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THE ATTITUDES OF PRE-INTERMEDIATE STUDENTS IN USING GOOGLE TRANSLATE AS A LEARNING TOOL DURING IN-CLASS WRITING LESSONS

Dang Vu Minh Thu¹, Nguyen Lam Anh Duong², Nguyen Hoang Thanh Tam³

Abstract: *This study examines the opinions and behaviors of tertiary-level students toward the use of Google Translate (GT) during writing assignments. GT has reportedly obtained the attention of several scholars in terms of how and why language learners are using it for writing assignments (Chompurach, 2021), which is the reason why this study was conducted. This research aims to explore students' perception of the accuracy and frequency of the use of GT and their feedback in general during writing assignments. The study employed a mixed-method approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. In the data collection process, a set of survey questions and a semi-structured interview that have been adapted from a previous study were delivered to 204 participants and 8 interviewees, who are freshmen and sophomore students at the Industrial University - Ho Chi Minh City (IUH). The findings of this research indicate that nearly all surveyed students acclaimed the effectiveness of GT, which could serve as a regular learning tool during writing tasks because it can ensure the accuracy of the translated texts, while only a low proportion of participants were concerned about its effectiveness. The evidence would provide English teachers with an understanding of how GT has been viewed by students, from which any modifications to teaching methods of writing skills would be generated to ensure the students' confidence level.*

Keywords: *Google Translate, learning aid, students' perception, writing assignments.*

INTRODUCTION

With the increasing globalization and interconnectedness of the world, proficiency in multiple languages has become highly valued in various domains, including academia. However, language barriers can often pose challenges for non-native speakers when it comes to writing assignments and academic projects. In recent years, the proliferation of machine learning, specifically Google Translate (GT), has emerged as an accessible resource to assist individuals in overcoming these barriers (Pham *et al.*, 2022).

Truly, Google Translate (GT) is one of the most widely used language translation tools as well as a powerful tool that can help students save a large amount of time for translating a text from one language to their target one forthwith when encountering unfamiliar lexis. Instead of having to manually translate each word or phrase, with just a simple “copy-paste” manipulation, university

¹ Saigon University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

² Industrial University of Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

³ Saigon University, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

students can get an instant translation effortlessly. Due to this user-friendly design, speed, and practicality, GT has increasingly become popular among university students (Komeili *et al.*, 2021).

This study aims to investigate university students' attitudes toward the benefits of using Google Translate in their writing assignment endeavors. Specifically, the authors will explore how using Google Translate affects students' perception of the overall improvements on grammatical accuracy, vocabulary usage, coherence of written texts, and other factors in non-native speakers of English.

The research questions of the study are as follows:

1. *How do pre-intermediate students use Google Translate during writing lessons in classrooms?*
2. *What are the attitudes of pre-intermediate students towards the use of GT for writing skills?*

The study results will provide insight into how students use GT in the hope that language educators and teachers can encourage students not to rely too heavily on translation tools and they should use GT judiciously and in conjunction with other language learning resources.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This scientific research aims to contribute to the ongoing discussions around the use of technology in language learning by providing empirical evidence on the impact of machine translation tools on writing skills and providing valuable insights into the effectiveness of Google Translate in improving writing skills. Also, the authors will investigate how the use of Google Translate impacts the grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, and coherence of written texts in English.

Google Translate as a pedagogical tool

The integration of Google Translation in language classrooms has gained attention as educators explore its potential benefits and challenges. Google Translation has emerged as a popular pedagogical tool in language education due to its availability and convenience (Hampel & Stickler, 2012). There are several studies for a closer look into the use of Google Translation as a pedagogical tool, highlighting its impact on language learning outcomes and providing insights for effective integration into educational contexts (Esteban, 2018)

Ducar and Schocket (2018) carried out a research project exploring in detail the strengths and limitations of using GT and presenting the pedagogical implications of incorporating GT into ESL classrooms. The report showcased that GT never produces misspellings, corrects the spelling errors of students effectively as well as detecting the use of proper nouns and translating idioms efficiently.

