Nurturing and Testing Translation Competence for Text-Translating

Karlygash Adilkhanovna Aubakirova[a]

[a]L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, KAZAKHSTAN

ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the problems of contemporary professional education. As its instance, we examine the developmental scheme for training professional translators. Optimal ways of organizing the learning process are suggested from the point of view of the competence approach, which is widely recognized for training a modern specialist.

The article demonstrates the present-day relevance of the translation profession and the importance of raising expert translators, who possess such a professional quality as a translator's competence. In this article, we analyze different points of view on the concept of "translation competence", as given presently in both national and foreign scientific literature. However, the PACTE-model is specifically highlighted.

The problems of developing criteria for the translation quality control are studied, as regards to the translations that future professional translators perform in the process of learning. The article presents various opinions of foreign scientists on the systems of assessment and on the criteria for evaluating the quality of translation services. These systems form the basis for the suggested complex of criteria for the quality control and

Introduction

At the present stage of social development, the specifics of language policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan determines the features of education process in linguistics, including the education process for professional translators. The issues of the quality of translation training become especially relevant, which, within the competence approach, is obviously inseparable from enhancing the level of professional competency of a future professional linguist.

CORRESPONDENCE Karlygash Adilkhanovna Aubakirova ✉ xxxxxxx@xxxxx.com

Since the Republic of Kazakhstan is stepping onto the world's educational arena, the new demands to the quality of professional translators training arise. Nowadays, the highly competitive future professionals have been already much needed in Kazakhstan as well as beyond its borders.

The unprecedented enlargement of international communication in every dimension of human and social activity can characterize the present stage in the development of the world's society. Its progress is determined by the need to communicate faster and by proclaiming multi-cultural and multi-language diversity and tolerance as the leading principles of human interaction. This approach increased and revived the scientific interest in the problems of training specialists that are ready to solve trend-specific tasks and, thus, provide effective cross-cultural and international communication.

Progress in the life of human civilization, the globalization trends and the development of the worldwide computer web for communication remarkably increased possibilities for cross-cultural communication, which strengthened the significance of speaking foreign languages. These trends actually shaped the public demand for professional translators as communication facilitators in various spheres of life.

It has become obvious that the long-debated issue between the community and the theorists and practitioners of translation services is presently widely recognized: translation is not a straightforward act of encoding a text from the source language into the target language, but also, it is a socially important act of international communication.

The specific trait of translation services consists more in the fact that a translator plays a significant social role of a connector between communities with different languages and cultures. The significance of translator's role will continue growing since a translator turns from an ordinary facilitator (who satisfies only a small amount of communicative needs between individuals separated by language and nationality barriers) into the leading actor in the sphere of cross-cultural communication, who ensures multi-dimensional information and communication activity of the modern community. According to I. I. Khaleeva, training a professional in the communicative sphere ("inter-lingvo-cultural" one) rather than in the linguistic one becomes more essential (Chaleva, 1999).

All this means that there is an urgent need to solve the numerous problems of linguistic didactics in a new key, taking into account the latest achievements of the liberal education with regard to the professional translators training.

As it is commonly known, translation is a complex type of communicative activity, which specific features are defined, first of all, by the nature of a certain type of communicative activity; secondly, by the working conditions under which a translation is conducted; and thirdly, by the particular features of translation activity (Alekseeva, 2008).

The demand for professional translators inevitably leads to the growth of requirements level against the level of their training. In other words, improving the proficiency of a translator is an item on the agenda, which means certain requirements to their professional competence. These days, the basis in the preparation of any specialist, trained in a higher education institution, is shaping professional competence. The professional competence of a translator means a holistic personal characteristic of an expert, which is a summary of equally

important professional linguistic and other specific competences, as well as of general cultural, psychophysiological and technical competences, which enables a professional translator efficiently provide translation services.

One of the components of a translator's professional competence is the translation competence (further abbreviated as TC). Meanwhile, in spite of a wealth of research on the issues of translation competence, it should be noted that so far there are no optimal didactic models – the ones that would allow nurturing and testing effectively the level of translation competence, thus guaranteeing the quality of translators training.

Prior to proceeding with the practical aspects of TC nurturing and testing for text translation, let us analyze the TC concept.

The majority of studies render TC as a certain aggregate of expertise, knowledge and skills (EKS) required for a professional translator to provide adequate translation services (Porshneva, H., 2002). It is a meta-competence comprising a set of expertise, knowledge and skills as well as certain personal qualities applied by expert translators in their everyday professional activity (Beeby, Ensinger, & Presas, 2000).

