same source text was provided to all participants to allow systematic comparison of their lexical choices across translations. An argumentative text was selected because it contains evaluative expressions, reasoning, and contextual meanings that encourage various lexical decisions during translation.

To answer the first research question, document analysis was employed. The analysis focused on selected lexical items that generated varied translations, including *cepat*, *menurunkan nilai mereka*, *sembarangan*, *dengan bijak*, *sudah berhasil menggunakan*, *sebaiknya*, *sangat diperlukan*, and *topik yang diperdebatkan*. These lexical items were selected because they represented different lexical alternatives that potentially affected meaning transfer. Each lexical choice was classified according to Baker's (1992) framework of lexical meaning, namely propositional, expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning.

The analysis did not only examine lexical equivalence at the word level but also considered co-text and context. Co-text refers to the surrounding linguistic environment that influences the interpretation of a lexical item, whereas context refers to the situational conditions, communicative purpose, register, and field in which the lexical item is used (Hasan & Halliday, 1976). These two aspects were employed to determine whether students' lexical choices appropriately represented the intended meaning of the source text within its textual and situational environment.

To answer the second research question, semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with five purposively selected students whose translation products demonstrated diverse lexical choices. The interviews were carried out immediately after the translation task to capture participants' reasoning while the decision-making process remained fresh in their memory. Conducted in Indonesian, the interviews explored the reasons underlying students' lexical decisions, including vocabulary knowledge, use of dictionaries and machine translation, contextual consideration, and other factors influencing translation.

The translation data were analyzed through comparative textual analysis by comparing the source text with each student's translated text. The identified lexical choices were categorized according to Baker's (1992) four dimensions of lexical meaning and subsequently interpreted by considering their co-textual and contextual relationships. Meanwhile, the interview data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), involving data transcription, coding, categorization, and interpretation to identify the major factors influencing students' lexical choices.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing the translation products with the interview results. The analysis process was continuously reviewed by the research supervisors, and representative excerpts from both translation data and interview responses were included to support the interpretation of the findings.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the results of the data analysis conducted with 20 fourth-semester EFL students at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. The findings are organized according to the two research questions: (1) the characteristics of lexical choices in students' translated texts, and (2) the factors influencing EFL students' lexical choices during the translation process. Data were collected through student translations from Indonesian to English and retrospective interviews with five selected participants.

3.1 Characteristics of Lexical Choices

The analysis of students' translation products revealed distinct patterns across the four dimensions of meaning proposed by Baker (1992): propositional, expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning.

Table 1. Characteristics of Lexical Choices in Students' Translation Products Across Baker's Dimensions of

Meaning		
Dimension of Meaning	Source Text	Students' Translations
Propositional	<i>Cepat</i>	quickly, faster, more quickly, more fast, more easily
	<i>Menurunkan nilai mereka</i>	decrease their grade, reduce their grades, lower their grades, lower their marks, make their score go down, lead to a

		decreasing of their grade, reduce students' focus, students' scores decline, lower they mark, reduce they mark, reduce their attention, can lower they mark.
Expressive	<i>sembarangan</i>	carelessly, haphazardly, carefully, properly
	<i>dengan bijak</i>	wisely, properly, with wise, responsibly, more wisely, correctly
Presupposed	<i>sudah berhasil</i>	have successfully used, already success use, already succeed use
	<i>sebaiknya</i>	should, ought to
	<i>sangat diperlukan</i>	very necessary, very needed, essential, very required, very important, important, need
Evoked	<i>topik yang diperdebatkan</i>	debated topic, topic of debate, hotly debated topic

3.1.1 Propositional Meaning

Propositional meaning refers to the core factual content of a word that enables judgments about truth or falsity (Baker, 1992). The findings showed that most students successfully preserved propositional meaning for basic vocabulary. For the Indonesian word *cepat* (meaning fast/quick), many of students used *quickly*, *faster*, or *more quickly*. However, one student translated it as *more easily*, which changed the propositional meaning because *easily* refers to ease of execution rather than speed. This finding aligns with Mubarak (2022), who argue that vocabulary limitations force students to use partially accurate substitutes when they cannot find precise equivalents.

This shift can be explained through the interaction of co-text and context. The surrounding sentences discuss students' academic performance; therefore, lexical items related to *grades* are more cohesive than those referring to *attention*. Likewise, the educational context of the argumentative text requires lexical choices that accurately represent learning outcomes. These findings suggest that inaccurate lexical choices resulted not only from limited vocabulary but also from insufficient consideration of textual and situational context, supporting previous studies that lexical equivalence extends beyond dictionary meaning.

