

The impact of the translation method in vocabulary teaching to bilingual EFL young learners

by

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Submitted to the

Department of English and German Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master's in Teaching and Learning English as a
Foreign / Second Language**

at the

UNIVERSITAT ROVIRA I VIRGILI

June 7th, 2021



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Abstract

Although it is correct to maintain individual space for each language, it is also essential to explore alternative strategies. The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between the use of L1 or L_a + L_α (Language A and Language Alpha in case of bilingual students learning English as Foreign Language) and students' ability to recall and retain the meaning of words that they learn. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to determine the effectiveness of the translation method (using both native languages) in teaching vocabulary to elementary level EFL learners in the second year of Primary School. The results show that, during the L2 vocabulary-teaching process, the proper application of L₁ can effectively expedite the memorization of new words. Among the researchers who present their arguments in favour of using translation in the classroom, we can find Cook (2011). In the present work, the translation method has been overall successful. A total of 46 young learners took part in this study: 24 of them were in the experiment group who were taught English language using L₁ (or L_a plus L_α in case of bilingual students) translations during the term, and the other 22 students were in the control group who continued learning English using the English language exclusively. A pre-test and a post-test were done orally to the two groups; both consisted of 20 questions. The results indicated that there was a difference between the results of the experiment and the control group after 2-week treatment, in favour of the experiment group. Alongside, an inquest has been done to 19 EFL teachers in the form of questionnaire, to investigate their beliefs about the use of L1 in teaching L2 and the general benefits that a bilingual approach may affect young learners' learning of L2.

Keywords: *vocabulary learning; L1 use; translation; young learners.*

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List of abbreviations

CLT - Acronym for Communicative Language approach

EFL - English as a Foreign Language

FL - Foreign Language

L1 - Language 1, intended as the native language

$L_a + L_\alpha$ - Language A and Language Alpha in case of bilingual students learning English as Foreign Language

L2 - Language 2, intended as the target language

TBL - Acronym for Task-based Learning

PPP - Acronym for Present, Practice, Produce

1. Literature review.

The employment of translation-based activities into foreign language learning has been largely discussed. Using L1 in foreign language classrooms is discouraged by advocates of the L2-only position. They usually argue that students must be exposed to a significant amount of L2 input if they want to develop better L2 proficiency, so using L1 in the classroom denies students that input. Nonetheless, according to many other researchers, translation is considered a valid teaching tool particularly in an EFL situation, and this tool should be investigated and integrated (Ellis 1992:46). Foreign language teaching experienced several changes during the 20th century, particularly with the appearance of the communicative approach. Its advent and the status it gained was one of the most important causes for the common neglect of the students' L1 and the barring of translation from language teaching (Koletnik, 2012). However, as Koletnik (2012: p. 2) states "translation never went away completely; it patiently waited for a time when the language teaching community would again discover synergies between translation and established approaches, then reassess its lost potential." Marqués-Aguado and Solís-Becerra (2013) assert that lately, the translation-based methods have won back approval. Nonetheless, the use of translation in class is still thoroughly disputed. Some authors claim that translation helps in the process of learning a second or foreign language whereas others believe it is deleterious.

One of the defenders is Rol Ellis, stating that students' L1 may act 'as a resource which learners use for translation to overcome their limitation' (Ellis 1985: 37). It has also been argued that referring to one's L1 is a learning strategy. Research done by Swan (1997) for instance shows that falling back to

the native language is one of the typical strategies of good language learners, as they also make effective cross-lingual analogies at distinct learning phases. This, according to Swan (1997), is an important stage because, as he points out, if one did not make cross-lingual reference, one might never manage to learn new languages. Lewis (2009) conducted a classroom-based research on a group of Mexican adults learning English as L2 to understand what they think of the inclusion of L1 in L2 learning. The results say that students have the perception that L1 inclusion reduces anxiety, enhances the effective environment for learning and facilitates the inclusion of the learner experiences. The vast majority of works are conducted on adults. There is, nevertheless, an eye-opening experimental work done by Laura Andreu Pirrie (2017) on young learners. Her work compared the gamification and the translation-based method in order to determine which was the most effective for teaching vocabulary. Results showed that the translation method can be a highly useful tool in teaching vocabulary, at the same level of the newly-discovered gamified teaching. Hsieh (2000) conducted a research to understand attitudes and thoughts toward translation, with 52 Taiwanese college students at the end of one year of EFL instruction using a translation method. The results show that the vast majority expressed that translating helps pay attention to the coherence and contextualization of English reading tasks, many of them became more aware of multiple meanings of an English word and extended their vocabulary knowledge and reading skills. Additional research was conducted by Carreres (2006), who submitted a questionnaire (11 questions) to second- and third-year students of modern languages degree. It consisted of exercises of text translations (literary, film, journalistic writing). She discovered that translation

exercises are helpful for language learning and that it is one of the finest ways to check that a text has been entirely understood. Calis and Dikilitas, in a work of 2012 about the effectiveness of translation on L2 learning practice, discovered that translation tasks could promote learners' receptive skills and productive skills.

2. Rationale

2.1. The importance of vocabulary at the initial stages of learning a FL

The current literature on teaching second language vocabulary reveals that the acquisition of vocabulary has got a more central role in learning a second language (Sokmen 1997). One key claim is that a good awareness of how the system of a language goes may not necessarily enable one to communicate, but it is generally likely to communicate if one has the vocabulary (Wallace 1988). As a result, according to Nation's definitions (2013), and taking into account the quasi-absence of writing and reading activities in the first two years of Lestonnac Primary School, we might affirm that meaning is the most important dimension in early L2 learning. We could infer that vocabulary translation fosters the development of the meaning dimension up to lexical competence. The value of vocabulary learning has been linked with conversation and written work as Cook (1991) maintains that vocabulary learning provides input for these skills. Vocabulary is the most sizable and uncontrollable component in the learning of any language (Nation 1990). With this in mind and the shift in emphasis on vocabulary in language, it becomes necessary to help students to store and retrieve words in the target language (Sokmen 1997: 237), which requires the use of useful pedagogical techniques

