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Using machine translation tools for academic writing in language courses –perspectives of students and language teachers

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With the affordances of advanced technologies, machine translation tools (MTT), such as Google Translate, have been created and widely used to facilitate communication between people from different language backgrounds. The last decade has also witnessed the employment of MTT by English as a Foreign Language learners to assist their studies at university. Such use of MTT is regarded as a “double-edged sword” and thus not often encouraged. Studies have found that MTT can help students with their language use in writing. However, there is a dearth of research on the use of MTT in the writing assessments for an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course. This study attempts to bridge this gap by examining student and teacher perspectives on using MTT for the assessments of an EAP course in a major university in Hong Kong. Both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered for this research. The quantitative data was derived from surveys of 47 students and 37 language teachers and the qualitative information was collected via semi-structured interviews with 12 students and 10 language teachers. The analysis of the gathered data showed that notwithstanding some commonalities, the perspectives of students and teachers are markedly different on students’ deployment of MTT in the assessments of the EAP course. The study has profound pedagogical significance with respect to assessment designs.

Keywords

machine translation tools; Google Translate; EAP; student perspectives; teacher perspectives

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