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The Use of DeepL in Engage Students' Reading Comprehension through Meaning Negotiation Strategies: A Case Study

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abstrak— Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana siswa menggunakan DeepL untuk menerapkan strategi negosiasi makna selama kegiatan pemahaman bacaan. Penelitian ini didasarkan pada pengamatan bahwa banyak siswa EFL menggunakan alat terjemahan mesin saat membaca teks bahasa Inggris, namun tidak semua siswa mengevaluasi hasil terjemahan tersebut secara kritis. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana siswa menegosiasikan makna saat menggunakan DeepL selama proses membaca. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus eksploratif digunakan. Peserta penelitian ini adalah 15 siswa dari MAN 2 Bojonegoro yang memiliki pengalaman menggunakan DeepL dalam kegiatan membaca. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa menggunakan DeepL untuk menerjemahkan kata, frasa, atau kalimat yang tidak dikenal saat membaca teks bahasa Inggris. Selama proses membaca, siswa menerapkan beberapa strategi negosiasi makna, seperti klarifikasi, konfirmasi, dan reformulasi, untuk memastikan bahwa makna terjemahan selaras dengan konteks teks. Siswa sering membandingkan alternatif terjemahan yang disediakan oleh DeepL dan memilih makna yang mereka anggap paling sesuai dengan konteks. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa DeepL terkadang menghasilkan terjemahan yang tidak sesuai konteks, sehingga mendorong siswa untuk mengevaluasi ulang dan menyesuaikan pemahaman mereka. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa DeepL berfungsi sebagai alat mediasi yang mendukung siswa dalam menegosiasikan makna selama aktivitas membaca, bukan sebagai sumber akhir pemahaman.

Kata Kunci — DeepL, Membaca, Negosiasi Makna, EFL, Terjemahan Online

Abstract—This study explores how students utilize DeepL to engage in Meaning Negotiation Strategies during reading comprehension activities. The study is based on the phenomenon that many EFL students use machine translation tools while reading English texts, yet not all students critically evaluate the translated output. Therefore, this research focuses on how students negotiate meaning when interacting with DeepL during the reading process. A qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design. The participants of the study were 15 students of MAN 2 Bojonegoro who had experience using DeepL in reading activities. The data were collected through classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The findings revealed that most students used DeepL to translate unfamiliar words, phrase, or sentences while reading English texts. During the reading process, students engaged in several meaning negotiation

strategies, such as clarification, confirmation, and reformulation, to ensure that the translated meanings matched the textual context. Students often compared translation alternatives provided by DeepL and selected meanings they considered most appropriate for the contexts. The findings also showed that DeepL sometimes produced contextually inappropriate translations, encouraging students to re-evaluate and adjust their understanding. The study concludes that DeepL functions as mediating tool that supports students in negotiating meaning during reading activity rather than as direct source of final understanding.

Keywords – DeepL, Reading Comprehension, Negotiation of meaning, Machine translation, EFL students

PENDAHULUAN

Today's increasingly demanding academic and technological environments, the ability to comprehend English texts has become a fundamental requirement for EFL learners. Reading is the process of perceiving and interpreting messages contained in print media. This activity involves processing written information into understanding, which begins with the text itself and culminates in new knowledge acquired by the reader (Nurdianingsih, 2021). Reading comprehension enables students to access academic knowledge, engage with digital information, and participate effectively in global communication. It is not merely the ability to decode words but a complex cognitive process that requires readers to integrate linguistic knowledge, background knowledge, and higher-order thinking skills simultaneously (Pathology, 2023). Consequently, effective reading comprehension plays a crucial role in students' academic success and long-term language development. Students often struggle with limited vocabulary, insufficient grammatical knowledge, and difficulty interpreting complex textual information in reading activity. These problems hinder their ability to construct meaning from texts, particularly when they encounter unfamiliar words or complicated sentence structures, although digital tools such as online dictionaries have been shown to support vocabulary retention and contextual understanding through features like rapid search and audio support, relying solely on dictionary lookup is often insufficient to achieve deeper comprehension (Hamzadayı, 2022)