3.1.2 Expressive Meaning

Expressive meaning reflects the speaker's or writer's feelings, attitudes, and evaluations toward a particular situation (Baker, 1992). The findings showed that students experienced greater difficulty in maintaining expressive meaning than propositional meaning because this type of meaning requires sensitivity to evaluative nuances. For instance, the lexical item *sembarangan* was translated into various expressions, including *carelessly*, *recklessly*, and *properly*. While *carelessly* and *recklessly* successfully convey the negative evaluation intended in the source text, *properly* fails to preserve the expressive meaning because it conveys a positive attitude that contradicts the author's intention. Similarly, the phrase *dengan bijak* was appropriately translated as *wisely* by most students, whereas alternatives such as *properly* weakened the evaluative meaning embedded in the source text.

The differences in students' lexical choices can be explained through the interaction of co-text and context. The co-text surrounding *sembarangan* contrasts responsible and irresponsible smartphone use, indicating that the lexical item carries a negative evaluation. Likewise, the context of the argumentative text aims to persuade readers to use smartphones responsibly in educational settings. Therefore, lexical choices that fail to express the intended attitude reduce the interpersonal meaning of the text. These findings suggest that preserving expressive meaning requires not only lexical equivalence but also an understanding of the evaluative function of words within their textual and situational context, supporting previous studies that contextual awareness plays a crucial role in translation quality.

3.1.3 Presupposed Meaning

Presupposed meaning refers to the meaning that arises from restrictions on the co-occurrence of lexical items, particularly collocation and selectional preferences (Baker, 1992). The findings indicated that presupposed meaning was the most challenging category for students. Several participants produced unnatural lexical combinations, particularly in translating the phrases *sudah berhasil menggunakan* and *sebaiknya*. For example, some students translated *sudah berhasil menggunakan* into expressions such as *already success use*, which violates English collocational patterns. Although the intended meaning remains partially understandable, the lexical combination does not conform to natural English usage. This finding suggests that many students relied on literal translation or dictionary equivalence without considering acceptable lexical combinations in the target language.

This problem can be understood through the interaction of co-text and context. From the perspective of co-text, the surrounding words require collocations that are grammatically and semantically acceptable in English, such as *have successfully used* or *have been successful in using*. Meanwhile, the context of the source text, which discusses smartphone use in educational settings, requires formal and natural academic language. Consequently, inappropriate collocations reduce the naturalness and readability of the translation even when the general message is retained. These findings support previous studies indicating that insufficient knowledge of target-language collocations frequently affects EFL students' lexical choices and translation quality.

3.1.4 Evoked Meaning

Evoked meaning refers to meaning that arises from variations in dialect and register, reflecting the social and situational context in which a lexical item is used (Baker, 1992). The findings revealed that students generally recognized the intended meaning of lexical items but occasionally failed to maintain the appropriate register. For instance, the phrase *topik yang diperdebatkan* was translated into expressions such as *controversial topic* and *debatable topic*. While both translations convey a similar conceptual meaning, *controversial topic* is more appropriate in the context of academic writing because it reflects the formal register expected in an argumentative text. These findings indicate that some students focused primarily on semantic equivalence while paying less attention to register appropriateness.

The differences in lexical choices can be explained by considering co-text and context. The co-text presents a formal discussion on the advantages and disadvantages of smartphone use in education, requiring lexical items that are cohesive with the academic style of the text. Likewise, the broader context of the source text demands a formal register suitable for argumentative writing. Therefore, maintaining evoked meaning involves not only conveying the intended message but also selecting lexical items that are appropriate for the communicative situation. This finding is consistent with previous studies emphasizing that register awareness contributes to producing more natural and contextually appropriate translations.

3.2 Factors Influencing EFL Students' Lexical Choices

The interview data revealed five main factors influencing students' lexical choices during translation: vocabulary mastery, use of dictionaries and machine translation, cognitive factors, textual and contextual understanding, and register and source language influence.

3.2.1 Vocabulary Mastery

All interviewed students reported difficulties related to limited vocabulary knowledge. SPK 2 stated, "A bit confused, there are words I don't know" ("Agak bingung, ada kosa kata yang tidak diketahui"). SPK 4 explicitly attributed their difficulty to vocabulary limitations: "A bit difficult... because I don't have much vocabulary" ("Agak susah... karena tidak begitu banyak vocabulary"). These statements align with Mubarak (2022), who found that vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component in making accurate lexical decisions. When students encounter unfamiliar words, their translation process is disrupted, forcing them to guess or rely on external tools.

