

Rethinking Translation Through an Interlingual Focus on Form: Students' Experiences and Pedagogical Insights for Grammar Learning

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Abstract

This study explores how translation as a communicative activity may support learners' experiences of grammar learning through an *interlingual focus on form*. While recent research has re-evaluated translation through a translanguaging lens, its role in facilitating focus on form remains underexplored. Drawing on a functionalist (*Skopos*-oriented) view of translation, the study examines how students experienced interlingual focus on form in an introductory tertiary translation unit. Survey data from 73 EFL students suggest that purpose-oriented translation tasks were widely experienced as meaningful opportunities to engage with grammar in context across learners with differing levels of course performance. Students particularly associated translation with contextualized grammar use, heightened awareness of grammar's communicative role, and opportunities to apply grammatical forms in contexts where the L1 supported access to meaning. Rather than positioning translation as a technique for isolated form practice, the study conceptualizes translation as a mediational space in which learners evaluate grammatical choices in relation to communicative purpose, audience, and contextual appropriateness. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of designing translation tasks that strategically engage learners' plurilingual repertoires to support meaningful engagement with grammar in communicative contexts.

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1 Introduction

Attention to grammar remains an important component of second language teaching despite continuing debates over the most effective approaches to grammar instruction (Ellis, 2016; Erlam, 2019; Lee et al., 2015; Pawlak, 2021). Such attention helps learners notice linguistic structures that are often less salient than vocabulary (Schmidt, 2001). Because grammar instruction ultimately aims at meaningful use, learners need to engage with grammar through a contextual focus on form (Ellis,

2016; Long, 1991). In monolingual EFL settings, however, learners' limited L2 resources can make engagement with grammar in meaning-oriented activities particularly challenging. When learners struggle to access meaning, their ability to establish form–meaning mappings may also be reduced.

Translation offers one possible way of addressing this challenge. When embedded in communicative focus-on-form tasks, translation may help learners engage meaningfully with the L2 while using the L1 strategically as a mediating resource. The longstanding tendency to restrict translation to isolated rule practice or focus on forms based on pre-selected grammar items (Ellis, 2016) is problematic. Such a view marginalizes translation's potential as a communicative activity and as a means of supporting tasks that do not predetermine specific linguistic structures (Cook, 2010).

Despite renewed interest in translation – particularly from translanguaging perspectives (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; González-Davies, 2018) – its potential for supporting engagement with grammatical form in discourse-level communication remains underexplored. This gap stands in contrast to evidence that various forms of translation can support language learning (Chang & Yamada, 2021; Jung, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Liu & Yang, 2025). This issue is particularly relevant in ongoing discussions surrounding translation, translanguaging, and the pedagogical use of learners' full linguistic repertoires (Ping, 2024; Smagul, 2024; Qureshi & Al-Surmi, 2025).

To address this gap, this study examines how EFL learners experience “interlingual focus on form”, an approach that uses communicative, discourse-level translation tasks to support learners' engagement with grammatical form in context. The study explores students' affective responses to the approach, their beliefs about its role in supporting engagement with grammar, and the processes through which they report attending to and learning about grammatical form during translation activities. It also examines whether these experiences vary in relation to students' relative performance in the translation course, as reflected in their course grades. Importantly, the study does not seek to measure grammatical development or establish the instructional effectiveness of translation for grammar learning. Rather, it focuses on how learners experience and perceive grammar learning within communicative translation activity. While the pedagogical framework is elaborated in greater detail elsewhere (Murtisari, 2025), the present study reports the empirical work on which that conceptualization is based.

This article contributes to the TESOL field in three ways. First, it reconceptualizes translation tasks for L2 grammar learning by integrating focus on form with a functional, purpose-oriented view of translation, drawing on Skopos theory (Nord, 2006; Reiss & Vermeer, 2013). Second, it provides empirically informed insights into how EFL learners experience and perceive grammar learning within this pedagogical framework. Third, it identifies the reported practices through which learners perceive grammar learning to occur. Taken together, this study suggests that learners experienced grammar learning as an iterative, contextual, and socially situated process in which grammatical choices were evaluated in relation to communicative purpose.

2 Literature review

2.1 Translation in language teaching and learning

Translation has received renewed attention in language teaching as a communicative and mediating activity rather than merely an isolated exercise associated with the grammar-translation method (Cook, 2010; González-Davies, 2018; Panzarella & Sinibaldi, 2018). In multilingual perspectives on language learning, learners' existing linguistic knowledge is increasingly viewed as a resource for developing new forms of understanding (Machida, 2011; González-Davies, 2018), with L1 use seen as both inevitable and potentially facilitative during L2 processing (Cao et al., 2022; Costa et al., 2017; Galante, 2021). Research suggests that translation can promote awareness of form–meaning relationships, lexical development, and more contextually appropriate language use (Jung, 2016; Lee et al., 2015; Liu & Yang, 2025; Scheffler, 2013).

However, findings have varied depending on how translation is pedagogically implemented. Earlier research that reported less favourable outcomes often treated translation primarily as an assessment tool rather than a pedagogical activity and provided little or no instruction in translation strategies (e.g., Kobayashi & Rinnert, 1992). Under such conditions, translation was positioned as a product to be evaluated rather than as a communicative process for developing L2 resources. More recent studies, by contrast, have emphasized communicative and cognitively engaging translation tasks that encourage meaningful interaction with the L2 (e.g., Chang & Yamada, 2021; Schnell & García Pérez, 2025).

From learners' perspectives, translation is often viewed more positively than its traditional reputation suggests. Studies with adult and university-level learners consistently report favourable attitudes towards translation as a learning resource. Kelly and Bruen (2015), for instance, found that Irish students learning German and Japanese at university enjoyed using translation as a language learning aid. Other studies examining translation use over extended periods (one to two semesters) have also shown that this enjoyment spans various proficiency levels among young adults and adolescents (Lee et al., 2015; Murtisari, 2020). At the same time, learner perceptions appear to be shaped by task design and perceived relevance. Liu and Yang (2025), for example, found that learners responded less positively when translation activities were viewed as overly simplistic or disconnected from academic needs, highlighting the importance of cognitively engaging and purpose-driven translation tasks.

