



EVALUATION OF TRANSLATION COMPETENCE IN TRAINING THE FUTURE TRANSLATORS

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Abstract

The present article examines different trends in translation evaluation based on the subcomponents of translation competence. To be a good translator requires a sizeable investment in both languages. It is one of the most challenging tasks to switch safely and faithfully between two universes of discourse. Only a sophisticated and systematic treatment of translation education can lead to the development of successful translators. An evaluation framework is proposed as a suitable tool in analyzing translational texts in English.

Keywords: translation competence, translatorial action, discourse, translation evaluation, quality assessment, translation process, translational text.

Introduction

In educational settings, translation evaluation is one of the most significant issues which must be addressed duly in order to determine the level of competence achieved by the translator, besides measuring translation competence, evaluating the target text helps identify areas in which competence is still to be developed. We may argue that it is impossible to evaluate or study translation competence without considering translation product. By evaluating a translated text from English into Russian, we may, performing a macro-level analysis, evaluate the translating process to a considerable extent.

In this article, we outline to propose an approach for evaluating target texts in Russian at three consecutive stages. Firstly, in order to evaluate students' abilities to produce and then edit a text in the target language (students' translation performance), it is suggested that students' translations be evaluated by an assessor whose native language is the language to which students have translated the source text. In this case the instructor has no knowledge of the source language. At the second stage, a bilingual instructor is asked to compare and contrast students' translations and source language texts. Finally, the results of the previous stages are compared to arrive at an objective evaluation grade.





Evaluation is made on students' performance, it is meant to assess their translation competence. Due to the fact that translation competence is not directly measurable, we have to evaluate students' translation performance. Translation competence is the student's ability to comprehend the source text, his ability to produce a text in the target language, and finally his competence in editing and revising the target text based on source language textual elements. So, translation competence is what we mean to evaluate. Translation performance is not an exact representative illustration of a student's translation competence. So, target text can be evaluated for different purposes:

- To aware the suitability of the text for its intended reader and use;
- To evaluate language competence;
- To determine levels of intercultural awareness;
- To identify levels and types of translation competence.

In the environment of translation training, it is not only desirable to know the translation aim or brief, but to know the criteria of evaluation that will be used by the instructor to assess the trainees. In other words, students should be familiar with the expectations of their instructors in order to be able to meet them. Translation competence is the resource that translator has to use and tap into in order to produce translations that are adequate for their respective purposes.

Simultaneously, translation trainees should understand not only *what* happens during the translation process, but also *how* and *why*. Students should be provided with a meta-language that would enable them to reflect upon their solutions and, which would allow them to defend and explain their choices. Evaluation criteria are to be set before proceeding to translation tasks and they have to be general enough to be applicable to various situations and specific enough to allow for assessing a concrete text-in-situation. Perhaps the most frequent and self-explanatory way of cultivating translation competences is to expose trainees to as many texts as is humanly possible in order to constantly enrich their "textual experience" [Bochner, 2000].

The concept of translation competence can be understood in terms of knowledge necessary to translate well [Hatim & Mason, 1990]. However this definition is too general, it is objective to divide knowledge into different subtypes. Schäffner defines 'translation competence' as "a combination of linguistic competence and the ability to translate" [Schäffner & Adab, 2000]. Then, the translation competence can be defined in the frame of the three-stage process. It starts from the comprehension of the source text, meaning that the primary skill needed to translate is to well comprehend the source text. The second stage would be the ability to produce a text in the target





language. A competent translator must be an excellent user of his/her mother tongue. This ability should not be limited to what the user has acquired subconsciously from his/her environment. A translator should have the professional knowledge of the language to which he is translating. The third element comprising translation competence is "editing competence". It requires a detailed analysis and comparative-contrastive study of both source text and translation text. This comparison leads to the translator's awareness of possible mismatches in his rendering and pseudo-equivalents. He/she then will be able to revise his product in the target language. Translator's knowledge of both source and target cultures are ignored in this model. Training translators is an important task which should be given a high priority. The service that translators render to enhance cultures and languages has been significant throughout history. Translators are the agents for transferring messages from one language to another, while preserving the underlying cultural and discourse organization (discursive) ideas and values [Robinson, 1997].

It goes without saying that translator training courses will have to consist of appropriate modules which account for all sub-components of translation competence, and in an integrated way of the curriculum. Translation competence cannot be developed solely by practicing translating, i.e. learning by doing, but it needs to be embedded in a theoretical framework in order to allow trainee translators to make informed decisions [Newmark, 1988]. This also means that a curriculum needs to include a module on translation theories, to familiarize students with various definitions of translation, various approaches and controversial concepts, and thus encourage critical reflection. In a wider sense, then, translation competence also includes knowledge about translation, intercultural context of translation, and its disciplinary discourse.

It is discussed that in teaching/learning language(s), competence cannot be evaluated directly. Performance, because of its accessibility, is what we evaluate or even measure. By studying translation performance, we can, indirectly, evaluate translation competence as defined previously.

Approaches for evaluating texts have given in a quantitative feature. The followers of this tradition evaluate a translation based on painstaking comparison of the source text and target text. This sort of comparison is exercised even at morpheme level to guarantee the exact matching of source language items and their equivalents. The position of the instructor is of prime importance in which the purpose of the source text, the purpose of the translator and that of the target text should match. For the purposes of evaluating a translation product, the evaluator should be well aware of this common purpose and see if it is achieved. The instructor would evaluate a





translation differently in case of teaching purposes. Undoubtedly, they will treat a translation more painstakingly if they are dealing with translations as a fail-pass criterion for a translator to be known as a professional.