GT can serve as a valuable resource for vocabulary acquisition, allowing L2 learners to quickly access translations, expand their lexicon, and understand complex sentence structures and idiomatic expressions through the research of Tsai (2020). The purpose of the study conducted by Tsai (2020) is to investigate the effectiveness of using Google Translate as a translingual CALL tool in EFL writing. Two cohorts of Chinese English major university students and non-English majors were asked to first write a reflective essay after watching a 5-minute passage from a video in Chinese, then compose a corresponding text in English, submit their Chinese text to Google

Translate, compare the translated English GT text with their own self-written (SW) text. The final results of this research indicated that GT texts are significantly better than self-written ones in terms of the increased amount of content, more interesting subject matters, and reduced errors in spelling and grammar.

The integration of Google Translation aligns with the goals of promoting learner autonomy and developing digital literacy skills. By utilizing Google Translation, learners can independently explore authentic texts, decipher unknown vocabulary, and engage with diverse linguistic resources (Heift & Schulze, 2013). Therefore, educators should embrace the tool as a means to promote learner autonomy and digital literacy. However, it is advisable that educators also provide guidance on effective search strategies and encourage learners to compare translations, encouraging them to become critical users of machine translation tools.

Students' attitudes towards Google Translate and their behavior of using Google Translate in language learning

Additionally, students often turn to GT when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or complex grammatical structures. Several studies have explored students' attitudes toward Google Translate and their behavior when using it in their writing.

Jolley and Maimone (2015) conducted a study to investigate Spanish learners' and instructors' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about GT in connection with its ethicality and quality. The results revealed that nearly 66% of students use GT as a dictionary to interpret the definition of new words. It is believed by most students that GT is helpful and handy for their learning process. Also, teachers considered using GT in the classroom as an appropriate tool for improving students' language learning.

The findings in Darwish and Rajendran's (2019) study showed that while most students were aware of the potential drawbacks of using Google Translate, they still used it for various reasons, such as saving time and improving their writing. The study also found that students who used Google Translate tended to rely on it heavily, sometimes using it to translate entire sentences or paragraphs rather than individual words. Regarding learners' attitudes, in a study by Lee and Kim (2019), it was found that Korean EFL students had positive attitudes towards Google Translate and perceived it as a useful tool for language learning.

Another research of Bin (2020) was conducted to gather the data over six weeks when observing the personal histories of learners with GT. The findings indicate that twelve-year-old language learners at a university in Saudi Arabia used GT frequently in everyday life when being given five different modes of writing in English. As a result, the study recommends language instructors should promote the use of GT as a mini dictionary and encourage language learners to use GT as a source for ensuring accurate spelling.

The attitude of ninety-two EFL students majoring in English in Saudi Arabia was collected by utilizing a quantitative tool and a questionnaire in Alhaisoni and Alhaysony's (2017) study. The authors found that the majority of their study participants used GT to determine the definition of unfamiliar words and support them in completing their given writing assignments. They clarified that students developed positive thoughts about user-friendliness, faster translation speed, and vocabulary learning. (Alhaisoni & Alhaysony, 2017).

Accordingly, students should be encouraged to use the GT tool judiciously and in combination with other language learning resources, to ensure that they develop their language skills and do not become overly reliant on the tool. A significant research gap exists in understanding students' attitudes towards using Google Translate to practice writing skills among English-major students in university settings. While studies have shown the tool's potential benefits, such as improved grammatical accuracy, lexical diversity, and coherence of written texts, there's a need to delve deeper into students' perceptions and practices. Research should investigate students' attitudes towards using Google Translate, their reasons for using it, and the extent to which they rely on it in language learning. Understanding students' attitudes and behaviors regarding Google Translate can provide valuable insights for educators aiming to effectively integrate this tool into language learning curricula.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants

Participants were announced directly by the researcher during one of the writing sessions in class about the purposes, aims, and reasons for conducting this investigation. The link of the questionnaire was then distributed via Google form where students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. In total, 204 freshmen and sophomore English majors from the Foreign Language department of the Industrial University - Ho Chi Minh City provided their feedback via the Likert scale. Subsequently, 8 participants were collected by convenience sampling, answering 6 open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview on Zoom recordings with their announcement of consent. The language utilized during this interview process was English and all surveyed students are from 5 writing classes whose levels are equivalent to pre-intermediate levels according to the CEFR scale.