Across age groups, learners tend to associate translation with a range of perceived language learning benefits. Studies involving children (Ramachandran & Rahim, 2004), adolescents (Lee et al., 2015), and adults (Liao, 2006; Murtisari, 2016) suggest that learners often view translation as supportive of reading, writing, vocabulary development, and grammatical understanding. In Liao's (2006) survey of Taiwanese university students, participants reported using translation to verify comprehension, recall linguistic forms, generate ideas, and build confidence. Interview data further suggested that translation activities could enhance learner motivation and engagement. Overall, these studies suggest that learners often perceive translation not simply as a linguistic exercise, but as a meaningful activity that can support engagement with the L2.

At the same time, some studies suggest that learners' attitudes toward translation vary according to proficiency and instructional context. Payne and Contreras (2019), for example, found that lower-level Ecuadorian EFL learners were generally more receptive to translation use in instruction, whereas higher-level learners preferred greater use of the L2. At the same time, Murtisari (2021) found that advanced EFL students continued to rely on translation – often mentally – when dealing with complex writing tasks, suggesting that translation may remain relevant even at higher proficiency levels.

These findings suggest that learner engagement with translation depends less on proficiency alone than on how translation tasks are pedagogically framed and experienced. Student engagement is critical because, as Dörnyei and Kormos (2000, p. 276) argue, language learning tasks must involve purposeful communication, authentic contexts, and active involvement. When designed around such principles, communicative translation tasks may create meaningful opportunities for engagement with the L2.

2.2 Focus on forms, focus on form, and translation

Although grammar is widely regarded as essential for effective communication, approaches to grammar instruction have long been debated. The rise of communicative language teaching led some scholars to question the value of explicit grammar instruction altogether (Krashen, 1981). In response, Long (1991) distinguished between *focus on forms*, which involves explicit teaching of isolated grammatical items, and *focus on form*, which draws learners' attention to linguistic features within meaning-oriented communication.

Expanding this concept, Ellis (2016) defines focus on form broadly as any instructional strategy that directs learners' attention to linguistic form – including grammar and vocabulary – while they are engaged in communicative language use. Such attention may be planned or incidental, and may occur during tasks (e.g., through feedback or input enhancement) or around tasks (e.g., through pre-task planning or post-task repetition). While Long (1998, 2016) emphasized the communicative orientation of focus on form, Ellis (2016) argues for combining it with explicit instruction when needed, a claim supported by research (Khezlrou, 2021). This blended approach is particularly useful in EFL settings where opportunities for L2 exposure are limited.

Although focus on form has traditionally been examined in monolingual L2 classrooms, it can also be extended to discourse-level translation. Much existing research on translation in language learning has focused on sentence-level activities or pre-selected structures, which are more closely aligned with focus on forms (Källkvist, 2004, 2008; Korošec, 2013; Murtisari, 2020). Fewer studies have explored translation as a text-based, communicative activity capable of fostering a cross-linguistic focus on form (Cook, 2010; Machida, 2008; 2011; Lv, 2016).

Within such contexts, translation may function as a mediational process in which learners draw on the L1 strategically to notice, test, and refine L2 forms while pursuing communicative goals. Both L2–L1 and L1–L2 translation can contribute to this process in different ways: the former may support noticing and comprehension, whereas the latter may encourage more active engagement with grammatical forms when embedded in meaningful tasks (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011). Through sustained interaction with texts, translation may also allow learners to use L1 to connect form with meaning, clarify L2 input, and reinforce their understanding of grammar.

Translation also requires learners to attend to lexico-grammatical, pragmatic, and socio-cultural dimensions of language. This may create rich opportunities for integrated focus on form engagement. As learners work with texts across genres and communicative contexts, they may engage with grammar in ways that align with Larsen-Freeman's (2015) concept of *grammaring* – an iterative process of learning to use grammatical forms for diverse communicative purposes. Rather than repeating structures mechanically, translation activities may encourage learners to revisit, adapt, and evaluate grammatical choices in relation to meaning, audience, and context.

Despite this potential, research on focus on form instruction using translation remains limited. Although Machida (2011) and Lv (2016) treated L1–L2 translation as focus on form through action research, neither examined specific grammar learning in detail. Neither study foregrounded the pragmatic and functional dimensions of grammatical choice, or specified how grammar was systematically integrated into translation tasks. Both nevertheless reported positive effects: Machida found increased awareness of grammar and meaning in context among Japanese university students, while Lv observed improved idiomatic vocabulary use in Chinese learners. Grammar gains were less pronounced, likely due to the lower salience of grammar compared to vocabulary. Lv's analysis, based on a single student, further highlights the need for more robust data.

Together, these studies point to the importance of incorporating focus on form techniques – such as explicit language focus, consciousness-raising, and corrective feedback – into translation practice to create more opportunities for learners to notice and internalize grammatical features (Murtisari, 2025). The present study extends the previous work by framing translation as a Skopos-oriented, discourse-level activity, in which attention to grammar is embedded within the translation of genre-specific texts and guided by an explicit communicative brief. This interlingual focus on form situates grammatical choices in relation to purpose and audience, moving beyond sentence-level contrast toward more functional grammar use in context.

2.3 Skopos theory and interlingual focus on form

Interlingual focus on form refers to the use of communicative translation tasks that incorporate focus on form techniques to direct learners' attention to L2 form. In the present study, the approach

was designed to foreground grammar. The term interlingual emphasizes the bidirectional and negotiative nature of translation by highlighting learners' engagement with both language systems rather than the simple transfer of meaning from one language to another. Although translation inevitably involves multiple aspects of language competence, foregrounding grammar does not reduce its broader pedagogical value. Rather, it reflects the view that grammar development is embedded within – and inseparable from – the broader communicative discourse in which it occurs.