In the national and foreign translation studies, there is a number of TC definitions. A Russian researcher V.N. Komissarov, for example, supposes that professional TC has to include such linguistic elements as the language competence, the communicative competence, the technical competence and the text producing competence (Komissarov, 2001). A British linguist R.T. Bell thinks that TC consists of grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse-specific and strategic skills (Bell, 1991). An American researcher K. Nord points out the following EC aspects: comprehending the text meaning; ability to interpret information included into the source text; creating a new text based on a source one; individually independent verification of the quality of a newly generated text based on the sufficient linguistic level; and the knowledge of cultural studies (Nord, 1991). According to S. Heizman, TC includes the following types of EKS: linguistic and cultural competences, competences of a specific subject in the field of the source and the target languages; and the ability to apply intuition in translation and to verify the equivalence of the match between the text of translation and the source text (Heizman, 1994).

However, according to the author, the most exhaustive analysis of TC is suggested by the PACTE model, the developers of which offer a TC model consisting of linguistic, extra linguistic and professional competences, psychophysiological and strategical skills, and the skills of rendering information (Beeby & Ensinger, 2000).

Within the framework of this model, the linguistic competence means systematic mastering of the EKS necessary for linguistic communication, and includes the ability to perceive and understand the language of the original (source) as well as to reflect it in the target language. This competence consists of the following components: a grammatical competence based on the linguistic knowledge (vocabulary, syntax, orthography etc.), a socio-linguistic competence characterized by the correct recognition and acknowledgement of the given contexts and situations; and a discourse competence, which means a correct reproduction of different text types and the coherency of translation.

The extra linguistic competence includes the following kinds of awareness: theory of translation, national culture (of both languages), and general and specialized knowledge necessary to perform translation.

A professional competence comprises EKS and activities that relate to the translator's professional activity and represent actions at the labor market, professional ethics, and ability to use various databases and sources of information.

The psychophysiological skills, as a TC component, are revealed through the following aspects of translation activity: a psychomotor aspect of reading and writing, developed cognitive abilities (memory, attention, thinking); and some specific psychological characteristics (curiosity, accuracy, an ability for self-examination).

The performance skills are the personal aptitudes (conscious and subconscious) employed for solving problems that may arise during the translation process. These skills help to detect problems, find their solutions, search for and correct all sorts of mistakes (shortcomings).

A skill of translating information combines all the rest ones and means the translator's ability to cover the whole process of text translation that is from reading a source text to creating a final text in the target language. This presumes the initial comprehension of the original text and its potential sounding in the target language, taking into account the purposes of translation and the needs of the target audience. This ability includes, in turn, the following skills: a skill of comprehension, which makes it easier to apply extra-linguistic knowledge and understand the text meaning; and a skill of re-phrasing (transformation) that allows planning a layout of the new text and analyzing the target language.

According to the PACTE model developers, the integral unity of all the above-mentioned competences and skills is interrelated and leads to TC formation.

By analyzing the models, we can observe a similarity between the majority of TC components, which only differ by name and classification in different conceptions by different authors. Thus, most researchers agree on the necessity to possess a bilingual competence, specific translator's EKS as well as the encyclopedic, cultural and specialized knowledge.

At the same time, all researchers, while highlighting different TC components, agree that the translation competence is multi-faceted.

Therefore, when testing and assessing TC, we need to control and assess each of its components. Although, there is no doubt that while assessing TC, the elements of the assessment scheme can vary, depending on the context that is depending on the required target language and the language of the source text, on the text's register, objective and theme, on the conditions, under which the translation is carried out, and on the level of training.

Methodology

According to the general rule, the methodology of translators training is first of all aimed at assessing and testing the product of this activity, that is, the translated text, the quality of which is one of the indicators of the students' professional competence formedness.

Setting criteria for the quality measurement of translation services, when training linguist-translators, presents a significant problem that should be

resolved within the framework of the competence approach, given the trend to modernization in the national education.

A wealth of research is dedicated to the criteria for the quality control of translation services, among which we would highlight scientific studies by some foreign authors, who compare the results of their studies with the professional competences of aspiring linguist-translators.

Thus, S. Campbell proposes to consider a three-level scale for assessing the quality of a translation: the level that requires editing (level 1), the level ready to be handed in to the client (customer) (level 2), and the level that is ready for publication (level 3) (Campbell, 1991). However, in this case, the "absolute" quality of translation is regarded, rather than the "relative" quality, which is the case of university education, and it depends on a number of factors, such as: whether the target language is native or foreign, the stage of training, etc.