Reading is a crucial aspect of language proficiency. Through this activity, readers can expand their vocabulary, understand intonation and grammar, and gain a

comprehensive understanding of how paragraphs and texts are structured (Primasari, 2021) One of strategy that can support deeper comprehension in reading activity is negotiating meaning. Negotiation of meaning can be defined as a set of strategies applied by communicators to overcome barriers to interaction and ensure mutual understanding (Isnaini, 2026). It can be defined Negotiation of Meaning functions as a communication strategy used in interactions to ensure meaning is comprehensible. In reading these strategies include clarification, reinterpret information, and adjust their understanding to resolve confusion. Negotiation of Meaning occurs when a learner proceses feedback, makes sense of it, attempts to clarify its meaning and adjusts their understanding to resolve any confusion (Parker, 2025) It is stated that the negotiation of meaning provides opportunities for improved linguistic output due to the presence of comprehensible input. For instance, when an interlocutor (whether human or an AI chat bot) does not understand, they can ask for clarification. In the context of reading, meaning-negotiation strategies do not appear as an exchange of utterances between two speakers, but rather as a series of cognitive actions carried out by readers when they encounter comprehension barriers.

In the context of reading text, Students need to use a dictionary to accurately understand the meaning or definition of a word (Sari et al., 2024). Dictionaries play an important role in resolving lexical uncertainty and supporting comprehension one widely used digital translation tool is DeepL. DeepL is an AI-based translator that assists learners in addressing lexical and syntactic difficulties during reading. Previous studies indicate that DeepL helps students understand texts more easily, read more efficiently, and reduces reliance on conventional dictionaries (Munawwarah, 2024) Additionally, DeepL has been found to support vocabulary enrichment, exposure to natural sentence structures, and grammatical awareness (Liang, 2025). However, concerns have been raised regarding students' overreliance on DeepL, which may lead to superficial comprehension if the translation output is accepted uncritically (Jiang, 2024). Ideally, DeepL should function not only as a translation tool but also as a medium through which students compare, evaluate, and negotiation of meaning. Based on the background of the study, the researcher

formulates the problem statements as follows: How do the students utilize DeepL to engage in meaning negotiation strategies during reading comprehension?

Based on initial observations of English education students' reading behavior, many students do not utilize DeepL as a tool for negotiating meaning. Instead, they tend to accept translation results without comparing them to the original text or considering contextual and structural aspects. Some students modify the input text merely to obtain smoother translations rather than to clarify meanings they do not understand. This practice often results in shallow comprehension and creates the illusion of understanding. Previous studies on online dictionaries have primarily focused on the effectiveness of DeepL as a translation tool, while its role in facilitating negotiation of meaning during reading remains underexplored (Munawwarah, 2024). Moreover, research specifically examining how students use DeepL in the context of reading comprehension is still limited. Therefore, this study aims to explore how students utilize DeepL as a meaning negotiation strategy during the reading process, offering a new perspective on the role of AI-mediated tools in supporting deeper reading comprehension.

METODE PENELITIAN

This study employs a qualitative research approach with an exploratory case study design. This design is selected because the study aims to explore how students utilize DeepL as a mediating tool while engaging in negotiation of meaning strategies during reading comprehension, rather than to measure the effectiveness or impact of the tool quantitatively. The case study design is an in depth description and analysis of a bounded system. Part of the confusion, surrounding case studies is that the process of conducting a case study is conflated with both the unit of study (the case) and the product of this type of investigation (Merriam, 2015). The qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture students' cognitive process, decision making, and strategic behaviors as they interact with DeepL in an authentic reading context. The participants of the study were 15 students of MAN 2 Bojonegoro who had experience using DeepL in reading activities. The study took place during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, from January 05, 2026, to January 20, 2026. This period

was chosen because students had already been exposed to various reading materials and classroom activities, enabling them to reflect on their experiences more effectively. To collect data, this study employed three primary methods: observation, semi-structured interviews and documentation

HASIL DAN PEMBAHASAN

The findings revealed that students utilized DeepL not only as a translation tool but also as a medium to support meaning negotiation during reading comprehension. Most participants reported using DeepL when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary, finds synonyms, difficult sentence structures, slang expressions, or academic texts that were challenging to understand directly in English. DeepL was frequently used to translate words, sentences, or longer passages while also providing alternative vocabulary choices and synonym suggestion that helped students achieve more comprehensible meanings. The following is a table of interview results