in teaching vocabulary. The approach in teaching vocabulary has been principally communicative which stresses implicit, incidental learning. The techniques used in vocabulary teaching include inferring the meaning of lexical items from the context in which they occur, using the dictionary, using real stimulus and providing English synonyms (Richards and Rodgers 1996). The argument against implicit instruction to facilitate second language acquisition, according to Sokmen (1997: 237), 'comes from a number of potential problems associated with inferring words from context'. Several studies on vocabulary acquisition have revealed the ineffectiveness of simply using implicit vocabulary instruction and the need to complement it with explicit vocabulary instruction (Sokmen 1997). To encourage better learning therefore, the current vocabulary acquisition instruction emphasizes both implicit and also explicit learning. Learning, be it incidental or intentional, is above all a question of selective attentiveness and elaborated processing. The lack or existence of a learning will is not as crucial as the nature and frequency of the processing of new words. (Sokmen 1997; Lee et al. 2014). Whilst there is now more emphasis on explicit learning, it has been argued that the vocabulary development of a language, second and foreign in particular is more likely to be generally implicit or incidental beyond a certain level of proficiency (Carter and McCarthy 1988). Per se,, it is essential 'to explore the points at which explicit vocabulary learning is more efficient when it becomes implicit vocabulary learning...' (1988: 202). It has been suggested that the translation method, an explicit type of instruction, which uses the L1 in the teaching of L2, be supported in the ESL classrooms for learners whose English proficiency is at the elementary level; the key rationale is that it permits learners to correlate a new information to their L1 knowledge.

Webb (2009) explored the upshots of receptive and productive learning of word pairs (an item written in the L2 paired with its definition in the L1) on vocabulary knowledge on a group of Japanese native speakers. Learning word pairs entails memorising foreign vocabulary items coupled with their synonyms or translations and is certainly a traditional method of vocabulary learning. As described by Webb (2009), receptive learning of word pairs firstly involves the acquisition of a decontextualized L2 item to rehearse subsequently to recall its L1 significance. Nation (2001, 1990, 1980), Prince (1996), Siebert (1930) and Thorndike (1908) had seen learning word pairs to be a successive method of vocabulary learning. It has been indicated that beginners count on their L1 to transfer L2 meaning (Nation 1990) which means that their L1 works as a reference when they are comprehending the meaning of words.

2.2. The advantages of vocabulary learning with L1 use

Regarding vocabulary in particular, Auerbach (1993) argues that the use of learners' native language in the L2 classroom will have a positive effect on learners' second language learning, especially in the area of vocabulary. Gairns and Redman (1986) similarly point out that some would argue that translation might be legitimate for entries that have a word in the mother tongue that corresponds exactly, but it should otherwise be avoided. Translation may not always express the literal meaning of an entry, but then neither do English synonyms or definitions. Therefore, it could be reasonable to suggest that the translation technique will be effective in the teaching and learning vocabulary for elementary level ESL learners. This is because it offers students an understanding and insight into the language system. Finally, a bilingual

dictionary may be much more likely to help lower-proficiency learners in reading comprehension because their lack of vocabulary can be a significant factor in their inability to read (Knight, 1994).

2.3. The teaching methodology in Lestonnac.

The English Language Curriculum at the Lestonnac institution favours the communicative (CLT) approach for the first two years of Primary School, and no coursebooks are adopted. All the vocabulary teaching techniques require the use of English as the mode of instruction. The communicative approach is based on the belief that ESL learners must have significant exposure to L2, and that L_a and L_α should be avoided in the ESL classroom (Zimmerman 1997). Whilst the communicative approach encourages the use of the target language, studies have shown that the use of English alone may be more appropriate for learners with higher levels of proficiency. As a matter of fact, the use of English alone may cause problems in comprehending the language in elementary level ESL learners who have very limited knowledge in English. This is real, and clear especially in countries such as Catalonia, where the English language is a foreign language. Furthermore, Catalonia is a bilingual region: the Spanish language is highly spoken in several contexts, and the educational curriculum is provided in Catalan (with an exception for the Spanish language subject, which is taught in Spanish). As stated by Cenoz (2013), bilinguals have advantages over monolinguals when acquiring an additional language. Bilinguals are more experienced language learners and have potentially developed learning strategies to a larger extent than monolinguals. They also have a larger linguistic and intercultural repertoire at their disposal. Cenoz's perspective

focuses on multilingual speakers and their linguistic repertoires, including the interaction between their languages. For this reason, Making the most of bilingualism in teaching a third language can do nothing but increase students' ability to learn vocabulary.

A similar theory to Cenoz's is the interdependence hypothesis, formally expressed by Cummins (1981) with particular reference to bilingual instruction. To the extent that instruction in or L_a and/or L_α is effective in promoting proficiency in L_a and/or L_α , transfer of this proficiency to the foreign language (FL) will occur, given that there is adequate exposure to FL (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn FL. The interdependence hypothesis represents a stable explanatory construct that can be employed as a powerful tool in educational language planning. According to Cummings' hypothesis, I believe that a multilingual instruction entails no adverse effects on the development of either L_a and/or L_α or FL academic abilities.

3. Methodological principles

This section of the research work will describe the various principles and methodologies that guided the experiment, as well as their application to the particular classroom context described in the group description below. The theoretical background of the methodologies will be explained since they have a key relevance within the teaching development.

3.1. Communicative Approach.

With the objective of identifying the motivations that have determined the employment of an approach instead of another, it is useful to define the concept

of language first, despite the fact it could appear obvious. According to The Macmillan Dictionary of English, language is “the method of human communication using spoken or written words”. Such a definition underlines the idea of language as the method used to create communication. Consequently, in this method, the teachers have a role of instructors. Throughout the story of language teaching, researchers have attempted to discover the perfect recipe for the most efficient approach, while the world was developing an increasing necessity to adopt a lingua franca to connect. Long ago, in both political and cultural settings, Latin used to have this role of hegemony in written and oral communication. According to the way Latin was taught, the EFL teaching shaped itself: at the outset, pupils should acquire lexical items and linguistic rules by heart. When this point was overcome, they began teaching reading and writing skills. Undoubtedly, EFL teaching has been directing itself on accuracy and grammatical rules on and on. Nevertheless, as society evolves, so does the approach to teaching. The various methodologies employed in language teaching change over once students’ needs do. Hence, in the late 1970s a concept shift occurred: a language teaching based on communication aroused, and some teachers and students started to use it while others continued following the idea that a student's performance was affected by their cognitive behaviour. Whether we contemplate that English converted into the current lingua franca, we understand that now communication implies delivering and getting messages efficiently all over the world. The ability to communicate is what the Communicative approach supports, that is why implementing it nowadays in the teaching of EFL is utterly important. While there is not an obvious description of what teaching EFL with a communicative approach