Central to this approach is Skopos theory, which conceptualizes translation as a functional, meaning-oriented activity shaped by communicative purpose (Nord, 2006; Reiss & Vermeer, 2013). From this perspective, translation is not a decontextualized linguistic exercise, but a form of purposeful cross-linguistic mediation grounded in real-world communication. In TESOL contexts, a Skopos-oriented approach therefore challenges the longstanding view of translation as an “uncommunicative” classroom practice. Rather than prioritizing formal correspondence between languages, it frames lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic choices in relation to communicative goals, target audience, and contextual demands.

In translation practice, this Skopos-oriented perspective is typically operationalized through a translation brief specifying the task's communicative purpose, medium, and intended audience. To produce a contextually appropriate translation, learners must consider why the text is being produced, for whom, and under what conditions, adjusting lexical, grammatical, and pragmatic choices accordingly. Unlike many communicative classroom activities, Skopos-oriented translation encourages explicit reflection on how linguistic choices relate to audience, purpose, and context, making such considerations central to cross-linguistic meaning-making.

Because cross-linguistic decision-making is complex, translation competence does not develop automatically, even among advanced language learners. Nevertheless, translation can still serve as a valuable pedagogical activity when appropriately scaffolded. In language learning contexts, the goal is not to train professional translators, but to help learners develop the ability to mediate meaning across languages within and beyond their current linguistic resources. Tools such as dictionaries, parallel texts, and model translations can support this process as mediational resources.

To support engagement with grammar through translation, the instructional design incorporated genre-based tasks, parallel texts, and explicit language focus. Murtisari (2016) found that students across GPA-based proficiency levels generally perceived translation as supportive of language development, a finding echoed by Lee et al. (2015). Similarly, reflections reported in Murtisari et al. (2020) suggested that interlingual focus on form in an introductory translation unit encouraged learners to engage more consciously with grammatical and pragmatic choices in context.

Through activities such as reading parallel texts, comparing linguistic choices, and applying grammatical forms during translation, students reported experiences of grammar learning that were closely tied to the communicative context of the translation task. Many participants also viewed explicit language focus as helpful for drawing attention to genre-specific grammatical features embedded in texts. These findings resonate with Murtisari et al.'s (2020) observation that learners often perceive translation as a meaningful context for engaging with grammar, particularly when translation tasks are guided by communicative goals.

Although these insights are valuable, further research is needed to explore how learners experience grammar learning within communicative, discourse-level translation activity involving broader groups of learners. The present study responds to this need by examining learners' perceptions and reported experiences of interlingual focus on form within a Skopos-oriented translation unit.

2.4 Background to current study

This study builds on previous research by examining a larger group of intermediate to advanced EFL students (CEFR B1–C1) and their experiences in an introductory translation unit. By their final semester in the third year, students were expected to reach at least a lower upper-intermediate level

(CEFR B2), with around 10% achieving an advanced level (C1). However, a portion remained at the intermediate level (B1).

The study was designed to examine learners' perceptions and experiences of translation-based grammar learning rather than to measure learning gains. Learners' accounts are treated as evidence of how the grammar learning is experienced, conceptualized, and enacted through interlingual focus on form. Accordingly, the research focuses on students' enjoyment with translation activities, beliefs about the benefits of the interlingual focus on form for grammar learning, and their reported experiences of learning grammar through the approach.

Affective responses are a central concern, as attitudes toward tasks play a key role in language learning (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000). Translation is sometimes perceived as tedious or suitable only for certain proficiency levels, which can influence motivation. Yet motivation in language learning is shaped by both intrinsic factors (e.g., enjoyment, challenge, growth) and extrinsic ones (e.g., academic or career value) (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). In translation activities, intrinsic motivation may stem from the cognitive challenge of cross-linguistic work, while extrinsic motivation may relate to the practical benefits of bilingual competence.

Given the common assumption that translation primarily benefits lower-proficiency learners, this study also investigates whether learners' relative performance within a translation course varies according to their perceptions of interlingual focus on form. In the absence of standardized proficiency measures, course grades were used solely to contextualize learners' reported experiences, indexing sustained engagement and success in translation-based instructional tasks rather than general language proficiency. Accordingly, this study's guiding research questions were:

- RQ1. Do students enjoy their experience of learning to translate texts through interlingual focus on form?
- RQ2. What are students' beliefs on the benefits of interlingual focus on form translation practice for their grammar learning?
- RQ3. How do students report learning grammar through interlingual focus on form?
- RQ4. To what extent do students' reported enjoyment and beliefs regarding translation practice through interlingual focus on form correlate with their relative performance within the translation course?

3 Method

3.1 Research context

The study was conducted at an established undergraduate English language education program in Central Java, Indonesia. In this EFL context, English was used in approximately 90% of classroom activities, while Indonesian or other local languages were spoken outside class. As the national language and the medium of school instruction, Indonesian is the dominant language for these EFL students. Although English and Indonesian share a basic SVO structure, they differ substantially in tense, aspect, definiteness, and phrase-level grammar, creating challenges for Indonesian EFL learners.

The study was conducted in an introductory three-credit translation course offered in the second term of the third year. The 14-week course enrolled intermediate to advanced students, most of whom were at the upper-intermediate level, and aimed to develop translation both as a practical skill and as a resource for language learning. It was delivered in four parallel classes, each taught by a different Indonesian instructor with 15–30 years of teaching experience. All instructors were fluent in Indonesian and English and had completed at least two translation courses within the department.