Instruments

Questions on the survey, which remained highly consistent with (.85), were adapted from the research of Jolley and Maimone (2015), and Lieshout (2019), in which their validity and reliability were tested using Cronbach's alpha (Creswell, 2013; Gass & Mackey, 2007). The results are measured and synthesized via the method of descriptive statistics involving mean and percentage. 13 questions on the questionnaire include exploring students' perspectives on the following aspects: overall feedback, the frequency of using GT, agreement on the use of GT, and the accuracy level of GT. Meanwhile, 6 open-ended questions for the semi-structured interview would give educators an insight into the current situation of how students are using GT for their writing assignments and make modifications to their teaching methods if possible.

Surveys are effective research tools for several reasons. First, they allow researchers to collect large amounts of data from a relatively large number of participants in a relatively short period. This makes surveys an efficient way to gather information about a wide range of topics or issues. Second, surveys can be administered in a variety of ways, including online, by mail, or in person, which can increase the accessibility of the research to a wider audience. Third, surveys can be standardized, meaning that all participants are asked the same questions in the same way,

which can increase the reliability and validity of the data collected (William, C., 2007). Several researchers have emphasized the benefits of using surveys as a research tool. Tourangeau, Rips, and Rasinski (2000) note that surveys are particularly useful for studying attitudes and beliefs, as they allow researchers to collect data on subjective experiences. Moreover, researchers such as Fowler and Cosenza (2009) agreed on the versatility of surveys, as they can be used to collect data in a wide range of settings and on a variety of topics. Additionally, these researchers note that surveys can be modified to suit the needs of specific populations, making them a flexible research tool. Surveys can allow researchers to collect large amounts of standardized data from a wide range of participants in a relatively short period. The versatility and flexibility of surveys make them a valuable tool for researchers in a variety of fields.

Semi-structured interviews can lead to successful qualitative research for several reasons. First, they allow for open-ended questioning, which can elicit rich and detailed responses from participants. Unlike structured interviews, which use a fixed set of questions, semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in the questioning process, which can result in more in-depth and nuanced data. Second, semi-structured interviews provide a framework for consistency in data collection, while still allowing for exploration of new ideas and themes that may emerge during the interview process. This can help ensure that data collection is rigorous and systematic, while also allowing for the exploration of unexpected or previously unanticipated topics. Third, semi-structured interviews can help build rapport between the interviewer and participant, as they allow for a more conversational style of questioning. This can help participants feel more comfortable sharing their perspectives and experiences, which can result in richer and more meaningful data. Several researchers have emphasized the benefits of using semi-structured interviews in qualitative research. For example, Kvale (1996) notes that semi-structured interviews allow for the exploration of complex and sensitive topics, and can help build trust between the interviewer and participant. Similarly, Ramsook (2018) suggests that semi-structured interviews allow for the collection of detailed and personal narratives, which can help researchers gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Moreover, researchers such as Marshall and Rossman (2016) and Silverman (2016) claimed the flexibility of semi-structured interviews, which can be adapted to suit the needs of specific research questions and populations. This flexibility allows for customization of the interview process, which can result in more meaningful and relevant data.

Data collection and analysis

A mixed-method approach can enable researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. A study by William, C. (2007) reported that researchers can triangulate their findings and gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of the research question. Second, a mixed-method approach can help address the potential limitations of using only one method. For example, Creswell (2014) argues that a mixed-method approach can help researchers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic, and can help ensure that their findings are valid and reliable. Using both methods can help balance these limitations and provide a more complete picture of the research topic. Similarly, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) suggest that a mixed-method approach can help address the limitations of using only one method, and can help researchers gain a deeper

understanding of the research question. Third, a mixed-method approach can help researchers identify and address potential biases in their research. By using multiple methods, researchers can compare and contrast their findings, which can help identify areas of agreement and disagreement. This can help researchers identify potential biases and ensure that their findings are robust and reliable. Moreover, researchers such as Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) and Greene and Caracelli (2003) emphasize the flexibility of a mixed-method approach, which can be customized to suit the needs of specific research questions and populations. This flexibility allows researchers to adapt their approach to the specific needs of the research question, which can result in more meaningful and relevant data. Overall, a mixed-method approach is an effective research tool because it allows researchers to collect both quantitative and qualitative data, address potential limitations of using only one method, and identify and address potential biases in their research, in which students' attitudes about using this application in their studies will be recorded via the use of Likert scale in the questionnaire and open-ended questions in the semi-structured interview.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Survey

Demographic information of Respondents

In this study, there were 204 participants, with 79.4% of them being female students and 20.6% being male students. Additionally, 58.3% of participants studied in Writing 3, compared to 41.7% of participants in Writing 1 classes.