A broad framework for evaluation is required to assess the development of language skills. Translation evaluation requires a heightened awareness from the point of view of linguaculturology, sociolinguistics, cognitive and text linguistics, drawing on concepts proposed by scholars such as Snell-Hornby who advocates an integrated approach to translation [Snell-Hornby, 1992] and Taft who calls for an interdisciplinary approach [Taft, 1981]. Development of translation competence should be a natural consequence of the implementation of such approaches. Moreover, a trainee translator must have a level of sufficient socio-cultural experience and language competence to be able to make decisions without some deliberation of comparative-contrastive, linguistic and stylistic use. It is believed, that students' translations, must be evaluated based on the following parameters:

- ❖ Students' comprehension of the source text,
- ❖ Students' production ability in the target language,
- ❖ Students' editing ability in the target language.

To check the students' ability to produce a target text and to edit that, it is suggested that students' papers be corrected by assessors whose native language is the language to which students have translated a text. Such an assessor has no knowledge of the source language. In fact, he evaluates the translation product regardless of its original source text. These raters were expected to keep in mind factors such as text difficulty of the products, grammaticality of the utterances produced by the translators, wording and faultless use of collocations, text coherence and cohesion, and punctuation. Under the micro-level we understood grammatical, lexical and stylistic appropriateness, structure of translated sentences and macro-level deals with discursive and translatorial strategies in translation to target language.

Then, a bilingual instructor was asked to compare and contrast students' translations and source texts to make sure the degree of students' comprehension of the source text and their renderings into the target language. The trainee himself/herself undertook the given tasks. The results were calculated to arrive at a standard mean out of 20 grades respectfully equal at macro- and micro-levels. The instructor (at first and second levels) gave marks to the students' translations. Appropriate comments were added to students' renditions in order to provide them with enough feedback on their performance. All the gathered materials, then, given back to the students. The instructor is obliged to introduce enough suitable source books or materials to students hoping that they would correct their mismatches.





When students are faced with a translation task, it is necessary for them to reflect consciously on all the factors that are relevant to the production of a target text that appropriately fulfils its specified purpose for its target addressees. This means awareness of the skopos, reflecting on the required target text profile, analyzing the source text against the background of the translation brief, deciding on the translation strategies with which the purpose can best be achieved, and reflecting on the research that needs to be carried out in completing the task (e.g. checking parallel texts for genre conventions in the target culture, doing an Internet search to find information about historical events). In this way, students experience translation as a complex decision-making process.

Learning cultural aspect takes place in a process of a conscious, reflective comparison, comparing the foreign target culture to one's own culture, comparing behavior and products of behavior [Byram, 1997]. Texts as products of contextualized behavior show traces of socio-textual practices in a culture in a more or less explicit way in their surface structure. In deciding on an appropriate solution for the target text, the skopos needs to be related to the content, the genre, and the function of the text. In reflecting about these cases, students also realize that a given cultural phenomenon is not in itself culture-specific, but it is constituted as being culture-specific in the process of translation and as a result of a comparison. In this way, trainee translators can be sensitized to the possibility that there may be differences in behavior and in products of behavior, and that these may be relevant to a given translation task, or in evaluating a translation.

In reflecting about potential solutions it is important to bear in mind that the target text is produced for the needs and purposes of others, i.e. in producing a target text, the translator will enable intercultural communication. Cronin [1986: 363] and Katan [2000: 145] point out that a translator him- or herself is not a participant in such an act of communication, but an outsider. A translator's action is not a communicative action in a direct sense, but it is a translatorial action. A translator acts in his or her own role as a translator in his or her own situation, producing a text which is then used by others in a situation of intercultural communication. The translator is usually not immediately present when his or her product is received; this also means that he or she is not in a position to check any feedback. This is different for people who act in their own role in contexts of intercultural communication.

In intercultural communication which realized through translatorial action, it is the translator who has to negotiate at least two models of reality and make them logically and culturally compatible for the specified purpose of the target text. A comparison of source text and target text can serve as an exercise to identify translation decisions





and reflect about their potential causes and effects. Including discussions of the reception of translations in the training context can thus contribute to an understanding of the social role and responsibility of translators. In this respect, it is also illuminating for translators to see the attitude that people lay to translation. Critically reflecting on such cases as well in a training process should have at least two consequences: 1) an understanding of the role of the professional translator as an expert in text production and 2) an awareness of the social role played by professional translators and of the professional ethics related to it. Ethical competence, as a reflection of an awareness of the fact that translators are practicing in intercultural context, could therefore be added as another component of translation competence. Evaluation is one of the most indispensable parts of any educational system. In fact, evaluation and teaching have complementary roles. The findings and results of any objective evaluation lead to improvements in teaching methods and approaches. Translation competence evaluation can be made at two completely different levels such as micro-level and macro-level analysis. It was discussed that the results of evaluation help students take charge of their own learning processes. Finally, it was mentioned that one of the best approaches to evaluate both translation process and product. Instructor consider the translation product as a mere composition in the target language. It leads to an unbiased and objective assessment of both process and product of translation, once considering source text and the other time considering just target text as a mere production in the target language. The mean grade would be a representative reflection of the students' translation competence. Developing such skills in translation students will be an important contribution to their performance as future translators with the proficiency that shall ensure their walking up the steps of the quality ladder.

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