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Translation Competence as a Complex Multidimensional Aspect

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Abstract

This article is devoted to problems of translation didactics. A comparative study of translation competence concepts, their main methodological characteristics, and means of competence formation allows to define the translation teaching goal as the formation of translation competence, which comprises knowledge and skills required for translator's professional activity. The PACTE group model is chosen as one of the most comprehensive and frequently cited models for organizing the training process.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, the role of translation as an intercultural mediator is increasing. The volume of translated documents is rising rapidly while translators and interpreters have to assume more and more tasks and responsibilities. Researchers (Buena Garcia 2007; Lederer 2010; Baker 2010) agree that translation is becoming growingly important in today's globalized world. Nevertheless, translation didactics is still “in search of methodology” (Gémar 1996) and is “a poorly investigated” science (Durieux 2010). Literature survey (Hatim 2001; Ito-Bergerot 2009; Komissarov 2002) proves that many aspects of translation didactics remain unclear and highly

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debatable: Translators are born or made? Is it necessary to teach theory? What is the goal of translation training? How to organize the training process? How to measure the quality of training? The educational level of translators can vary from top level professionals to self-proclaimed translators and bilinguals who translate without formal training. The debate whether translators “are born not made” or “made not born” has had a rather negative influence on translator training. Nowadays there are opinions that some of the highly skilled translators in the industry are self-taught (Gile 2009: 6). However, it is widely believed that a professional translator must possess certain skills and competences acquired in the formal training. Many researchers (Komissarov 2002; Gile 2001; Scarpa 2010) have noted that translation competence is becoming one of the main goals in translation training. Despite this agreement, the questions of what translation competence is, how it can be developed and measured are still debatable. Neubert (2000) stresses seven features of translation competence: complexity, heterogeneity, approximation, open-endedness, creativity, situationality and historicity that are intricately bound up with each other.

Komissarov, for instance, suggests a very comprehensive model of translator competence that perceives translation as a complex cognitive activity. He stresses that the assimilation of stereotyped patterns and rules applicable in all situations is not the purpose of academic translator training; on the contrary, translator training should instill a variety of translation strategies and techniques, the ability to choose the optimal method in a given situation, for different text styles, etc. We agree with the idea advanced by Komissarov that translation tasks can be both typical and unusual requiring unconventional approaches. The translator must understand whether it is possible to use a regular or unique, "occasional" translation method (Komissarov 2002: 324). So, typical translation tasks are quite easy and allow almost immediate reformulation in foreign language, i.e. “to pay attention”, “the sky is blue”; these tasks can usually be classified as a loan translation or a transcoding. We believe that this type of translation (typical) can be acquired through foreign language education and does not require much attention in academic training. Whereas challenging translation tasks entail deferred or laboured reformulation in foreign language and require significant cognitive and mental efforts.

Summing up, Komissarov (2002: 326) puts forward, as we believe, an original idea that “the process of creating professional translation competence is accompanied by a formation of a specific linguistic identity, which differs from the ‘normal’, non-translator personality. These differences are revealed in all major aspects of verbal communication: language, communicative, personal and professional aspects”. However, Komissarov puts together language and communicative competencies but we believe that the communicative one should be placed above as more important and integral. He also does not talk about the importance of cultural or sociocultural aspect which has to be taken into account given the requirements of global labor market.

Additionally, as pointed out by Lavault-Olléon (2003) implementing a translation training course in the university is quite difficult for there are many missions to fulfil: it is necessary to allow professional translators become capable of meeting the real needs of the public and private sectors in order to promote the real professionalization of this activity. As we mentioned above, the educational level of translators is very uneven and as Gile points out, the situation is not beneficial to high-level professionals since their status is dragged down by self-taught translators and bilinguals without education (Gile 2009: 5).