implies so far, Jeremy Harmer imagines it as an umbrella term to define a teaching and learning system whose aim is to improve the student's communication skills. He makes a sharp distinction between this teaching system, and the sheer teaching of bits of language (2007, p. 70). As claimed by Celce-Murcia (2001), the Communicative Language Approach to Teaching has fostered the awareness of a need to focus on the communicative characteristics of language use as an integral part of the teaching curricula, that should include communicative activities, which have the typical purpose of involving students in real communicative contexts. In this sense, grammatical accuracy plays a secondary role, in favour of efficient communication, especially at lower levels of proficiency. Though, these activities will eventually come to be truly communicative when learners have the eagerness of speaking. As we previously stated, all teaching approaches change when society does, to fulfil the evolving needs. The actual phenomenon of globalization has been creating the need to be constantly communicating. According to Celce-Murcia (2001), the most important goal of language teaching is to give students the ability to communicate by using the target language, even when communication is difficult; for this reason, teachers must produce suitable and diverse interaction, and give students the opportunity to put their communicative skills into practice.

3.2. Task-Based Learning.

As we already witnessed on several occasions, many methodologies during the twentieth century struggled to achieve accuracy in the production of a message in a target language. However, probably because of the limited piece of language to which students were exposed in class, several methods did not

match genuine communicative conditions. Parents and teachers do not require children to be accurate from the start, and something similar should happen with learners of a second language. TBL, acronym standing for Task-based Learning, is a methodology used in EFL. Jeremy Harmer (2007, p. 71) affirms that task-based learning makes the performance of meaningful tasks central to the learning process. If students are focused on the accomplishment of a task, they are just as likely to learn language as they are if they are focusing on language forms, then understanding TBL as the pathway by which students acquire a target language most proficiently. According to Willis (2004) Task-based Learning is based on three main rules: 1. The learning of languages is a dense organic process. Concisely, teaching an isolated piece of language does not provide an immediate command of it. 2. A foreign language is acquired properly when the focus is on meaning. Learners should be continually exposed to intelligible input from a broad range of backgrounds, either written or spoken. 3. Besides being exposed, learners should be provided with opportunities of employing target language. The structure of a task-based learning method includes three stages. Firstly, TBL relies on a pre-task phase, where learners are shown the task and the expected outcome. The second phase is the actual task: learners are instructed to achieve a goal focusing on meaning. At this stage, the strategies are explicit and adequate for the learners' age. The post-task is the last phase. Here, learners show their progress as a whole-class activity. The TBL setting interlaces with two crucial ideas: learner centeredness and learner's active involvement in the task.

3.3. A combined approach based on the learners' needs

All the concepts illustrated above demand another important clarification: the teaching strategy still considers the learner's needs, and this is the reason why the translation method is introduced as an experiment. Students at a low level of proficiency need to establish a bond between L1 and L2. Using a communicative approach, the main focus for teachers is to foster lexicon and oral expression. In parallel, the main focus for students is to understand and then put into practice what they have understood, and they usually do it with translation, to establish a bond between native and target language. They mostly do it until an intermediate level of proficiency is obtained. This approach puts the students in the spotlight, not only giving them the opportunity to create and produce language in real-life communicative contexts, but also helping them to create a more accurate lexical reference with translation that appears so useful to them. This idea emerges from the assumption that we, as human beings, are intrinsically communicative, and it is in our nature to be independent and proactive, but as teachers we should not forget to observe our students and indulge a need, if we consider it could help us to reach our purpose. For what refers to the task-based learning method, it can be easily applied to the present investigation because of the focus on meaning, and its consequent consistency with the translation method.

4. Question and hypothesis

The present paper focuses on the following question:

Q: What are the effects of a well-implemented translation-based method on the amount of English vocabulary learnt, in contrast with a L2-only program?

The expectation is that a translation-based task, if well implemented, can facilitate learning and memorizing vocabulary more than a L2-only program. It is expected for the teacher to call out the term and to wait for an answer (see in activities in appendices 4, 6 and 7). If students are not familiar with some terms, I shall expect her to give them the meaning in the L1. It is important to be aware of the teacher's strategies and beliefs she employs to present and revise the vocabulary. Her usual method is L2-only.

The answer to the question draws on research data showing consistently strong relationships across languages in foreign language learning contexts. According to the literature review, and the theoretical positive effects of vocabulary translation in vocabulary learning, we hypothesize that using tasks based on translation promotes vocabulary learning.

5. Overview of the teaching situation

5.1. Group description

According to the short amount of available time, it has been decided to conduct the experiment during the development of just one didactic unit: "The Market".

A quasi-experimental design is used in which two groups were compared: an experimental and a control group, section A and B of the second year of Lestonnac Primary school. Being between seven and eight years old, children do not have an English coursebook, and, during the English hours in the previous year of Primary school, they have been taught through TPL and communicative approach, with songs and little dances, that allowed them to learn by heart and internalize structures through repetition. Before the application of the translation-based method, both groups of participants took a

pre-test to check their equality and current vocabulary knowledge. The experimental group is composed of 24 students and the control group has 22: they all have an A1 level of English proficiency. Following these steps, they were taught a new didactic unit about “The Market”, with a variation in the vocabulary teaching strategy and some tasks. The control group was taught using a L2-only approach, both for teaching and tasks, while the experimental group was instructed through translation-based teaching and tasks. The independent variable measured throughout the experiment was the strategies used by the participants. The dependent variable consisted of participants’ scores on pre- and post-test evaluating their vocabulary awareness. The pre-test was carried out orally by the two groups; it consisted of a short list of words about the new topic (see appendix 2). The aim was to ensure that both groups of learners were equal in terms of their proficiency. At the end of the didactic unit about “The Market”, again each group undertook the same activity as the post-test.

5.2. Classroom Routine

When the English subject is in the first period, the lesson starts with the “colour monster”: each child should stick a paper with their name on one of the four posters that are hanging under the blackboard. Each poster is the face of a monster representing a feeling (happiness, calmness, sadness, scare). After that, the teacher checks the papers and asks them in Catalan how they are feeling and why. Afterwards, they pray and then the lesson starts. Usually the lesson opens with a vocabulary brainstorming that can be done through little songs or questions about the previous lesson, that the teacher asks the

students by saying their names. Before starting the lesson, sometimes the teacher guides children on a mental vacation using an English meditation text. Occasionally, at the end of the class, the teacher plays a video on youtube about the topic she taught, and sometimes she asks children to clean up their tables, pick up a book from the class library and read until the next teacher comes. Generally speaking, they don't assign homeworks.