SPK 1 identified specific challenging words: "New words I've never read before, especially 'inhibition' (penghambat)." SPK 5 added, "The word 'inhibitor' because I'm not familiar with its various word choices" ("kata 'penghambat' karena belum familiar dengan pilihan katanya yang beragam"). This reveals that even when students know a word exists, they may not be familiar with the various lexical choices available to translate it, a finding consistent with Napu and Hasan (2019).

3.2.2 Use of Dictionaries and Machine Translation

All five respondents reported using Google Translate or DeepL. SPK 2 admitted, "I take the word that appears without further evaluation" ("mengambil kata yang muncul tanpa evaluasi lebih lanjut"). SPK 4 stated, "I trust one app more" when in doubt ("lebih percaya ke satu aplikasi" saat ragu). These statements demonstrate uncritical acceptance of machine translation output, which Vandevoorde (2018) identifies as a major source of collocational and contextual errors.

SPK 2 further revealed, "Using the app; no other alternative considerations" ("Menggunakan aplikasi; tidak ada pertimbangan alternatif lain") when choosing between words with similar meanings. This indicates that for some students, the machine's output serves as the sole criterion for lexical selection, explaining collocational errors such as *already success use* and *very required* observed in the translation data.

3.2.3 Cognitive Factors

The findings revealed that high cognitive load forces students to choose the most mentally accessible word rather than the most accurate one (Tomczak & Whyatt, 2022). SPK 1 admitted, "I just write whatever comes to mind first" ("Yang paling sering muncul di otak aja yang ditulis") when unsure about choosing a word. This prioritization of speed and accessibility over accuracy directly leads to inappropriate lexical choices.

Regarding translation strategies, SPK 1 explicitly stated, "Word-for-word, translate directly without focusing on context" ("Kata per kata, langsung translate tanpa fokus ke konteks"). This word-for-word

approach, which Napu and Hasan (2019) found common among beginner translators, explains the collocational errors observed in the presupposed meaning analysis. SPK 5 described a two-stage strategy: "Word-for-word first, then re-read after finishing for correction" ("Kata per kata dulu, lalu baca ulang setelah selesai untuk koreksi"), acknowledging the limitations of literal translation but still prioritizing speed in the initial stage.

When asked whether they think of alternative word choices, four out of five students answered "No." This lack of alternative exploration is a clear indicator of high cognitive load, as generating and evaluating alternatives requires holding multiple lexical options in working memory while maintaining awareness of broader context (Tomczak & Whyatt, 2022).

3.2.4 Textual and Contextual Understanding

The findings showed that most students did not engage in global text processing before translating. Only SPK 4 reported the strategy of "reading the whole text and translating it" ("membaca keseluruhan dan menerjemahkannya"). Huang and Li (2023) argue that understanding the broader context is essential for adjusting lexical items to suit the target language, yet most students in this study processed text at the word or sentence level only.

After discussion, some students recognized inappropriate lexical choices. SPK 1 wanted to change "quick" to "fast/quickly" because "quick" felt "less academic" ("kurang akademik"). SPK 3 wanted to change "well" to "wisely" for the word *bijak* because "well" felt "unnatural" ("tidak natural"). These post-discussion recognitions indicate that students possessed some register and expressive awareness but failed to activate it during translation, likely due to cognitive load or lack of automaticity.

3.2.5 Register and Source Language Influence

The findings revealed that students' vocabulary acquisition occurs primarily through informal entertainment media. SPK 1 stated, "Using smartphones exposes me to new vocabulary from movies or games." SPK 5 provided the most revealing response: "I'm active on social media (X/Twitter) and reading English fanfiction unconsciously shapes my lexical preferences" ("saya aktif di media sosial (X/Twitter) dan membaca fanfiction bahasa Inggris membentuk preferensi leksikal secara tidak sadar"). This unconscious shaping of lexical preferences through informal digital content creates a familiarity bias, where students prefer words they encounter daily in informal contexts over those appropriate for academic register (Vandevoorde, 2018).

Regarding audience awareness, four out of five students answered "No" when asked whether they imagine who will read their translation. Only SPK 3 considered the audience, answering "Both (Indonesians and native speakers)." As Yanto and Pravitasari (2022) emphasize, limited audience awareness exacerbates register mismatches because students have no basis for making register-appropriate lexical choices.