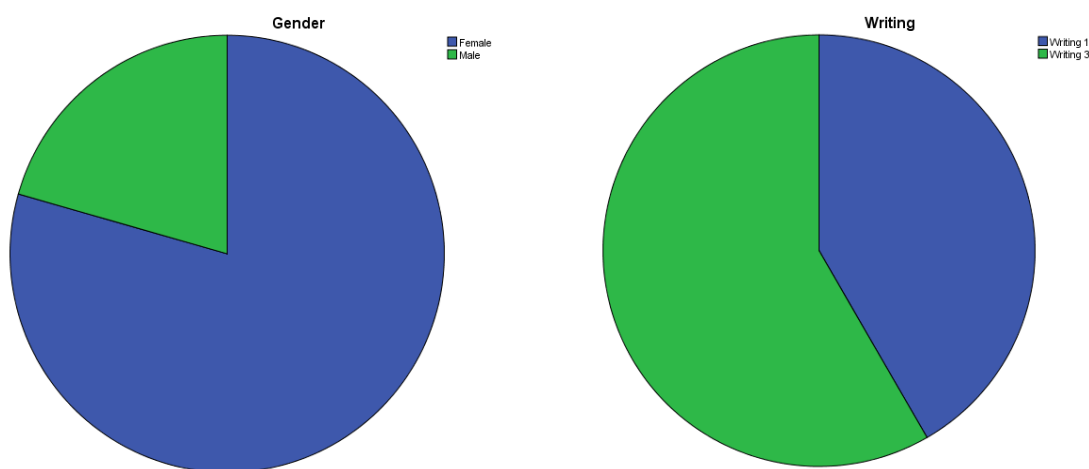


Table 1. Results of students' responses to the general questions on the use of Google Translate (GT)

General questions	Yes	No	N
1. Do you use GT for English language learning?	96.3%	3.7%	204
2. Do you have a GT application in your mobile phone(s)?	77.5%	22.5%	204
3. Do you think GT is faster than other machine translations?	79.4%	20.6%	204

In contrast to the 3.7% of participants who did not utilize GT for their studies, the majority of participants (191 students) used GT to learn English, and this proportion was 96.3%. The second and third questions shared relatively similar results. Specifically, 77.5% of participants, which was equivalent to 158 students, had a GT application in their mobile phones, compared to 46 students who did not have. Similarly, almost 80% of the subjects did believe that GT was faster than other translation tools, while the opposite accounted for around 20%.

Table 2. Results of students' responses to the frequency of using GT

The frequency of using GT	N	Mean	SD
4. How frequently do you use Google Translate for English language learning in general?	204	3.41	0.714
5. How frequently do you use Google Translate for English written assignments?	204	3.23	0.871

Table 2 reveals that most of the students frequently used GT for their English lessons in general ($M= 3.41$, $SD= 0.714$), whereas they occasionally GT used specifically for English writing tasks ($M= 3.23$, $SD= 0.871$).

Table 3. Results of students' responses to the agreement on the use of GT

The agreement on the use of GT	N	Mean	SD
6. Do you agree that it is easy to use Google Translate?	204	4.18	0.877
7. Do you agree that you are comfortable using Google Translate in English language learning activities?	204	3.68	0.905
8. Do you agree that you know how to use Google Translate to help you write in English?	204	3.47	0.985

Table 4 indicates that the majority of the students shared positive agreement on the use of GT. With the highest mean score ($M= 4.18$, $SD= .877$), GT was inevitably user-friendly and easy to use for the students. In addition, the statistic for the seventh item reported a relatively similar trend with item number six. To be more explicit, most of the participants agreed on the comfort that GT provided when they used it for their English learning activities ($M=3.68$, $SD= .905$). However, the agreement of knowing how to use GT to support their writing lessons received a slightly lower mean score of 3.47 (item 8, $SD= 0.985$).