5.3. Individual vs pair/group work

There is a good balance between individual activities and the ones done in pairs and/or groups. The teachers' methodological approach is set along the lines of the PPP method with a focus on CLT. Generally, they introduce the topic by an explicit explanation (the "presentation" phase). At this step of the lesson, students pay attention and do not do any activity other than being focused. The "practice" phase is usually done as a pair or group work, mostly as a whole-class activity. The teacher usually asks students to answer some questions about what she has just explained. The "production" phase is usually an evaluable activity that the students should do individually. Children are able to switch from a classroom activity to another without any difficulty.

5.4. Materials and Technology

Students have tablets, but we have never used them (throughout the duration of the study), even if during English class, technology and the Internet are quite important. Internet resources, such as games and videos are highly used during the English lessons. With the first and second year students, the teacher uses many resources from Youtube (mostly stories and songs), and with the

third-year students, the Internet is used to play Kahoot games, give the learners points in *Class Dojo* and do the coursebook exercises as well, like whole-class activities. The activities are projected on the whiteboard. Children look more interested and motivated when some youtube videos are played or the coursebook activities are done on the projector. The disadvantage is that they quickly become accustomed and disinterested: sometimes, all this technology looks like a palliative.

5.5. Mixed-ability, sociocultural background, diversity.

The teacher succeeds in managing the issue successfully; she has been teaching the same class for years, so she knows her students quite well. Teaching these children is quite challenging, and sometimes it seems impossible, because they disturb their peers. When it looks too difficult to calm down the students (especially those with behaviour disorders or conditions like ADHD, overactivity or Asperger), the teacher asks them to get out of the class and come back only when they have relaxed. The majority of children with disorders are in the control group. Some children are newly-arrived in town, so they don't even speak the vehicular language, Catalan. It must be hard for them. In any case, they are well-followed and I am sure they will have kept up by the end of the year. There are no particular cultural issues, as far as I could see, or perhaps they manage them so well that I did not notice anything. The teacher has a particular sensibility to a sexism-free and racism-free teaching. She is inclusive and open-minded. She keeps explaining to the kids that, for example, there are no colours for girls and colours for boys, as like carnival costumes or super heroes.

5.6. The importance of gamification

Many resource books when examining games in English Language Teaching make a distinction among those employed to develop grammar, vocabulary knowledge, speaking skills, etc. Wright and his colleagues (2006) say that learning a language is difficult as it demands from learners a great effort to undertake different tasks, from understanding to using the new language while speaking and then writing. They set forth that effort cannot be irregular, and students' work and interest must be maintained all through the learning process. Students' work and interest are nuances of motivation, and they can be achieved by using games in the classroom. Some teachers, even if they may believe in the potential of games, do not seem happy playing them in class. Toth (1995: p. 7) explains some of the concerns shown by teachers about games: "the children get too excited and then they don't listen to my instructions" or "I have too many children in my class to control the language they are using." Toth (1995: p. 8) also suggests that games are occasionally seen as "relaxation activities in which students are not actually studying English. Games are "often severely marginalised and tend to be used for some ephemeral pedagogic purpose – not as a means of learning" (Cook, 2000: p. 183, mentioned in Chou, 2014: p. 286). Toth (1995) claims that most classes count children with different learning styles, so playing a game may be advantageous. It is essential to guarantee that the games have strong teaching and learning goals (Chou, 2014). We can relate to various categories of games gleaned from the facet being analysed. According to the type of learning the teacher intends to encourage in the classroom, Hadfield (1998) presents two kinds of games,

competitive and cooperative games. In the second one, “players or teams work together towards a common goal” (p. 4) and in the first one “players or teams race to be the first to reach the goal” (p. 4). As per the choice of the game, In Chou’s (2014) research work, children played Monopoly, Twister and Crossword. In Mehregan (2014), the experimental group took part in Hangman, Flash Card Memory Game, Bingo and Odd Man Out. In the present work, word puzzles, hangman (see appendices 4 and 5) and crazy teacher (it will be explained below) were played.

5.7. Structure of the lesson

The lessons open as per the classroom routine in paragraph 5.2. After the warm-up, the proper lesson starts. One of the activities that has been used most is called “Crazy teacher”. The teacher played this game in 2B and I played it for the first time in 2A (the experimental group) after observing her once. It is a game designed to improve and practice vocabulary related to a specific topic and some simple grammar structures concerning asking and answering properly. I have used it for the first time in the previous didactic unit about jobs and occupations. The first thing to do is to hang on the blackboard a poster about the topic, with some pictures on it. Later, the teacher creates a signpost that says “crazy teacher”. The first person that has to be the “crazy teacher” is the teacher herself, in order to explain the rules. She places the signpost on her smock using a clothespin and she starts asking questions about the poster on the blackboard. The reason why it is called “crazy teacher” is that she points to a picture (for example, a carrot) and she asks what it is (for example, <Is it a carrot?>). Students answer <Yes, it is> or <No, it isn’t>. After the teacher plays,

children play the same role in turn. This activity is effective and not tiring at all. Students participate actively and are engaged, since peer-learning and gamification make them live this experience as a game. The activity has been played in the two classrooms, every day using a different grammatical structure (e.g. <Do you like carrot?> <Yes, I do>/<No, I don't> or Does you brother like broccoli?> <Yes, he does>/<No, he doesn't>, as well as <How much do you like carrots?> <Not so much>/<A lot>). Nevertheless, to check the effectiveness of a translation-based method, a peculiar difference has been applied to this game. In the experimental group, as a whole-class activity, the teacher asks, after each question, the translation in Catalan and Spanish of the word. By a show of hand, any child can answer the question.

Another activity that has been largely used is the worksheet, as an individual activity (see appendix 4, 5, 6 and 7). The worksheets used have been designed to be completed according to a listening. The teacher reads or speaks while children fill the worksheet up. In appendix 4, they are supposed to write the name of the food under the related shop. To check the effectiveness of the translation-based method, another difference has been applied to this activity between the experimental and the control group. In the control group, the entire activity is done in the target language, while in the experimental group, the children are instructed both in the target and the native languages.

6. Data analysis

Quantitative data obtained in this study were analysed through Microsoft Excel. Paired-sample t-test was used separately for each group to see the differences between pre- and post-test scores. Also, an independent-sample t-test was

used for the post-test scores of two groups to understand whether the scores of the experimental and control group differ from each other. With the help of these analyses, the research question was answered. The post-test had to be the same as the pre-test. It was in the same format and level, in order to check possible variations between the two groups in the knowledge and skills of all subjects involved in the study (see appendix 3).