3.3 Discussion

The findings of this study confirm and extend previous research on lexical choices in translation among EFL learners. First, the predominance of literal, dictionary-based translations observed in this study aligns with Napu and Hasan (2019), who found that beginner translator students tend to translate word-for-word without considering context. The current study extends this finding by demonstrating, through Baker's (1992) framework, that while students can preserve propositional meaning relatively well, they systematically fail to maintain presupposed, expressive, and evoked meanings.

Second, the study confirms Mubarak (2022) finding that vocabulary mastery is a fundamental factor influencing lexical choices. However, this study adds nuance by revealing that even when students possess basic vocabulary knowledge, they struggle with collocational patterns and expressive nuances. The errors in translating *sudah berhasil* as *already success* use demonstrate that students transfer Indonesian grammatical patterns into English, a finding consistent with Ramli (2019) on lexical distortion in Indonesian-English translation.

Third, the heavy reliance on machine translation tools documented in this study supports Vandevoorde (2018) argument that uncritical use of digital tools leads to collocational and contextual errors. However, this study reveals a more concerning pattern: students not only use these tools but also accept their output without evaluation, treating machine translation as an absolute authority rather than a reference tool.

Fourth, the cognitive factors identified in this study support Tomczak and Whyatt (2022) finding that lexical selection in L2 is more demanding and less accurate than in L1. The finding that four out of five students do not consider alternative word choices provides strong evidence that cognitive load limits students' ability to engage in comparative evaluation.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the existing literature by integrating product-oriented analysis (characteristics of lexical choices) with process-oriented investigation (factors influencing those choices). While previous studies have examined either translation errors (Ramli, 2019; Hassan, 2020) or cognitive strategies (Rababah, 2022) separately, this study demonstrates how these aspects interact: limited

vocabulary mastery increases cognitive load, which leads students to rely on machine translation, which produces collocational errors, which result in loss of expressive and presupposed meaning.

Practically, these findings suggest that translation instruction for EFL students should address not only vocabulary expansion but also collocational awareness, critical evaluation of machine translation output, and strategies for managing cognitive load during translation tasks.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

This study investigated the characteristics of EFL students' lexical choices in Indonesian–English translation and the factors influencing their lexical decision-making. The findings revealed that students' lexical choices reflected the four dimensions of lexical meaning proposed by Baker (1992), namely propositional, expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning. While many students were able to preserve propositional meaning, greater difficulties were found in expressive, presupposed, and evoked meaning, particularly in conveying evaluative nuances, producing natural collocations, and selecting lexical items appropriate to the intended register.

The analysis further demonstrated that accurate lexical choice depends not only on semantic equivalence but also on the interaction of co-text and context, which help determine the appropriateness of lexical items within their linguistic and situational environment. Furthermore, the interview findings indicated that students' lexical choices were influenced by limited vocabulary knowledge, reliance on machine translation and dictionaries, familiarity with frequently used words, first-language interference, and contextual understanding. These findings highlight the importance of developing students' lexical awareness beyond word-level equivalence by emphasizing contextual interpretation and natural language use in translation instruction. Future studies are encouraged to involve larger participant groups and different text genres to provide broader insights into lexical choice in EFL translation.

4.2 Suggestions/Recommendations

Based on the conclusions above, the researcher proposes several suggestions that may be beneficial for related parties:

- 1) For EFL Students: Students are encouraged to expand their vocabulary by reading text from various formal and academic registers, not just informal media. When translating, students should reduce their absolute dependency on machine translation tools. If they use such tools, they must actively evaluate the suggested words by cross-checking the context, checking collocations in target language dictionaries, and considering the specific register of the text.
- 2) For Translation Lecturers and Teachers: It is suggested that lecturers teaching translation courses incorporate "machine translation literacy" into their curriculum. Since students will inevitably use digital tools, lecturers should teach them how to use these tools critically rather than passively. Furthermore, translation exercises should emphasize the importance of pragmatic equivalence—such as presupposed, evoked, and expressive meanings—to train students to look beyond literal dictionary definitions.
- 3) For Future Researchers: Since this study focuses on a specific group of EFL students and a particular text type, future researchers are encouraged to investigate lexical choices involving a larger number of participants or different text genres (such as legal, literary, or technical text). Additionally, employing other data collection methods, such as Think-Aloud Protocols (TAP), could provide a more real-time understanding of students' cognitive processes when selecting lexical items during translation.

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