One researcher also served as the course coordinator and as a class instructor. While her background in translation studies may have influenced a favorable view of translation in language learning, participants were not made aware of any such stance. The course syllabus made no explicit

reference to translation's potential learning benefits. To minimize instructional variability across classes, all sections followed a highly structured format. Instructors met prior to the course to review the syllabus and instructional materials. Additionally, they shared common teacher resources, including key discussion points, translation models, and suggested interpretations of the exercises. Common assessment rubrics and grading guidelines were used across all classes to ensure uniform evaluation standards. Additional measures were taken during data collection (as described later) to ensure participants felt comfortable expressing their own views freely. The research was conducted with ethical approval granted by the Research, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship Committee of the first author's faculty (045a/SuKet/Ethics/FBS/Dek/09/II/2020).

3.2 Translation unit overview

The 14-week translation unit aimed to achieve three core objectives: (a) teach basic translation skills across different genres; (b) develop students' interlingual awareness, focusing on differences between Indonesian and English; and (c) improve their ability to express themselves in English. In the first four weeks students explored five foundational concepts in translation: namely: (a) translation as a form of communication; (b) lexical incompatibilities across languages; (c) translation strategies for dealing with differences (e.g., paraphrasing or spelling out implicit meaning); (d) translating based on the *skopos* or purpose of communication; and (e) the global features of English compared to Indonesian. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, five lessons for one class and six lessons for the other three classes had to be conducted online.¹ Although the data were collected in 2020, the intervention was based on well-established SLA and translation principles that remain pedagogically relevant.

Following the theoretical foundation, the remaining weeks focused on translating four different genres – manuals, tourist texts, advertisements, and academic texts – based on their communicative purposes. These sessions incorporated both L1–L2 and L2–L1 activities, forming the practical basis for interlingual focus on form while remaining linked to theoretical content. Both directions of translation supported language learning: L2–L1 translation enhanced receptive skills, while L1–L2 translation promoted productive skills. As the course emphasized written English production, the majority of translation activities shifted to L1–L2 after initial L2–L1 scaffolding. Each genre-based session followed a receptive-to-productive sequence involving parallel-text analysis, vocabulary work, translation strategy discussion, explicit language focus, and collaborative translation (see Appendix A for the standard lesson sequence and Appendix B for an illustrative excerpt from the Indonesian–English parallel texts used in the study).

In addition to these regular activities, students completed four graded translation tasks, including two individual assignments. To ensure sustained engagement with linguistic form and meaning-making processes, students completed all translation tasks without access to any digital tools or the internet, relying instead on paper-based dictionaries and course materials. Each task involved translating a previously unseen text within the same genre as one practiced earlier in the course, applying a procedural repetition approach. This iterative method, which has been associated with effective focus on form (Hawkes, 2012), was a key component of the course's interlingual focus on form design.

Assessment was broadly aligned with commercial translation criteria while calibrated to expected third-year language development. Grades primarily reflected learners' ability to produce natural and contextually appropriate L2 translations, alongside their understanding of foundational translation concepts and their capacity to reflect on language mediation. The final grade comprised individual translation assignments (55%), collaborative translation tasks (35%), and individual experiential reflection (10%), with confidential peer evaluation incorporated into group tasks. These course grades were used only as a contextual indicator of relative performance within the translation course rather than as a measure of general language proficiency.

3.3 Participants

A total of 73 students, aged 20 to 22, participated in this study. They ranged from intermediate to advanced levels of English proficiency (CEFR B1–C1). Most were in their third year of study, with the majority placed at the lower or upper B2 level. Specifically, 10 students were approximately at CEFR C1, 12 at upper B2, 37 at lower B2 or upper B1, and 14 at lower B1. All participants were enrolled in one of four parallel classes of the introductory translation unit offered during the second term of 2020, with data collection completed immediately following the course's conclusion. These classes were taught by four different instructors. The entire student population available from the course was included in the study.

3.4 Instrument and data collection

A questionnaire developed in Indonesian, based largely on Murtisari et al. (2020), was used to investigate learners' perceptions of interlingual focus on form. It consisted of five sections (Parts 1–5), with Part 5 collecting demographic information. The first four parts were designed to address the study's research questions through a combination of Likert-scale statements and open-ended questions:

- Part 1: Included one open-ended question on whether participants enjoyed the translation activities.
- Part 2: Contained six five-point Likert-scale items and one open-ended question, focusing on students' perceptions of translation's benefits for grammar learning.
- Part 3: Included seven Likert items exploring how students reported learning grammar through translation practice.
- Part 4: Comprised three Likert items and one open-ended question on the perceived effectiveness of translation for grammar learning.

After being piloted, the questionnaire was shared via WhatsApp groups affiliated with the undergraduate program. Students completed the survey online through a university-administered Google Form within two weeks of completing the course. A research assistant managed the distribution and monitored response submissions. To maintain anonymity while confirming participation, students provided their student ID numbers. Before completing the form, they were briefed on the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain confidential, anonymous, and unlinked to academic evaluation. They were also encouraged to respond honestly, as there were no right or wrong answers. A Cronbach's Alpha (α) analysis confirmed the questionnaire's internal consistency, yielding good to acceptable values of 0.826 for Part 2.A, 0.794 for Part 2.C, and 0.797 for Part 3.A.

3.5 Data analysis

Responses to the Likert-scale items were coded, and descriptive statistics – including means, standard deviations (SDs), and percentages – were calculated. Further analysis was conducted using Spearman's correlation in JAMOV, an open-source statistical software, to explore relationships between participants' responses and their translation course grades. Course grades were used not as direct measure of language proficiency, but as an institutional indicator of relative performance within the same instructional context. While grades are influenced by multiple factors, they provide a pragmatic means of exploring whether learners with differing levels of course success report systematically different beliefs and experiences of interlingual focus on form.