7. Results

7.1. Results of pre-tests

Before starting the new didactic unit, the two classes took the pre-test and they had slightly different exam score means, which is 19.75 for the experimental group and 20.09 for the control group. In order to answer the research question addressing the effectiveness of the translation-based program, pre-test scores of experimental and control group, pre- and post-test scores of both experimental group and control group, and at the end post-test scores of both groups were compared.

Table 1 - Results of pre-test scores

Groups	N	mean	SD
Experimental	24	7,71	1,76
Control	22	8	1,63

Table 1 above shows the pre-test score averages of the experimental group and control group. The pre-test score average of the experimental group students is 7.71, on the other hand, the pre-test score average of the control group students is 8. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare pre-test

scores of experimental and control groups in order to assess if there is a significant difference between them. There was not a statistically significant difference in scores of both the experimental group ($M=7.71$, $SD=1.76$) and control group ($M=8$, $SD=1.63$), or between them (the two-tailed P value equals 0.563. By conventional criteria, this difference is considered to be not statistically significant). These results suggest that academic achievement levels of the experimental and control group are similar but not equal. Specifically, the control group has a little superiority over the other group.

7.2. Results of post-tests

At the end of the application both groups were given the same post-test. An independent sample t -test was conducted to compare scores of experimental and control groups, in order to understand if there is a significant difference between them (Table-2). It was found that there was a difference between the post-test scores of the experimental ($M=16.83$, $SD=1.6$) and control groups ($M=16.36$, $SD=1.5$), even if not considered as statistically significant. In fact, the P value is 0,311. However, this indicates that learners in the experimental and control group differ in their scores after the experimental group, which was taught through a translation-based program (unlike the control group).

Table 2. Post-test scores of experimental and control group

Groups	N	mean	SD
Experimental	24	16,83	1,6
Control	22	16,36	1,5

Results showed that using translation-based tasks in teaching vocabulary programs affect the EFL learners in their lexicon knowledge, even if the results

are not exceedingly different. The independent sample t-test results indicate that learners who were taught vocabulary with L1 translation differed positively from the learners who were not, but the L2-only method seems quite effective as well. That little superiority of the control group over the other group shown in the pre-test has been somewhat overturned.

7.3. Comparison between pre and post-test

Experimental group	N	mean	SD
Pre-test	24	7,71	7,28
Post-test	24	16,83	

Table 3. Pre-test and post-test scores of experimental group

In order to determine if there is a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores of the experimental group, a paired sample t-test was performed (Table-3). The results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between pre-test ($M=7.71$) and post-test ($M=16.83$) scores of the experimental group. The P value is less than 0,0001, this means that the difference is extremely statistically significant. These results indicated that the vocabulary translation helped students to memorize the new lexicon, in other words, it made learners score higher and perform better.

Table 4. Pre-test and post-test scores of control group

Control group	N	mean	SD
Pre-test	22	8	5,9
Post-test	22	16,36	

A paired sample t-test was computed to assess whether there is a significant difference between pre- and post-test scores of the control group (Table 4). The results showed that students in the control group improved their vocabulary as well, but to a lower extent in comparison to the experimental group. Learners in the control group who went on their education in a traditional environment (L2-only teaching) showed progress in their scores too. However, the percentage increase of the experimental group's score is almost 4% higher than the control group one (about one more word).

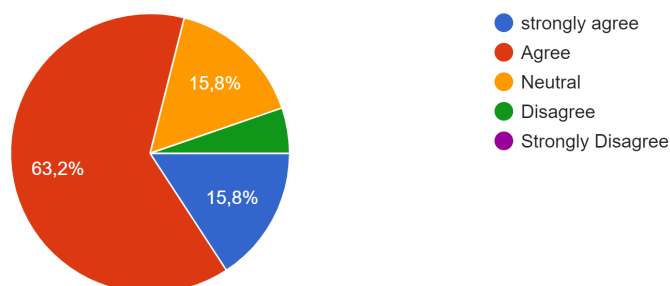
8. Relevant results of the questionnaire for teachers.

According to the results of a questionnaire that has been submitted to 19 native and non-native English teachers from private and public institutions in several countries (Spain, Italy, UK, Russia, Vietnam, China and USA: see appendix 3), the results seem to show that there are probably no right and wrong techniques. The questionnaire has been divided into two sections. The first ten questions have been designed to gather results of the teachers' beliefs about general statements regarding language teaching, while the second part's answers refer to the translation method applied to the actual dynamics in their own EL classrooms. In the first section, a Likert scale has been adopted to determine to what extent the sample agreed or disagreed with a certain statement; in the second section, the scale's aim is to verify the likelihood of some situations proposed. The organization and the structure of the questions required quick answers, and all teachers replied according to their personal beliefs and feelings: there were no right or wrong answers. The form had some key

questions, like the first one: <<Using the native language to teach a foreign one is a necessary tool that makes communication between students and teacher more effective>>. Its results are literally fragmented, with a predominance of neutral answers. Such an outcome can be interpreted as a confused opinion about the issue: the vast majority of the interviewed educators teach according to the L2-only method, but they seemed quite disoriented when they were asked this question. Two respondents agreed totally or partially, the 52,5% answered neutrally, and seven people disagreed. Why so? One possible answer is that teaching with a L2-only method is pure utopia. For instance, Atkinson (1987) states in his work that the mother tongue is profitable because it is strongly related to the learners' preferred strategies of learning. Students necessarily need to get to L2 knowledge and awareness passing through their L1. For this reason, every teacher knows that L1 is needed, albeit to a lesser extent. The results in question 5 confirm this theory. The statement was: <<Teaching a foreign language using exclusively that language enhances motivation and implicit learning of a lot of grammar and vocabulary>>.

5. Teaching a foreign language using exclusively that language, enhances motivation and implicit learning of a lot of grammar and vocabulary.

