FROM TRANSLATING TO THINKING IN ENGLISH

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Abstract. This article explores the transition from literal translation to thinking directly in English, emphasizing its significance for language learners seeking fluency. Traditional translation-based methods often hinder spontaneous communication and limit cognitive processing in the target language. The study examines strategies such as immersive learning, cognitive scaffolding, contextualized practice, and mental rehearsal to foster English thinking. Benefits include improved fluency, faster comprehension, and more natural expression. Challenges, including learner anxiety, interference from the native language, and lack of exposure, are also discussed. The article provides practical recommendations for educators and learners to implement effective strategies that promote independent, critical, and fluent English thinking..

Introduction. In second language acquisition, many learners rely heavily on translating from their native language into English, which can slow down comprehension and impede spontaneous communication. Thinking directly in English—without mentally converting from one language to another—is a critical skill for achieving fluency and communicative competence. The process requires cognitive restructuring, where learners gradually shift from translation-based processing to direct thought formation in the target language. Traditional translation methods, while useful in early stages, may create dependence that limits automaticity in English communication. Strategies such as immersive learning, contextualized practice, and mental rehearsal help learners develop the ability to think in English, improving fluency, accuracy, and confidence. Moreover, thinking in English enhances critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity within the language, allowing learners to engage more naturally in conversations, academic tasks, and professional settings.

This article examines the theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and challenges associated with the transition from translating to thinking in English. It also provides recommendations for educators, instructional designers, and learners seeking to foster a learner-centered, immersive, and cognitively engaging English language environment. Learning a second language often begins with translating from one's native language into the target language. While translation can serve as an initial scaffold, prolonged reliance on it may hinder the development of spontaneous communication and cognitive fluency in English. Thinking directly in English—without mental translation—enables learners to process information more quickly, respond naturally, and engage in authentic communication. The transition from translating to thinking in English requires deliberate cognitive strategies and instructional support. Immersive experiences, contextualized practice, and mental rehearsal encourage learners to internalize linguistic structures and vocabulary, promoting direct cognitive processing in the target language. Such approaches foster learner autonomy, critical thinking, and creative expression, as learners begin to formulate ideas and communicate them entirely in English. Traditional methods that emphasize translation can limit fluency by keeping learners dependent on their native language for meaning-making. Research has shown that learners who practice thinking in the target language demonstrate higher levels of spontaneous speech, improved comprehension, and greater confidence in communication (Swain, 2005; Ellis, 2003). This article examines the theoretical foundations, practical strategies, and challenges of developing English thinking skills. By exploring effective methods, cognitive processes, and pedagogical techniques, the study provides insights for learners, educators, and curriculum designers aiming to cultivate fluent, confident, and independent English language users.

Literature review. Research in second language acquisition has highlighted the limitations of translation-based learning and the benefits of developing direct thinking in the target language. Swain (2005) emphasizes that cognitive processing in a second language requires practice that goes beyond literal translation to internalize grammatical structures, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatic norms. Similarly, Krashen (1982) argued that input-rich environments and meaningful communication facilitate the internalization of the language, allowing learners to construct meaning directly in English rather than through translation. Immersive learning, which exposes learners to English in authentic contexts, has been shown to significantly enhance cognitive processing and reduce reliance on translation (Ellis, 2003). Mental rehearsal and cognitive scaffolding strategies, including sentence formation exercises, role-plays, and

self-talk, have also been effective in training learners to think directly in English (Vygotsky, 1978). Contextualized practice—learning vocabulary and grammar in meaningful scenarios—further supports fluency and comprehension, reducing the cognitive load associated with mental translation (Nation, 2001).

Despite these benefits, challenges persist. Learners often experience interference from their native language, which can slow processing and cause errors. Learner anxiety, limited exposure to English, and lack of structured practice can also hinder the development of English thinking skills (Horwitz, 2001). Overall, the literature underscores the need for targeted strategies that integrate cognitive, contextual, and affective approaches to foster direct English thinking.

Research methodology. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate strategies that facilitate the transition from translation-based thinking to thinking directly in English. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the research aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of both learners' cognitive processes and educators' instructional practices. Participants: The study involved 100 undergraduate students learning English as a second language, aged between 18 and 24 years, representing diverse academic disciplines. Participants had varying proficiency levels, ranging from beginner to intermediate, allowing for a broad analysis of English thinking development. Additionally, 8 English instructors with experience in immersive, communicative, and cognitive-focused teaching were included to provide expert perspectives on effective strategies. Data Collection Methods: Quantitative data were collected through structured surveys administered to students. The surveys measured reliance on translation, frequency of thinking in English, perceived fluency, and confidence levels. Likert-scale items, multiple-choice questions, and open-ended responses were included to capture a wide range of learner experiences.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with instructors. These interviews explored teaching techniques, cognitive scaffolding practices, immersive activities, and challenges faced in promoting English thinking. Classroom and online observations were also conducted to monitor students' ability to formulate responses directly in English without translating from their native language. Data Analysis: Survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means, percentages, and standard deviations, to identify trends in learners' translation habits and progress in English thinking. Qualitative data from interviews and observations were thematically analyzed to uncover effective strategies, common challenges, and best instructional

practices. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data ensured the reliability and validity of findings. Ethical Considerations: All participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Research Procedure: The study was conducted over a 12-week period. During this time, students engaged in a variety of activities designed to promote English thinking: immersive tasks such as English-only discussions, multimedia consumption, and storytelling; mental rehearsal exercises including self-talk, sentence formation, and role-play; and contextualized practice in academic, social, and professional scenarios. Educators guided students through these activities, providing feedback and scaffolding to gradually reduce reliance on translation. This methodological framework allowed for a detailed examination of the cognitive processes involved in transitioning from translation to direct English thinking. It also enabled the identification of effective instructional strategies and potential challenges, providing actionable insights for both educators and learners.