Additionally, open-ended responses were entered into a spreadsheet and analyzed manually using content analysis. The data were coded, categorized, and quantified to identify recurring trends and themes (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). To ensure consistency, the initial coding was performed by a

member of the research team and independently cross-checked by a TESOL academic familiar with grammar teaching and translation studies. Any disagreements were resolved through collaborative review. Furthermore, the content analysis of students' verbal responses demonstrated high Kappa coefficients. With average values of 0.887 (Q1, Part 1), 0.922 (Q6, Part 2), and 0.771 (Q1, Part 4) respectively, there was significant inter-rater reliability.

4 Results

4.1 RQ1 – Students' enjoyment of learning to translate texts

To assess students' affective responses to the translation activities, participants were asked whether they enjoyed learning to translate in the course. The results were overwhelmingly positive: 86.3% (N = 73) responded affirmatively, 11% were neutral, and only 2.7% expressed a negative view. Among the two negative responses, one student cited an inconvenient class schedule, and the other found the class structure monotonous. Of the three neutral responses, two students mentioned difficulties with translating the source texts; however, only one of these was from a lower-proficiency student. Overall, very few students expressed concerns about the difficulty level of the materials, despite the relatively high CEFR level of the model texts. Among those who enjoyed the translation experience without reservation (N = 63), the reasons cited are shown in Table 1:

Table 1. Students' reasons why they enjoyed learning to translate*

I could learn how to translate properly.	28	38.4%
Translation is important.	2	2.7%
I could learn vocabulary/grammar more.	6	8.2%
The teacher was helpful.	6	8.2%
Translation is fun.	5	6.8%
The subject was stimulating.	4	5.5%
I felt challenged.	3	4.1%
Other answers	12	16.4%

*N = 63. The percentages were obtained against the total participants (73). Some students gave more than one answer.

As shown in Table 1, students' enjoyment stemmed from a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors. The most frequently cited reason was the opportunity to learn how to translate properly, followed by recognition of translation's general importance (41.3% combined). This suggests that students viewed translation not only as an academic task, but also as a valuable skill relevant beyond the classroom. Given their context as EFL students navigating between languages, it is understandable that they would see translation competence as personally and professionally meaningful.

Additionally, several students reported enjoying the translation tasks because they helped them learn vocabulary or grammar (8.2%). This indicates an awareness of the pedagogical benefits embedded in translation practice. Other students described the activities as intrinsically engaging – calling them “fun” (6.8%), “stimulating” (5.5%), or “challenging” (4.1%). Although translation requires cognitively demanding and analytical thinking, these responses suggest that the problem-solving nature of the tasks was motivating rather than discouraging.

4.2 RQ2 – Students' beliefs on the benefits of translation practice for grammar learning

This part of the questionnaire (see Table 2) deals with how learning to translate in the unit may help students learn grammar in context and enhance their awareness of the role grammar in communication in terms of students' levels of agreement or disagreement.

Table 2. Perceived benefits of translation practice for grammar learning Statisticsa– Part 2.A.

	N		Mean	SD	<i>Agree and Strongly agree</i>
	Valid	Missing			
1. Learning to translate helped me to learn grammar in authentic communication contexts.	73	0	4.07	0.608	87.6%
2. Learning to translate in IC course has helped me to apply grammar in more natural English.	73	0	4.11	0.591	87.7%
3. Learning to translate in IC course has developed my awareness that grammar is important in communication.	73	0	4.29	0.634	90.5%
4. Learning to translate in IC course has helped me to understand that grammar is important in expressing meaning.	73	0	4.32	0.621	94.6%
5. Learning to translate in IC course has helped me to see how specific grammatical forms can create particular effects in texts.	73	0	4.18	0.609	91.8%
6. Learning to translate in IC course has motivated me to learn more grammar.	73	0	4.04	0.611	83.5%

a. Maximal value of 5 (strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1)

The survey showed very positive responses on the benefits of translation for grammar learning within this section and garnered the highest percentage of favorable answers compared to Parts 2.C. and 3.A. With mean scores around 4 and low standard deviations (below 1), students’ responses generally fell between ‘strongly agree’ and ‘agree’. The findings were especially strong – over 90% expressing agreement or strong agreement – when the statements addressed students’ awareness of grammar’s role in communication (Statements 3, 4, and 5). These statements reflected benefits such as improving students’ understanding of how grammar functions to express meaning and how it contributes to specific pragmatic effects in texts. Furthermore, it was clear that participating in the translation activities significantly motivated students to learn more grammar. This was reflected in Statement 6, where 83.5% of students indicated that the course encouraged further grammar study. When asked why this was the case through an open-ended question, students’ responses were categorized and summarized in Table 3:

Table 3. Students’ reasons why learning to translate had motivated them to learn grammar*

Grammar affects meaning.	21	28.8%
To be able to translate well, good grammar is necessary.	19	26.0%
Grammar is important.	7	9.6%
I want to make my language more sophisticated.	2	2.7%
I found my grammar is inadequate through translating.	8	11.0%
Translating made me use grammar.	3	4.1%
Other answers	5	6.8%

*N = 61. The percentages were obtained against the total participants (73). Some students gave more than one answer.

As shown in Table 3, the most common reasons students gave for feeling motivated to learn grammar through translation related to their awareness of grammar’s functional role in communication. Nearly 29% stated that grammar affects meaning, while 26% emphasized that mastering grammar was necessary for producing accurate translations. These responses suggest that students recognized grammar not as a set of abstract rules, but as a practical tool for conveying meaning clearly and appropriately in L2. Additionally, translation activities allowed students to reflect on their own interlanguage development. Eleven percent reported realizing gaps in their grammar knowledge through translation tasks – highlighting how the process can reveal areas for improvement. A smaller proportion (4.1%) noted that the act of translating required them to actively use grammar, while

2.7% felt they learned grammar more effectively through translation itself. Twelve participants gave neutral responses. Four indicated that the course had inspired them to focus more on vocabulary or other aspects of English, such as stylistic variation. Two acknowledged the importance of grammar but did not feel personally motivated to pursue it further. One student had already developed an interest in grammar before the course, and another enjoyed learning grammar within the course but not beyond it. The remaining responses were mixed. Notably, none of the neutral responses reflected negatively on grammar learning within the translation course.