19 risposte

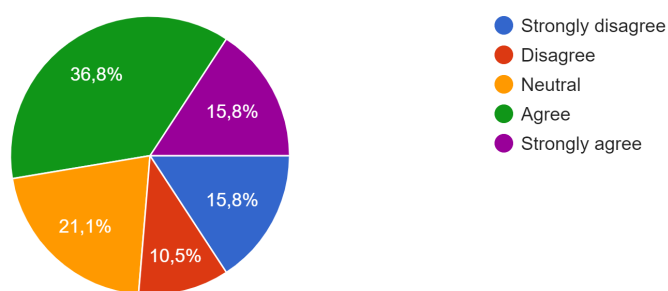


78,9% of them agreed totally or partially. This reaction might derive from their ideal teaching situation. Teachers know very well the positive effects of a

L2-only method on the implicit vocabulary learning, nonetheless they also know it cannot be applied to the letter. Among all the questions in the first section, the one that fractures the most of their opinions is the number 6: <<Vocabulary is more important than grammar, at an early stage of a second language's learning process>>. Its structure is deliberately maddening, because of its peremptory tone and significance, and it seems to have provoked the most unexpected reaction. More than 52% agreed, more than 20% expressed absolute indifference and almost 27% disagreed.

6. Vocabulary is more important than grammar, at an early stage of a second language's learning process.

19 risposte



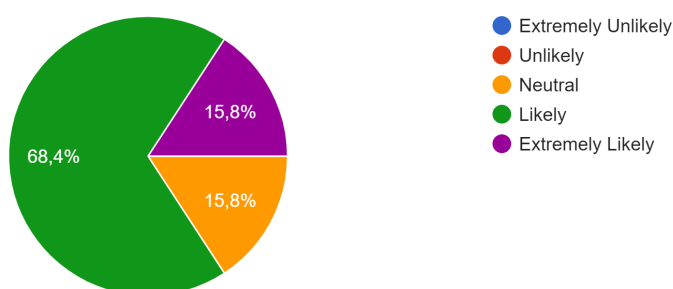
The importance of teaching L2 lexicon versus grammar has been largely discussed in the related literature and partially in the introduction of the present work. It seems to be an outstanding issue to consider when the moment of programming the syllabus comes. Yet, the teachers' opinions give the idea that this aspect of teaching methodology is not quite clear to them, and they usually adapt to their specific learners' abilities.

In the second section of the questionnaire, the Likert scale asks the respondents to provide their opinion about the alleged likelihood of some statements, according to the real EL circumstances they experience. All the statements are related to the vocabulary translation from L2 to L1, be it made

by the students or the teacher. Results of statements 14, 11 and 12 stand out for their relevance and consistency with the present research work. In assertion number 14, <<Some of my students tend to translate some vocabulary in their native languages>>, 84,2% of the respondents considered this statement as likely or extremely likely, proving that the overwhelming majority of students demand to recall the native language when learning vocabulary because they need it. The rest of the answers were neutral, perhaps due to the fact they did not notice this tendency. No teachers found this statement the least bit unlikely.

14. Some of my students tend to translate some vocabulary in their native languages.

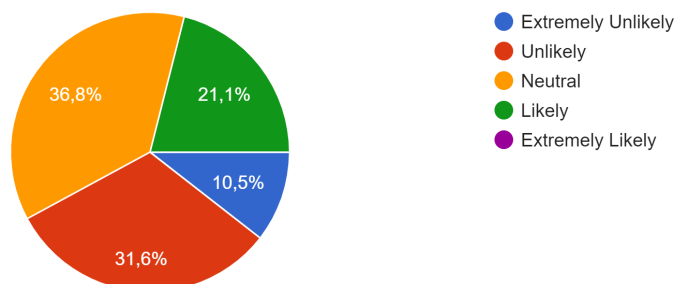
19 risposte



Yet, in statement 11, <<Translating the vocabulary that I teach is useful to explain its meaning to my students>>, 36,8% answered neutrally, 21,1% likely and 42% partially or totally unlikely.

11. Translating the vocabulary that I teach is useful to explain its meaning to my students.

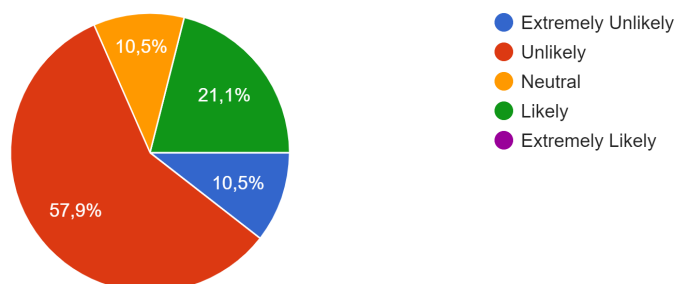
19 risposte



Is it perhaps true that teachers, knowing that their students need to translate vocabulary to understand it, do not have an exact guideline or do not care about that? I personally think that teachers do care about the effectiveness of their method, and I interpret these strange results with a general lack of research in the field that makes teachers confused. On top of that, in statement number 12, <<When my students ask me for the translation of English vocabulary is because they don't pay attention to the use of English>>, 68,4% of the teachers decided that this statement is completely or somewhat unlikely, 10,5% expressed indifference and 21,1% considered it possible.

12. When my students ask me for the translation of English vocabulary is because they don't pay attention to the use of English.

19 risposte

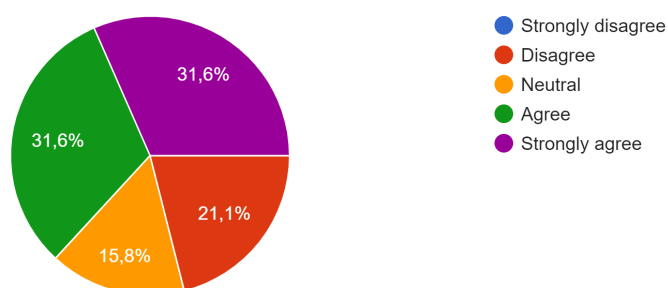


21,1% of teachers must certainly have their reasons to think so, but there seems to be no study proving such a theory. Putting aside these results for a moment, it is interesting to see the other responses. How is it possible that such a big majority of teachers think that their students' tendency to translate words is not a negative thing, and yet a little more than 21,1% of them use the translation-method in teaching lexicon (see answers to statement 11)? Once again, the answer might be that this field has been poorly studied so far.

In the last section of the questionnaire, teachers have been asked to leave a comment or justify their answers, if they liked. Four people did. One of them commented specifically on statement number 10, <<At the early stages of language learning, speaking and listening skills are more important than reading and writing skills>> , that showed this weird result:

10. At the early stages of language learning, speaking and listening skills are more important than reading and writing skills.