Table 1. Negotiation of meaning in DeepL

No	The Main Theme	Descriptions	Respondents	The Arguments
1	Find synonyms and alternative vocabulary	Using DeepL to find more appropriate word choices	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	<p>“There are many choices of translations under the translation results” (R1)</p> <p>“Searching for a more appropriate synonym” (R3)</p>
2	Negotiation of meaning	Rewrite sentences or words, shorten	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	“Finding the right words for translation” (R1)

		sentences, replace words		“Phrasing and re-translating” (R4)
3	Verification and Cross-checking	Reread and compare the original text, using other tools	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	“Double-checking with other tools” (R1) “Reading the original text repeatedly” (R2)
4	Enhancing Comprehension and Vocabulary Knowledge	Increase comprehension and expand vocabulary	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	“My understanding has increased from 70% to 90%” (R3) “learning new vocabulary” (R4)
5	Limitations of DeepL	The translation of the sentence is not consistent with the context of the original text.	R1, R2, R3, R4, R5	“DeepL frequently produces incorrect translations” (R5)

Several students described based on interview, one participant explained that DeepL was frequently used while reading online comics because the translations often contained unfamiliar slang expressions:

“I usually use DeepL when reading online comics in English, sometimes the translator use slang words that I do not really understand”.

Students also demonstrated active meaning negotiation strategies when the translation output was considered unclear or inappropriate, instead of accepting the translation directly, participants evaluated and adjusted the meaning according to the context of the text, one of participant stated *"If the translated sentence feels unfamiliar, I use the feature to replace the word or sentence with another option"*.

Similarly, another participant reported translating texts sentence by sentence by sentence when the translation of longer passage was inaccurate *"When translating long texts, sometimes the translation is different from the original meaning, so I translate it sentence by sentence or word by word"*

The findings further showed that students applied verification and reinterpretation strategies to ensure comprehension accuracy. Several participants reread original and translated texts repeatedly and compared the meanings carefully *"I reread the translated text and analyze both the original and translated version to make sure the meaning is appropriate"*.

In addition, some students cross-checked translation outputs using other tools or contextual analysis. Participant emphasized that DeepL translations could sometimes be technically inaccurate in academic texts *"The phrase 'The model fails to generalize well' was translated literally, but the meaning in the machine learning context was actually different."*

To resolve comprehension difficulties, students reread the surrounding paragraphs, compared the original and translated texts, and paraphrased the meaning using personal wording. The students also stated *"I do not trust DeepL 100%. I always cross-check the translation first"*.

The findings indicate that students used DeepL not only for direct translation but also support meaning negotiation during reading comprehension. The students actively evaluated translation results, adjusted lexical choices, reread text, and compared meaning to achieve better understanding. These strategies reflect the process of clarification and reinterpretation proposed in Negotiation of Meaning

theory (Parker, 2025). The study also found that students did not fully rely on DeepL outputs. When translations were considered unclear or inappropriate, participant's cross-checked meanings using contextual analysis, other translation tools, or reading strategies. One respondent even paraphrased meaning using personal wording to ensure accurate comprehension of academic texts. This suggest that students combined other translation tool support with their own cognitive processing during reading activities.

In addition DeepL was perceived as helpful for improving reading efficiency and enriching vocabulary knowledge through synonym suggestion and alternative expressions. These findings are consistent with previous studies that highlight the role of AI-based translation tools in supporting vocabulary development and comprehension (Liang, 2025). However, the findings also revealed that literal or inaccurate translations could lead to misunderstanding, especially in technical or academic context. Therefore, the effectiveness of DeepL depends on students' ability to critically evaluate translation outputs rather than accepting them passively.

Overall, the findings suggest that DeepL can support reading comprehension and meaning negotiation when learners actively engage in contextual evaluation, verification, and reinterpretation strategies during the reading process

SIMPULAN

This study explored how students utilized DeepL as a meaning negotiation strategy during reading comprehension. The findings showed that students used DeepL not only to translate unfamiliar words and sentences but also to evaluate, reinterpret, and verify meanings while reading English texts. Respondents applied several meaning negotiation strategies, such as reading texts, comparing translation outputs with the original texts, adjusting lexical choices, and cross-checking meanings using other sources. The study also found that DeepL helped students improve reading efficiency, reduce comprehension difficulties, and enrich vocabulary knowledge trough alternative word suggestions and contextual translations.

However, the findings revealed that DeepL translations were not always contextually accurate, particularly in academic or technical texts. Therefore, students needed to critically evaluate translation outputs to avoid superficial understanding.

Overall, this study suggests that DeepL can function as a supportive tool for meaning negotiation in reading comprehension when learners actively engage in clarification, verification, and contextual interpretation processes. Future studies are recommended to investigate the long-term impact of AI-based translation tools on students' independent reading and critical comprehension skills

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