In line with the above segment on the benefits of using translation for grammar learning, this section (Table 4) explores students' reports on the practical effectiveness of translation activities for grammar learning. Unlike the agreement-based items in Part 2.A. (Table 1), this section used frequency parameters – 'always', 'usually', 'often', 'sometimes', 'rarely', and 'never' – to reflect students' actual experiences during the course. It specifically addresses how translation helped students in three key areas: (1) understanding grammar, (2) applying grammar correctly, and (3) remembering grammatical forms. The results were consistently positive, with mean scores above 4, falling between 'often' and 'always'. Standard deviations were around 1, indicating closely clustered responses and minimal variability.

Table 4. Reported experience on the efficacy of translation practice for grammar learning Statisticsa–Part 2.C.

	N		Mean	SD	<i>Always, usually, and often</i>
	Valid	Missing			
1. I was able to understand the meaning of grammatical forms more easily through translation in IC course.	73	0	4.27	1.158	76.8%
2. Translation helped me to correctly apply the grammatical forms I had studied in IC course more easily.	73	0	4.05	1.053	67.1%
3. I was able to remember grammatical forms I had learned in IC course more easily by translating.	73	0	4.12	1.201	67.1%

a. Maximal value of 6 (always = 6, usually = 5, often = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely = 2, never = 1)

The overwhelming majority of students reported frequent positive experiences of grammar learning through translation via the interlingual focus on form. Statement 1 ("I was able to understand the meaning of grammatical forms more easily through translation in IC course") received the highest agreement (76.8%, mean = 4.27). Statements 2 and 3, which explored how translation may support grammar accuracy and memory retention, received slightly lower, though still strong, responses—each with a mean above 4 and 67.1% of students selecting "always", "usually", or "often".

In Table 5, students who selected these higher-frequency responses (N = 57) gave reasons related to implicit grammar learning. The most common were: translation elucidates grammar meaning (23.3%), allows direct application during translation (19.2%), and benefits from context (19.2%). The first, "translation elucidates meaning", highlights a key learning process not explicitly addressed in the survey: making form-meaning connections more noticeable, thus enhancing grammatical noticing. This was reinforced by 2.7% of students who noted that translation helped reveal grammatical forms, suggesting the value of L1 as a tool for noticing.

Other responses included the use of L1 and L2 in juxtaposition (9.6%) and model translations (2.7%), which may help highlight interlingual differences. Three students (4.1%) mentioned the value of repetition or iteration through translating similar genres, suggesting this repeated exposure supported grammar learning.

Table 5. Students’ reasons why translation facilitated them in understanding the meaning of grammatical forms*

Direct application	14	19.2%
Help of context	14	19.2%
Translation elucidates meaning.	17	23.3%
Translation reveals grammatical forms.	2	2.7%
Use of L1 and L2 in juxtaposition	7	9.6%
Use of model translation	2	2.7%
Repetition/iteration	3	4.1%
Other answers	15	17.8%

*N = 57. The percentages were obtained against the total participants (73). Some students gave more than one answer.

By contrast, twelve students responded with “sometimes,” three with “rarely,” and two with “never.” Among the least frequent responses, reasons included unclear grammar explanations, the teacher’s influence, a focus on vocabulary over grammar, or a preference for learning grammar separately. Among those who responded “sometimes,” three cited difficulties in translating certain sentences, while two noted that Indonesian and English do not always align grammatically. These comments suggest that, while translation generally supports grammar learning, indirect equivalence between languages can occasionally create confusion without sufficient guidance.

4.3 RQ3 –Students’ self-reports of learning grammar through translation practice

This part of the questionnaire explored how students learned grammar through the interlingual focus on form. Like Part 2.C. (Table 4), it used frequency scales (“always”, “usually”, “often”, “sometimes”, “rarely”, “never”) to capture how frequently certain learning experiences occurred. Statements 1, 2, 3, and 5 were drawn from students’ prior reflections on how interlingual focus on form had helped them learn grammar (Murtisari et al., 2020).

Table 6. Ways of learning grammar through the translation unit Statistics^a– Part 3

	N		Mean	SD	<i>Always, usually, and often</i>
	Valid	Missing			
1. I learned grammar in IC course from comparing the L1 and L2 texts in the handouts’ parallel texts.	73	0	3.90	0.869	74.0%
2. I learned grammar in IC course by imitating similar forms I had come across before.	73	0	4.32	1.104	78.0%
3. I learned grammar in communicative context through the language focus.	73	0	4.42	1.066	75.3%
4. I learned grammar from my teacher’s feedback on my translation tests in IC course.	73	0	3.97	1.343	65.8%
5. I learned grammatical forms by applying them directly in context while translating in IC course.	73	0	4.66	1.017	85.0%

6. I learned grammar more deeply through group work's discussion.	73	0	4.14	1.388	64.3%
7. I learned grammar from comparing my translation with the teacher's model translation after class practice.	73	0	4.48	1.094	80.9%

. a. Maximal value of 6 (always = 6, usually = 5, often = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely = 2, never = 1)

As shown in Table 6, the majority of participants reported positive experiences across all items. The means were all near or above 4 – comparable to a response of “often” – with relatively low standard deviations, indicating consistent patterns of learning. Students most frequently reported learning grammar through direct application in translation tasks (85%, mean = 4.66), comparing their translations with the teacher's model (80.9%, mean = 4.48), and imitating forms they had encountered before (78%, mean = 4.32). These approaches all involved learning through production or imitation – learning by doing. Many also noted that they benefited from language focus activities (75.3%, mean = 4.42), and from comparing L1 and L2 parallel texts (74%, mean = 3.90), both of which served as non-interactive forms of focus on form. Notably, the lowest percentages were for teacher feedback on translation tests (65.8%) and group discussions (64.3%). This may suggest that while these methods contributed to grammar learning, they were perceived as less impactful than tasks involving individual translation or comparison.