19 response



The respondent's answer is "disagree", but the comment is: <<it depends on the age of students. Listening and speaking would be the ONLY skills when teaching to very young learners. But reading and writing are also important for adults>>. I personally agree with professor Hazim Al Dilaimy from Al-Maarif University, that, in a comment on a discussion forum on researchgate (you can

find the link to the discussion in the references) states that priority is mainly devoted to the speaking skill. There are many people who can speak well but they are unable to write. In addition, there is a principle in language that it is basically oral. The other comments are reported below.

16. Would you like to make a further comment on any of the previous questions? Please, use the space below (you can see the entire questionnaire clicking on the link in the footnote¹).

1. In regards to translation into the students' L1 for enhancing comprehension of vocabulary words in the L2, I think it's an effective approach to second language learning because it allows students to develop in the language faster. Utilizing translation as the main method, though, can be detrimental for the students' progress in the L2 because it prevents them from using the language to communicate and to solve problems.
2. The use of L2 during the lessons for young learners gives them the chance to learn in a natural way. It requires a lot of creativity to teachers in planning enjoyable activities: through games, songs, chants, races, storytelling and so on kids absorb more than we can imagine! Nowadays you can find everything on the internet but teachers are always the guides and it's necessary to choose the right material to reach the aim that is to involve children in the learning process as much as possible!
3. Each child has its own background and some are fast learners, others need more time and each child has its own way of learning. (For some children especially beginners you might have to translate some words in their native language but you should always try and use English only as much as possible and use visuals).

¹<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1-guS3p0OKaHrwWycqznCR8ujesPyKsDR-xZxbw--UQ8/edit#responses>

9. Discussion and Conclusions

9.1 Brief summary of results

An important observation to be made is about the activity in appendix 5, the reading. This didactic unit has been the first one in which students have been practicing the reading skill so far.

As per the exercise in appendix 1 done by the experimental group, the expectation was that the teacher would call the word out loud and the students would provide the equivalent in their first language and write the word in the correct column. And this was how she proceeded. However, due to her firm belief on the advantages of L2-only teaching, she never actually appeared convinced of the project. The quantitative data obtained from the tests revealed nevertheless that the experimental group obtained better results than the control group. Moreover, the outcomes achieved by the experimental group could have been better if time had not been so short. Translation seemed to be more effective in helping the students to retain the words. In any case, although the experimental method resulted as effective, the results of the control group in the post-test are higher than their pre-test scores, which may indicate that the L2-only approach they are normally taught with, is effective too, even if to a slightly lower extent.

Upon hearing the students of both groups and observing their improvement, whether they prefer the L2-only method or translation remains unresolved. For this reason, the researcher realises that it would have been helpful to conduct a survey with an anonymous questionnaire. Yet, this was infeasible due to time constraints.

9.2 Pedagogical impact.

The quantitative data collected suggests that translation should be used in class as it has proved to be effective to learn and retain vocabulary. Though, students call for some variation in class to uphold their attentiveness and motivation. This could be fulfilled by employing games more frequently in their lessons. The teacher must encounter a balance between the various strategies adopted. As classrooms include students with different learning styles, a variation in methods may accomplish all the students' needs.

9.3 Limitations and strengths

It is important to acknowledge the limitations in the event of a further application. Some variables in this study might have affected the final results. The main obstacle of this study has been the time. As mentioned above, the experimental group could have obtained even higher results if they would have been exposed to translation during a longer interval of time. Besides, some mistakes made could have been corrected with more time, such as making students fill out a questionnaire to learn their opinion on translation. Another limitation is that it is a small-scale investigation. In any case, the major drawback might be the class's uneven number and the children's different learning abilities. It is possible that the final results would have been different, if this experiment had been conducted in a peculiar school setting, in which the children in the two classes were equally distributed and had - ideally - identical learning strategies. For this reason, a future research and investigation is needed and recommended to confirm the effectiveness of the present study.

Among the strengths, I can bring up that I have been able to execute all the research and the tests myself. Moreover, I have personally observed the issues of all students, and I have learnt how their teacher introduced and revised the vocabulary, a critical element to properly conduct the investigation.

9.4. Conclusion and limitations of the questionnaire for teachers.

A questionnaire to EFL/ESL teachers has been conducted. It showed really interesting results about how fragmented is the general opinion about the use of L1, the translation-based method and the importance of vocabulary against grammar in early teaching. These results provided a further demonstration of the fact that further research in the field is highly needed. Nonetheless, there is the possibility that the questionnaire has limitations as well. One of them is cultural, being the respondents people that live and work in different parts of the world. They are native and non-native English speakers, teaching to children coming from many different nations. Although the questionnaire seems statistically-wise, its results may be affected by this important variable. The second variable is the students' age and L2 level. Some teachers were working in primary schools, but others teach to high school students. This variable could have affected their beliefs and feelings. It might be interesting to see the answers of a group of teachers coming from the same nation, and teaching to students with the same age and L2 level.

9.5 Future research

My materials can be used by any other researcher who is interested in studying the phenomenon of teaching and learning vocabulary. Yet, I would recommend that this be carried out over a longer period of time and with a bigger sample if possible. In addition, I suggest administering an anonymous questionnaire to students. According to the teachers' questionnaires, it has emerged that students translate because they need to: this is why it would be interesting to ask them. The researcher could also carry out a "words assessment" to discover what words have been simpler to acquire and attempt to examine the motives. Ultimately, it would also be noteworthy, as said, to test the two methods on the same group of students and then equate the outcomes. This would allow the researcher to detect which technique is more recommended for each student.

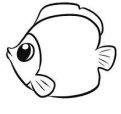
APPENDICES. Appendix 1 – “pre and post-test”

1. This is a  _____.

2.  _____ are red.

3. I like  _____ juice.

4. I eat two  _____.


5. I go to the market.  _____

6. I buy  _____ at the _____ store.

7. I eat an  _____.

8. I eat  _____.

9. I want an  _____.

10. This is a  _____

11. I eat _____ in Summer.



12. My brother loves _____



13. I eat _____ in May



14. Mum loves _____



15. _____ is sweet.



16. John doesn't like _____



17. This is a _____



18. In Autumn we eat _____



19. I love _____



20. We use _____ to make pizza.



Appendix 3 - Questionnaire for EL teachers

As part of my research TFM at the Rovira i Virgili University, I am conducting a survey that investigates some techniques in vocabulary teaching to young EL learners. I will appreciate if you could complete the following table. Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential.