Table 4. Results of students' responses to the accuracy of GT

The accuracy of GT	N	Mean	SD
9. How accurate do you think Google Translate can help you translate an entire text in English?	204	2.90	0.709
10. How accurate do you think Google Translate can help you translate an entire paragraph in English?	204	3.00	0.815
11. How accurate do you think Google Translate can help you translate sentences in English?	204	3.37	0.829
12. How accurate do you think Google Translate can help you translate short phrases in English?	204	3.17	1.028
13. How accurate do you think Google Translate can help you translate single words in English?	204	3.72	0.956

It is readily apparent that most of the survey items received mean scores that were below the average standard. It means that most of the students did not think GT was an accurate translating tool. Explicitly, the mean scores of item number 9 ($M= 2.90$, $SD= 0.709$) and number 10 ($M= 3.00$, $SD = 0.815$) indicate that GT was inaccurate in assisting the students in translating an entire paragraph and a full text in English. In the meantime, the mean scores for the remaining items were slightly higher. The participants showed neutral attitudes towards the accuracy of GT in translating English sentences ($M= 3.37$, $SD = 0.829$) and short phrases ($M= 3.17$, $SD = 1.028$). Last but not least, the students admitted that GT is relatively accurate in translating single words in English ($M= 3.72$, $SD= 0.956$).

In brief, the findings confirmed that the students used GT for their English classes and lessons quite frequently. The students also agreed that GT was easy and comfortable to use. However, they did not highly appreciate the accuracy of GT in translating full texts and long paragraphs, as opposed to short phrases and single words.

Interviews

The frequent use of Google Translate (GT) in writing assignments

Seven of out eight participants confirmed that they had used Google Translate for their writing assignments before, while only one student did not apply GT in his/her class, and he/she simply used GT for checking the meaning of new vocabularies. Half of the interviewees indicated that GT was a very helpful tool which assisted them in avoiding ‘grammatical mistakes’ and translating ‘Vietnamese words and phrases’ into English quickly.

The motivation of using Google Translate (GT)

‘The lack of confidence in writing skills’ was the primary reason why the participants opted for using Google Translate for the writing tasks, and this was confirmed by 6 out 8 students. The other two interviewees recommended the frequent utilization of GT due to the convenience, speed and accuracy of GT which could help them avoid ‘grammatical mistakes’ and become better in writing skill.

The difficulties of using Google Translate (GT)

The majority of students (7 out of 8) elucidated that they encountered some problems when using Google Translate, whereas one remaining student experienced no challenges at all. To be specific, it was ‘the inaccuracy of GT’ that the students mentioned, because GT mainly applied the translating method of word-by-word. This also meant that if the users wanted to translate complicated phrases or long paragraphs, GT could not ensure the accurate level like when translating single words, let alone other factors such as cultural and contextual differences.

The impact of Google Translate (GT) on the quality of writing assignments

The answers for this question were particularly diverse, in which 5 students demonstrated the negative impacts of the implementation of Google Translate on their writing ability, 2 students experienced no such differences and only 1 student notified the positive effect. The adverse impacts were mainly related to ‘the inaccuracy of GT’.

The advantages and disadvantages of Google Translate (GT)

There are three benefits of using Google Translate mentioned during the interviews. The first advantage of using Google Translate for writing assignments was the ability to quickly translate content and get a general understanding of the text. It could also be helpful for students who were learning a new language and needed to practice their writing skills. Finally, GT offered a wide range of translated languages, and with the connection to the Internet or Wi-Fi, everything was free of charge. However, the disadvantages of using GT included the risk of inaccuracies in translation, which could impact the quality of the assignment. Additionally, it may hinder the development of language skills and critical thinking.

The guidelines on the use of Google Translate (GT)

Five out of eight students suggested that there should be some restrictions over the implementation of Google Translate in writing classes since it would have some detrimental impacts on the students' writing ability. In contrast, the other three students indicated that instead of prohibiting the implementation of the technology, which the majority of students already use, educators could demonstrate to their students how to utilize it efficiently.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research were aligned with the results of some of the previous studies related to the effects of Google Translate on writing performance. Specifically, according to a Lee and Kim (2019) study, Korean EFL students thought highly of Google Translate and saw it as a helpful tool for language acquisition. GT was considered free, simple to use, and quickly translated text, that was the reason why the students had very positive attitudes toward it (Alhaisoni & Alhaisony, 2017; Jolley and Maimone, 2015).