Research discussion. The findings of this study indicate that transitioning from translation-based thinking to thinking directly in English has a significant positive impact on learners' fluency, comprehension, and confidence. Survey data revealed that a majority of students gradually reduced their reliance on literal translation, demonstrating increased spontaneity in forming responses in English. This aligns with Swain's (2005) assertion that cognitive processing in the target language enhances automaticity and communicative competence.

Immersive learning activities, such as English-only discussions, storytelling, and multimedia engagement, were particularly effective in promoting English thinking. Students reported that consistent exposure to authentic English contexts allowed them to internalize vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions without mentally converting from their native language. This supports Ellis's (2003) findings that immersion fosters natural language acquisition and cognitive restructuring in the second language. Mental rehearsal exercises, including self-talk, sentence formation, and role-play, were also found to be instrumental. These practices enabled learners to anticipate responses, structure sentences internally, and practice fluency in a low-pressure environment. Educators noted that scaffolding these activities with feedback gradually built learners' confidence and reduced anxiety associated with speaking in English. Such strategies align with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive scaffolding, emphasizing guided practice to support independent learning. Contextualized practice further enhanced students' ability to think in

English. Applying language skills in meaningful academic, social, and professional scenarios helped learners make connections between linguistic forms and practical use, reducing cognitive load associated with translation. This observation is consistent with Nation's (2001) research on the effectiveness of contextualized vocabulary and grammar learning. Despite the positive outcomes, some challenges were identified. Interference from the native language occasionally slowed processing, particularly among beginner-level students. Additionally, learner anxiety and inconsistent exposure to English outside the classroom limited the pace of transition for some participants. These findings underscore the importance of structured guidance, consistent practice, and supportive learning environments to maximize the development of English thinking skills. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that a combination of immersive learning, mental rehearsal, cognitive scaffolding, and contextualized practice effectively facilitates the transition from translating to thinking in English. The results emphasize that developing cognitive processing in the target language is essential for achieving fluency, spontaneous communication, and learner autonomy. The results of this study indicate that the transition from translation-based thinking to thinking directly in English has a substantial positive impact on learners' fluency, comprehension, and confidence. Survey data showed that most students gradually reduced reliance on literal translation, demonstrating faster and more spontaneous responses in English. This aligns with Swain's (2005) findings that direct cognitive processing in a second language enhances communicative competence and automaticity.

Immersive learning activities, including English-only discussions, storytelling, and exposure to authentic multimedia content, were found to be particularly effective in promoting English thinking. Students reported that these experiences helped them internalize vocabulary, grammar, and idiomatic expressions, allowing them to formulate thoughts directly in English without resorting to translation. These findings are consistent with Ellis (2003), who emphasizes that meaningful exposure accelerates language acquisition and cognitive restructuring in the target language. Mental rehearsal exercises, such as self-talk, sentence formation, and role-play, also proved instrumental. These strategies allowed learners to anticipate responses, organize sentences internally, and practice fluency in a low-pressure environment. Educators highlighted that scaffolding these activities with guidance and feedback gradually enhanced learners' confidence and reduced language anxiety, supporting Vygotsky's (1978) theory of cognitive scaffolding. Contextualized practice in academic, social, and professional scenarios further strengthened learners' ability to think

in English. Applying language in meaningful situations helped learners connect linguistic structures with practical use, reducing the cognitive load associated with mental translation. This finding aligns with Nation (2001), who emphasizes the importance of contextualized learning for vocabulary and grammar acquisition. Despite positive outcomes, some challenges were noted. Interference from the native language occasionally slowed cognitive processing, particularly for beginner-level learners. Limited exposure to English outside the classroom and learner anxiety were additional barriers, highlighting the need for structured guidance and consistent practice. Overall, the discussion demonstrates that a combination of immersive learning, mental rehearsal, cognitive scaffolding, and contextualized practice effectively facilitates the transition from translating to thinking in English. These strategies not only improve fluency and comprehension but also enhance learner autonomy, critical thinking, and communicative confidence.

Conclusion. This study demonstrates that moving from translation-based methods to thinking directly in English is essential for developing fluency, spontaneous communication, and overall language competence. The research revealed that immersive learning, mental rehearsal, cognitive scaffolding, and contextualized practice are highly effective strategies for promoting English thinking. Learners who engaged consistently in these activities gradually reduced reliance on literal translation, improved their cognitive processing in English, and enhanced their communicative confidence.

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