A. Hughes offers to consider the number and the nature (quality) of the students' mistakes, as an indicator of the quality of the undergraduate translation, that is, the process of translation itself (Hughes, 2002). In his opinion, the students' mistakes should be classified as follows: those arising from the insufficient level of competences; those arising from the lack of comprehension of the source language, those arising from the insufficient knowledge of the target language, and those arising as the by-product of the translation and learning processes.

A. Hurtado's (Hurtado, 1995) methodology for controlling and assessing the quality of translation activity is also based on the analysis of translator's mistakes divided by the scientist into three groups:

Firstly, these are the mistakes in translating content of the source text, which negatively affect the understanding of original. All mistakes can be divided into the following types: the mistakes of sense distortion; mistakes in conveying sense, the absence of sense, the addition of extra sense, omissions, unresolved extra linguistic references, loss of meaning, inappropriate linguistic variation (wrongly used dialectal expressions, etc.).

Secondly, these are the mistakes of interpretation, which negatively influence the process of reflecting original content in the target language, which, in turn, are divided into 5 kinds of mistakes: orthography mistakes, grammar mistakes, misuse of lexical units, textual and stylistic mistakes.

Thirdly, the translation mistakes concerning an inadequate interpretation of original, which negatively influences the process of transferring the main or additional functions of the original.

When evaluating translation by points, each group is differentiated into serious mistakes ("minus" 2 points) and minor mistakes ("minus" 1 point). Well-chosen translation decisions can score from 1 to 2 points. When giving the final mark to a translation using this methodology, the summary of the negative points is subtracted from a maximally possible score, and the result is then converted into a mark on the ten-point scale.

The next method also bases on revealing mistakes. However, it aims at analyzing the negative effect of the occurring translator's mistakes on the overall quality of the translation. This initially requires defining the type of the mistake: whether it is a mistake in translation or simply a linguistic mistake. It depends on how the occurrence of the mistake influences the transferring of original

meaning. If there is no negative influence, the mistake is recognized as the linguistic one, otherwise, it is a translation mistake, and scores more penalty points. However, in case of a translation mistake, it is necessary to estimate the extent of the negative effect of each such mistake on the entire text of translation, taking into account the purpose of the translation and the requirements of the target audience. The more is the extent of the negative effect, the more penalty points are scored.

The above-considered studies are echoing with the collective study conducted by the American scientists (Stansfield, Scott, & Kenyon, 2004), in which, apart from the student's mistakes, the following control criteria for a translation are taken into account: lexical diversity, mean lexical agreement, the amount of words omitted. The main characteristics for the evaluation of a translated text, according to the researchers, are the accuracy of translation (the amount of original content in the translation) and its expression (the quality of rendering original content in the text of translation). These indicators were further supplemented with a few more ones, including the students self-rating of their own translation aptitude.

In connection with everything said above, there arose a necessity of developing a system for testing and quality assessment of the translations made by linguistic students, which would meet the challenges of the present time.

Results

The above given analysis, regarding the scientific research on the issue of testing and assessment of the quality of translation services, and our personal teacher training experience give grounds to state that there are two basic approaches employed in the numerous methodologies for assessing translations at undergraduate level. Firstly, it is the analytical approach, based on the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the mistakes made by students, and secondly, it is the systematic approach, that presumes the holistic assessment of a student's translation. In practice, these approaches can be applied both separately and in combination.

In this case, we should be guided by two principles. First, the requirements to student translation and to professional translation should be viewed as different, even though the scale for assessing student translation is to be based on the assessment system applied to professional translations. Secondly, one must realize that it is impossible to adopt an ideal scale for control and assessment that would allow evaluating any student translation, because applying the same assessment scale in any situation (any level of students' skills, any text theme, etc.) will not end up with objectivity. However, there is an opportunity to design some basic scale that could serve as the basis for developing an assessment system for each particular situation.

Therefore, in compliance with the conducted analysis and the principles mentioned above, we have designed a complex of criteria for control and assessment of translation quality from Russian that combines both analytical and system approaches to translation assessment. This complex consists of four criteria, two of which are systemic ("accuracy of translating original text content" and "quality of expression in translation"), and the other two are analytical ("a number of mistakes", "negative influence of mistakes on rendering original

sense"). The indicators of each criterion are interrelated and classify 5 levels in TC development (see Table 1).