While some previous studies confirmed the 'ideal' accuracy of GT in terms of translating, the findings of this research revealed some noticeable opposing ideas. The report of Ducar and Schocket (2018) demonstrated how successfully GT detected the usage of proper nouns, translated idioms, and never misspelled words. According to Tsai's study, GT could be a useful tool for vocabulary acquisition since it enabled L2 learners to rapidly obtain translations, increased the size of their vocabulary, and comprehended intricate sentence patterns and idiomatic phrases (2020). Delivering more enriched content, using more advanced vocabulary, and making fewer spelling and grammatical errors were how GT texts clearly outperform self-written ones.

Nonetheless, some of the noteworthy variations were investigated in this research. The participants highlighted that potential drawback of using GT was the risk of translation errors, especially when translating complicated vocabulary and long paragraphs. In addition, the translation of idiomatic phrases and context-related words was not accurate as expected. This contributed greatly to the consideration of both teachers and students when they wanted to implement this tool in writing classes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research paper, it can be concluded that pre-intermediate students have a generally positive attitude toward the use of Google Translate in writing assignments. The

majority of the participants believed that Google Translate is a useful tool that can help them improve their writing skills and save time. However, some students also expressed concerns about the accuracy and reliability of the translations and the potential negative impact on their language learning. Overall, the use of Google Translate in writing assignments can be a useful tool for pre-intermediate students, but it should be used responsibly and in conjunction with other language learning resources. By providing guidance and support, teachers and instructors can help students develop their language skills and achieve their learning goals. This study aimed to explore the attitudes of pre-intermediate university students towards the use of Google Translate in writing assignments. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with a sample of students, several key findings emerged. First, students generally viewed Google Translate as a helpful tool for language learning and writing assignments. Second, students had mixed opinions on the accuracy of Google Translate, with some believing it to be trustworthy and others being skeptical of its reliability. Finally, students recognized the limitations of Google Translate, particularly concerning the nuance and context of language. These findings suggest that pre-intermediate university students have a generally positive attitude toward the use of Google Translate in writing assignments. However, their reliance on this tool may come at a cost, as they may overlook the nuances and intricacies of language that are crucial for effective communication.

Teachers and instructors should guide students on how to use Google Translate effectively and responsibly. This can include teaching them how to check and verify the accuracy of the translations, and the importance of using it as a supplement to their language learning, rather than a replacement. Teachers and instructors should provide alternative resources for students to use in their writing assignments, such as bilingual dictionaries, language learning software, and language exchange programs. This can help students develop a more comprehensive understanding of the language and improve their writing skills.

Despite the insights gained from this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study was limited to a specific population of pre-intermediate university students, and the attitudes of other groups may differ. Furthermore, the study relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias and inaccuracies. Finally, the study did not explore the long-term impact of Google Translate use on language learning and development. Overall, while this study provides valuable insights into the attitudes of pre-intermediate university students towards the use of Google Translate in writing assignments, further research is needed to fully understand the implications of its use on language learning and development. Because the samples opted for this study by using convenience sampling, they might not be able to represent all English learners at school or in any communities (Fraenkel *et al.*, 2012, p. 100)

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

1. Have you ever used Google Translate to complete a writing assignment for class? If so, how often do you use it?
2. What motivates you to use Google Translate? Is it because you find it difficult to understand the language of the assignment or because you lack confidence in your writing skills?
3. Have you ever faced any difficulties when using Google Translate? If so, could you elaborate on them?
4. Do you think using Google Translate has an impact on the quality of your writing assignments? If yes, how?
5. In your opinion, what are the advantages and disadvantages of using Google Translate for writing assignments?
6. Do you think there should be restrictions or guidelines on the use of Google Translate for writing assignments? Why or why not?

NHÀ XUẤT BẢN
ĐẠI HỌC QUỐC GIA HÀ NỘI
16 Hàng Chuối – Hai Bà Trưng Hà Nội

Giám đốc: (024) 39715011
Tổng biên tập: (024) 39714736
Kinh doanh: (024) 39729437
Biên tập: (024) 39714896
Fax: (024) 39724736

Chịu trách nhiệm xuất bản:

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