4.4 RQ4 –Relationship between students' relative course performance as reflected by their translation course grades and their enjoyment of and beliefs about translation-based grammar learning

Further statistical analysis using JAMOV's Spearman correlation tested whether students' grades – used here as an indicator for their translation course performance – were associated with their responses to Parts 2.A (Table 2) and 2.C (Table 4) regarding the benefits and effectiveness of translation for grammar learning. As the Likert-scale items in Parts 2.A and 2.C used different scoring systems and could not be combined, correlation coefficients were calculated for each section separately. Students' grades were distributed as follows: 6 As, 7 A-minuses, 21 Bs, 21 B-minuses, 11 Cs, 3 Ds, and 4 Es. Spearman's rank-order correlation (ρ) was used because the grades were treated as ordinal data and converted into ranked values (A = 7, AB = 6, ..., E = 1), for which equal intervals cannot be assumed. This method is appropriate for identifying monotonic relationships—those that consistently increase or decrease—even if they are not linear.

Table 7. Results of correlation tests Correlations – Part 2A and 2C

		Grades	Average Part 2A	Grades	Average Part 2C
Grades	Spearman's rho	1	0.119	1	-0.105
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.317		0.377
	N	73	73	73	73
Average	Spearman's rho	0.119	1	-0.105	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.317		0.377	
	N	73	73	73	73

As shown in Table 7, the statistical analyses yield $\rho = 0.119$, $p = 0.317$ for Part 2.A, and $\rho = -0.105$, $p = 0.377$ for Part 2.C. These negligible correlations are not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), suggesting no significant associations between students' grades as an index of relative performance and their beliefs about the value or effectiveness of the interlingual focus on form approach.

5 Discussion

The positive affective response from students highlights the potential of translation activities within interlingual focus on form to engage learners. Despite the relatively advanced level of English texts used as models, students found the materials manageable, aligning with Machida's (2008) findings. The intrinsic and extrinsic motivating factors suggest that translation can be both engaging and beneficial for language learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021), confirming Murtisari et al.'s (2020) findings. This contrasts with views that reject translation as too demanding for language learners (Carreres & Noriega-Sánchez, 2011). On the contrary, its problem-solving nature appears to provide cognitive stimulation that encourages students to improve their L2 skills (Machida, 2011; Takimoto & Hashimoto, 2010).

Students reported notable benefits of interlingual focus on form for grammar learning, particularly in understanding grammar's communicative role. High agreement with statements related to grammar awareness suggests students perceived translation as a communicative activity that helps enhance their understanding of how grammar expresses meaning and creates pragmatic effects. Students also reported being motivated to study grammar more as a result of these insights, echoing findings from Murtisari et al. (2020). This motivation was likely reinforced by class discussions on communicative goals, genre-specific grammatical features, and translation alternatives. These helped students view grammar, like vocabulary, as a tool for meaning-making.

Students also reported that interlingual focus on form was effective for understanding grammatical meaning. Few participants raised concerns about translating complex texts. The perceived effectiveness was linked to the juxtaposition of L1 and L2, direct grammar uses during tasks, and the support of context. At the discourse level, learners could compare multiple structures across sentences. For example, one student in Murtisari et al. (2020) noted being able to compare tenses from the parallel texts. These comparisons may highlight how forms function in context. The findings also align with research on deeper cognitive processing and memory retention through translation. Murtisari et al. (2020) showed improvements in grammar recall, and Scheffler (2013) found students remembered "unusual sentences" more easily through translation. Hummel's (2010) and Ramachandran and Rahim's (2004) vocabulary studies further support these outcomes, suggesting translation fosters deeper processing through L1 engagement and prior knowledge.

Still, as noted in earlier research (Lee et al., 2015; Lv, 2016), translation activity on its own may not be sufficient for grammar learning. As two students observed, L2 and L1 structures do not always align due to indirect equivalence – common in meaning-based translations. Rather than merely highlighting formal contrasts between languages, such mismatches foreground the pragmatic dimension of grammar, where grammatical choices are shaped by the communicative purpose, audience, and context, as well as by broader conventional patterns of natural L2 use. For example, the passive construction in Indonesian, which is frequently preferred due to the language's topic comment tendency, often needs to be rendered as an English active construction to achieve an equivalent communicative effect. This highlights the importance of instructional mediation in interlingual focus on form: Instructors help learners interpret cross-linguistic incompatibilities and relate grammatical form to discourse-level meaning and natural L2 usage, rather than treating translation as a contrastive exercise in a narrow sense.

The translation tasks also allowed students to apply grammar in real-world contexts, helping them develop more natural L2 forms. These results challenge assumptions that translation is uncommunicative or leads to unnatural L2 use. Students mainly reported learning grammar through direct application, comparing their work with teacher models, and imitating forms they encountered. Within a Skopos-oriented framework, such practices can be understood as cycles of purposeful reformulation, in which learners test grammatical choices against communicative goals and natural L2 use and revise them in light of contextual appropriateness. These learning processes – especially with reiterative practice and L1 scaffolding – appeared to create a rich environment for grammar

development with focus on form. In this context, sustained engagement in text production without access to digital translation tools may have encouraged learners to rely more fully on their own linguistic resources, potentially fostering pushed output (Jahangard, 2022; see also Liu & Yang, 2025). However, the lower ratings for written feedback and group work suggest these areas may need refinement. Unclear feedback or uneven group dynamics might have limited their effectiveness for grammar learning.

Overall, the findings suggest strong learner support for interlingual focus on form - translation course grades did not influence learners' reported enjoyment and positive perceptions across differing levels of course performance, corroborating Murtisari's (2016) findings. This challenges the idea that translation is only useful for less successful learners. Rather than positioning translation as a peripheral or remedial, interlingual focus on form illustrates how grammar learning can be integrated into communicative, *skopos*-oriented interlingual activities for learners regardless of their performance.