Table 1. The complex of criteria for the control and assessment of translation quality from the Russian language

Level	Criteria for controlling the quality of translation				The mark given for translation	Total score
	Accuracy of translating original text content	Quality of expression in translation	A number of mistakes	Negative influence of mistakes on rendering original sense		
High	The complete translation of original content	Translation mostly gives an impression of original.	Minor and rare lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On a shorter than 10 words segment or no influence.	Successful	9-10
Above average	The practically complete translation with minor (1-2) inaccuracies.	The majority of text fragments gives an impression of original.	There is a number of lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the segment of 10 to 30 words.	Almost completely successful	7-8
Average	The general sense of the text is translated with a significant amount of inaccuracies.	Some text fragments give an impression of original, while all the rest is perceived as a translation.	There is a significant number of lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the segment of 30 to 50 words.	Adequate	5-6
Below average	The content is distorted due to a great number of inaccuracies.	The text is majorly perceived as a translation.	There are continually repeated lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On a segment of 50 to 80 words.	Inadequate	3-4
Low	The original is rendered completely inadequately.	A complete lack of skills in translating into foreign language.	There is a vast number of lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the text as a whole.	Wholly inadequate	1-2

The maximal score for a translation in points is 10. Each level can be assessed by two marks in points, which gives an opportunity to the teacher to assess higher a student who fully matches the requirements of a particular level, and give a lower mark to a student who is between the levels, but closer to the lower one.

The high level of performing translation shows excellent quality: a student demonstrates TC mastering at practically expert level. The academic mark is "excellent".

The level that is above average means a translation of very good quality: a student is almost at the expert level; only minor editing is required, regarding the style of some text fragments, the lexical agreement of some segments, etc. The academic mark is "well done" / "excellent".

The average level means that the translation is adequate: a student is not yet ready to be a professional translator; substantial correction by teacher is needed with regard to lexical and grammatical mistakes, etc. The academic mark is "satisfactory" / "well done".

The level below average is characterized by the low quality of translation: a significant amount of editing is needed for numerous mistakes (in orthography, lexicology, and syntax); the sufficient level of TC will be achieved only by intensifying the general linguistic and bilingual training. The academic mark is "unsatisfactory" / "satisfactory".

The low level manifests a completely inadequate quality of translation. The situation cannot be improved by any action taken by teacher; a student does not possess any translation skills, which can appear only in case of maximal linguistic training taken from the zero stage. The academic mark is "unsatisfactory".

The variation of academic mark within levels allows varying the assessment of a student depending on his/her personal progress/regress in accomplishing the level, or depending on the progress of a group of students as a whole.

During the empiric research of efficiency of the methodology for control and assessment of TC, the quality of text translations was assessed by means of especially designed basic and additional test assignments. Let us consider the issues of their application in detail.

The practitioners in training translators not often mix up the concepts of TC and the accomplished level of TC, that is, of the successfulness of training.

When evaluating TC among professional translators, for instance, at the labor market, the basic parameters are namely the quality of a translated text, the results of the interview, the level of education and specialization, the experience in translating, the productivity, etc.

When assessing TC at university, besides the translation itself, we need to assess the accomplished level in TC development, that is, the achievements of students in learning how to provide translation services. Due to this, within the framework of TC testing, additional assignments are included into the assessment process, that are necessary because the basic test text is limited, as a rule, in the choice of themes and in size, which does not provide an opportunity for a student to demonstrate all the acquired EKS.

The basic testing assignments are the traditional assignments for the assessment of text translations. The texts selected for such assessment must represent a spectrum of themes and will match the actual level of the translation skills that students manifest, and, secondly, the criteria and the scale for assessment are developed.

Additional assignments give an opportunity to assess some of TC components that are impossible to control simply by checking the text of translation. This

presumes, first, the strategies of interpretation, the translational transformations as well as some linguistic and extra linguistic categories.

Discussion

This methodology for controlling and assessing translation quality from the Russian language was applied in the process of teaching a practical course in (English) translation to the 4th year students in order to assess the quality of written translation both during practical classes and at the examinations. During the practical classes, translations received an academic mark, and at the examination – a ten-point score.

Within the course of empirical work, the external (trust of students), the contextual (matching the test subject) and the criterial (sufficiency and correct choice of selected criteria) validity of the methodology was confirmed. This gave an opportunity to conclude that its use is effective enough when testing and assessing the quality of translation with aspiring translators.