Teacher's details: **Name** _____ **Gender:** Male/Female **Education** _____

Strongly agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
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According to your teaching beliefs and experience, and independently from the literature in the field,		1	2	3	4	5
1	Using the native language to teach a foreign one is a necessary tool that makes communication between students and teacher more effective.					
2	Using the native language to teach a foreign one is not a necessary tool for beginners.					
3	Bilingual learners have a better capacity for learning a third one, compared to monolingual learners.					
4	Young learners learn many languages at once with less effort than older ones.					
5	Teaching a foreign language using exclusively that language, enhances motivation and implicit learning of a lot of grammar and vocabulary					
6	Vocabulary is more important than grammar, at an early stage of a second language's learning process.					
7	When teaching kids, it is easier to teach them vocabulary (e.g. through songs) that they can learn by heart (implicit learning).					
8	If kids learn grammar structures by heart, they slowly develop automation in using that structure.					
9	When kids learn vocabulary by heart, they "crystallize" that knowledge and slowly learn how to use the words.					
10	At the early stages of learning, speaking and listening skills are more important than reading and writing skills.					

Extremely Unlikely (1)	Unlikely (2)	Neutral (3)	Likely (4)	Extremely Likely (5)
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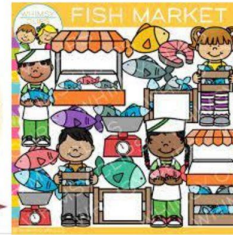
I personally think that		1	2	3	4	5
11	Translating the vocabulary that I teach is useful to explain its meaning to my students.					
12	When my students ask me for the translation of English vocabulary is because they don't pay attention to the use of English.					
13	If my students ask me to translate some vocabulary, is because they are not very skilled in language learning.					
14	Some of my students tend to translate some vocabulary in their native languages.					
15	My students tend to translate vocabulary when motivated in learning.					

16. Would you like to make a further comment on any of the previous questions? Please, use the space below.

Appendix 4 - individual work

The Market Place

Listen. Write the correct names under each picture.



Appendix 5 - individual work

Lesson 3

Reading

1. Read the information about this market

Jefrew's Market

Jefrew's Market is in Liverpool. It's a small market.
There are ten stalls.

We can buy meat and sausages
in three different butcher's shops.
The favorite one is the Kini's
Butcher shop.



Also, we can find a bakery with the best bread in
town. Next to it, we can see two green groceries with
different kinds of vegetables and fruits like eggplants,
artichokes and mushrooms.

Finally, you can find two fish shop, a chemist and
a flower shop with sunflowers.

2. Answer True or False.

Very good!

Jefrew's Market is a big market

False

There are 4 butcher's shops.

False

There isn't a fish shop.

False

You can ^{buy} but eggplants and sunflowers.

True

There is one green grocery.

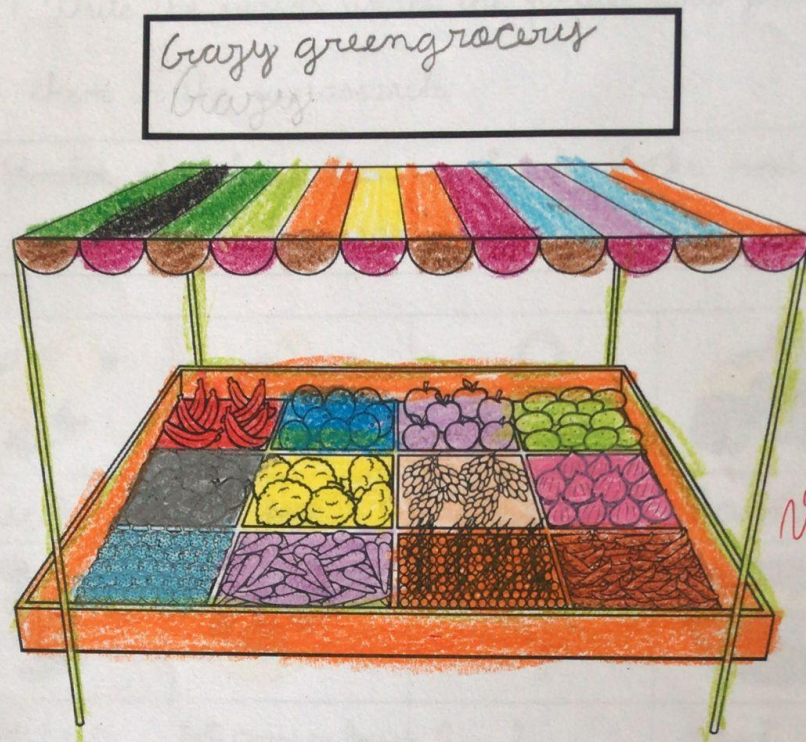
False

Appendix 6 - Individual work

Lesson 4

Listening

1. Listen and colour



Very good

2. Write two sentences about the picture using two word from the box.

Next to, behind, on, under in, between

The lemons are between the bananas and apples.

The cauliflowers are next to the peppers.

appendix 7 - whole-class activity

Lesson 1

Where do you buy food? Ask your partners and create the graphic:



After speaking about the poster of the market...



Very good!

Can you write the market stalls that you can see?

Butcher's shop, bakery, greengrocer *up* and fish shop.

appendix 8 - Individual work

bakery	bread
butchershop	cabbage
cake	chicken
cucumber	eggplant
eggs	fishshop
greengrocery	grocerystore
lettuce	meat
milk	prawns

find the words in the puzzle

G	R	E	E	N	G	R	O	C	E	R	Y	A	B
F	W	Y	M	E	A	T	E	I	W	M	T	G	U
C	I	B	G	M	F	Y	F	Z	J	I	J	R	T
A	C	S	W	V	L	Q	M	C	J	L	E	O	C
B	Q	V	H	W	C	E	V	P	A	K	U	C	H
B	R	E	A	S	O	H	T	F	F	K	L	E	E
A	Z	G	B	E	H	V	I	T	T	R	E	R	R
G	T	G	R	A	G	O	S	C	U	J	V	Y	S
E	Q	S	E	M	J	G	P	R	K	C	D	S	H
L	K	V	A	O	P	K	P	F	B	E	E	T	O
G	J	A	D	G	K	G	U	L	E	T	N	O	P
B	A	K	E	R	Y	X	N	Y	A	F	G	R	Y
C	P	C	U	C	U	M	B	E	R	N	E	E	A
P	R	A	W	N	S	B	C	C	L	G	T	F	G

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