6 Conclusion

This study sheds light on how learners experience translation as a resource for grammar learning through an interlingual focus on form. Rather than measuring learning outcomes, it explores how learners perceive and engage with grammar through translation tasks situated in authentic communicative contexts. The findings suggest that well-designed translation tasks can create potentially valuable interlingual focus on form opportunities for EFL students to learn grammar regardless of their course performance.

Drawing on Skopos theory, the study conceptualizes translation as a purpose-driven communicative activity in which L2 forms are evaluated and adapted in relation to discourse-level meaning. Rather than focusing solely on L1–L2 contrasts, this approach foregrounds grammar as a resource for mediating meaning across languages, situations, and cultures. From this perspective, L1 functions as a mediational resource that supports reflection on grammatical choices in context, rather than simply bypassing L2 engagement. By allowing learners to work with grammar in extended, meaning-oriented settings, iterative translation practice also aligns with Larsen-Freeman's (2015) concept of grammaring. Such experiences may foster learners' confidence and sense of agency in L2 use, without positioning native-like attainment as a benchmark for success.

This study's limitations include a relatively small sample size and its reliance on subjective self-reported data. It therefore does not seek to measure learning gains or establish causal relationships between interlingual focus on form and grammatical development. While course grades were used cautiously to contextualise learners' relative performance in the translation course – rather than as indicators of language proficiency – the findings should be interpreted as reflecting learners' reported learning processes. In addition, although grammar was analytically foregrounded, translation activities inevitably engage multiple dimensions of language competence.

These limitations are inseparable from the study's focus on learner experience rather than on direct measurement of learning outcomes. As such, the study is intended to complement, rather than replace, effectiveness-oriented research. Future studies could triangulate learner perceptions with analyses of translation output, instructor perspectives, longitudinal data, or quantitative measures across different language pairs and educational contexts. Nonetheless, the study offers important insights into the potential of interlingual focus on form as a meaningful, engaging, and context-driven approach to grammar instruction. More broadly, it illustrates how learners' full linguistic repertoires can support grammar learning within communicative, discourse-level activity.

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Notes

There were parallel classes - one instructor started the online classes one week later than the rest as the sudden shift to emergency remote teaching created significant uncertainty.

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Appendix A. Standard lesson sequence (timing for Steps 5-6 was adjusted for specific genres)

Stage	Main Activities
1. Introduction (5 mins)	Brief orientation to the text type, activation of prior knowledge, and discussion of the general <i>skopos</i> of the text. Students read a short text (250–350 words) in Indonesian or English alongside their parallel translation. Texts included product manuals, tourism articles, advertisements, and academic abstracts. Activities included silent reading, reading aloud in chunks, comprehension checks, and discussion of the <i>skopos</i> and notable translation choices. All English texts were idiomatic and rated C1–C2 using an online CEFR text analyzer.
2. Receptive Task (30 mins)	
3. Vocabulary Exercise (15 mins)	Students identified unfamiliar words or expressions and searched for their rendering in the parallel texts. The instructor discussed their general meanings and how they were used in context.
4. Translation Strategy Analysis (15–20 mins)	Students compared source and target texts to identify translation strategies and discuss lexical, grammatical, and audience-related choices.
5. Language Focus (20–30 mins)	Genre-specific grammatical features were discussed through guided analysis of the parallel texts and a sentence-level follow-up exercise within the genre’s relevant contexts. For tourism texts, for instance, the targeted structures inversions used to express location.
6. Productive Task and Discussion (45 mins translation + 20–30 mins review)	Students worked in groups of three to four to translate a text similar to that used earlier. The teacher monitored group work, provided corrective feedback, and facilitated whole-class review and comparison of alternative translations before presenting a model version.

Appendix B. Sample Indonesian–English Parallel Texts on Tourism

Indonesian	English
PANDUAN TEMPAT HIBURAN MALAM YANG COOL DAN TRENDY DI AMSTERDAM: BAR DAN KAFE	A GUIDE TO AMSTERDAM’S HIPPER NIGHTSPOTS: BARS AND CAFES
Jalan-jalan di Amsterdam tidak melulu tentang bir dan bitterballen. Kota yang terkenal akan kanal-kanal tradisional ini juga memiliki sisi yang semakin unik, trendi dan glamor. Terdapat pula banyak bar wine, kelab malam, restoran dan hotel baru yang buka di sepanjang jalan-jalan sempitnya. ...	Going out in Amsterdam isn’t all about beer and bitterballen. The city famous for traditional canals and coffee shops has an increasingly edgy and glamorous side to it too

Indonesian**English**

Di seberang Zeedijk ada Cafe Cuba – tua dan sederhana namun sangat populer. Jika yang Anda cari adalah minum-minum, ngobrol (atau teriak-teriak), dan bergaul dengan para profesional muda keren diiringi musik jazz yang keras, Cuba adalah kafe Anda.

Lebih jauh lagi ada Finch, bar kecil yang santai dan funky di Noodermarkt. Terletak di alun-alun yang cantik, tempat ini cocok untuk nongkrong kapan saja di sepanjang hari. Tempat serupa lain adalah Chocolate Bar di Helstraat.

and a slew of new wine bars, nightclubs, restaurants and hip hotels have opened along its narrow streets. ...

Across the square from Zeedijk is Cafe Cuba, an old, unpretentious but very popular pub. If you're just drinking, talking (or shouting), and socializing with an excitable yuppie crowd to the sound of loud jazz music, Cuba is for you.

Further afield, Finch is a relaxed and funky little bar in Noodmarkt. Located on a picturesque square, it's a great place to hang out any time of the day. And another popular place of that type is Chocolate Bar on Helstraat.

Note: Selected illustrative excerpts adapted from the Garuda Indonesia in-flight magazine.