The inclusion of the "negative influence of mistakes on rendering original sense" indicator into the complex of control criteria proved to be practically especially convenient. This indicator allowed to quantitatively reflect the effect that mistakes impose on the text of translation as a whole, and relate it to the general impression from the product.

The further analysis of the learning process demonstrated the results of applying the methodology for controlling and assessing translation quality from Russian, in which students increased the level of performing basic and additional assignments; demonstrated a higher level of EKS regarding the studied language, and revealed abilities to be creative in classes when solving particular translation tasks.

The effective approbation of this methodology shows that the suggested complex of criteria for controlling and assessing translation quality from Russian is a perspective variant in developing methods for examining professional competences of future translators in training to render translation services, and the necessity to improve the methods in demand due to the reality of the modern higher education.

Conclusion

At present, the leading role in the sphere of future translators training should belong to the following pedagogical principles: first, there is no alternative to practical experience, that is, to learn how to translate, one must continually practice; secondly, any attempts to accelerate the learning process inevitably deteriorate the students' ability to recognize their own mistakes.

Traditionally, when conducting translation quality control, the final product is assessed, or the text of translation. As a widespread view holds it, when examining the student's translation, we evaluate the level of his/her EKS, or a student's translation competence. However, only the quality of a particular translation is being assessed.

In case of paying more attention to nurturing different components of translation competence, when teaching translation, it is incorrect to control only the degree of accomplishing a training standard as an output, by means of assessing the quality of a translation.

The structure and components of TC need to reflect its specifics. An analysis of various concepts and models of TC shows that the authors generally agree in opinions regarding the scope of EKS that constitute TC, although they sometimes differ in their grouping and names.

It is only possible to judge about the translation competency of a student, if we control and assess those components of the translation competence that were given to the student during the learning process. That is to say, the control and assessment of the learning process results should be compared against the practice of teaching. We have to control and assess the result of training as well as the context, in which the student achieved it.

Therefore, the assessment of translation competency at university cannot be limited to assessing the quality of a translation done at the examination. Additional test assignments, the accuracy of the measurement scale, the acknowledgement of the difference between assessing a student and a professional translator, and the teacher's recognition of the difference between assessing a translation and assessing the level of translation competence will help to provide the high quality of university training for translators.

The competence approach to translation training and the inclusion of translation competence in the process of training translators give an opportunity to consistently build the professional competence of the translator's personality as a whole, which will allow avoiding numerous mistakes in translating texts into the target language.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors

Karlygash Adilkhanovna Aubakirova holds a PhD in science education and now is a professor at L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Astana, Munaitpasova, Kazakhstan.

References

1. Chaleva, I. (1999). *Training the translator as "the second linguistic personality". The translator's workbooks: a collection of theoretical and scientific articles*, Moscow, MGLU, 24, 63-72.

2. Alekseeva, I. (2008). *The text and its translation: theoretical aspects.* Moscow: International relations.

3. Porshneva, H. (2002). *The basic linguistic training for a translator, a monograph*. Nizhniy Novgorod: NNGU named after N. I. Lobachevsky.

4. Beeby, A., Ensinger, D., & Presas, M. (2000). *Acquiring translation competence: Hypotheses and methodological problems in a research project*. Investigating Translation. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

5. Komissarov, V. (2001). *Modern translation studies.* Moscow.

6. Bell, R. (1991). *Translation and Translating.* London: Longman.

7. Nord, C. (1991). *Text Analysis in Translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-Oriented Text Analysis.* Amsterdam: Rodopi.

8. Heizman, S. (1994, November). *Human Strategies in Translation and Interpreting – what MT can learn from translators.* BMT. Report 43.

9. Beeby, A., & Ensinger, D. (2000). *PACTE Acquiring Translation Competence: Hypotheses and Methodological Problems in a Research Pr*oject (pp. 99-106).

10. Campbell, S. (1991). Towards a Model of Translation Competence. *Meta, 36-2/3,* 329-243.

11. Hughes, A. (2002). *Testing for Language Teachers*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12. Hurtado, A. (1995). *La didáctica de la traducción. Evolución y estado actual*. X Perspectivas de la Traducción, Universidad de Valladolid, 49-74.

13. Kussmaul, P. (1995). *Training the Translator*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

14. Stansfield, C., Scott, M., & Kenyon, D. (2004). The Measurement of Translation Ability. *The Modern Language Journal, 76*.