All the goals aimed at transferring all the competencies needed by a translator are rather ambitious. It would be naive to think that graduate student will have the professional competence equal to that of an experienced interpreter. The training can allow to get a "half-finished product", which will be perfected in the course of professional activity (Gémar 1996: 503). We agree that perfecting translation skills is a lifelong task: formal training can allow developing translation skills and techniques but this does not spare future professionals from trial and error. Translators extend and deepen their knowledge of their working languages and the subjects they work on while translating. Their skills also perfect with practice. Moreover, the requirements change with technologies and social demands so translators should be able to adapt. Still, formal training and education can help individuals acquire the necessary technical skills without developing bad habits that could hinder their performance.

Researchers (Komissarov 2002, Scarpa 2010, Guidere 2008, Pym 2011, PACTE group 2007, 2011) agree that the translator training should form a translation competence. Let us examine this concept in more detail and define translation teaching goals on the basis of different characteristics and models of translation competence.

2. Translation competence: a comparative study of concepts and notions

One of the problems of translation theory is to describe the nature of translation competence. Neubert (2000) stresses seven features of translation competence: complexity, heterogeneity, approximation, open-endedness, creativity, situationality and historicity that are intricately bound up with each other.

Pym points out an existing disagreement on the nature and the components of translation competence (Pym 2003: 482). Our comparative analysis of different definitions and models of translation competence also shows their heterogeneity and eclecticism for they have different components which are combined differently. However, we find these components quite relevant though not very systematized.

Previously it was thought that translator competence depends on a good knowledge of the working languages, which is why translation teaching methods emulated the methods of teaching foreign languages, so, for instance, in Europe there was not much difference between the faculties of foreign languages and translation departments (Guidère, p. 113). It is now believed that foreign language proficiency is a necessary but not sufficient component of translation competence (Gile 2005:12). Currently it is no longer a question of translation competence only as a form of bilingualism (Scarpa 2010: 288; Pym 2003: 481).

According to Scarpa, translation competence comprises knowledge, competencies and strategies needed to create high-quality translation. We think this definition is overall acceptable, however, unclear and needs details.

M. Presas, for instance, defines translation competence as follows:

- declarative knowledge of categories for describing and analyzing texts, as well as for evaluating the communicative situation; these categories allow to create an internal representation of the translation problems;
- practical knowledge of the processes necessary for understanding the source text and creating a translation; these processes are mainly automatic;
- the ability to evaluate one's own strategies and change them if the results do not meet expectations (Presas 2005: 183-184). We believe that translation competence is first and foremost practical; in this regard, Presas' approach is not quite accurate since it does not mention any skills or practical abilities of a translator.

A.Pym defends a minimalist approach to defining translation competence. He advances a definition of translation competence as a two-fold mechanism of decision-making comprising:

- the ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TT1, TT 2 ... TTn) for a pertinent source text (ST);
- the ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence.

Scarpa pretends that Pym's binary definition is one of the most popular ones and widely used because of its simplicity (Scarpa 2010: 287). We believe this definition has many limitations: it does not really deal with any major competencies needed by a translator so it is unclear what specific skills students need to have in order to generate target texts or to choose one TT. Therefore Pym's approach does not allow measuring the quality of academic programmes.

In recent years, the definition of translation competence has been changing: it is becoming more complex and includes more components. The incorporation of the 'professional element' is an important trend in recent years. Professional element refers to the translator's interaction with colleagues, customers and the use of information technologies (Scarpa 2010: 287).

As for the content of translation competence, many researchers suggest similar models, but their opinions differ in the details. Professional literature cites numerous models of translation competence, but we will cite several of them.

Kelly offers a list of competencies desirable for graduates of translation departments. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and, according to the author, the competencies may overlap:

- Communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and two cultures. This competence covers both active and passive skills in the working languages, as well as the knowledge of text and discourse in the respective cultures.
- Cultural and intercultural competence. Here, culture is not understood as an encyclopedic knowledge of geography, history, politics, etc., but rather as traditions, values, beliefs, behaviors, and how all this is expressed in text.
- Competence in a particular field of knowledge. Basic knowledge of the science spheres in which the translator can / will work at a sufficient level to understand the source text and work with specialized literature to solve translation problems.
- Professional and instrumental competence. Using a variety of documentary sources, searching terminology, mastering of modern technologies and information and communication technologies (ICT). Basic knowledge of professional activity: contracts, working with customers, professional associations, professional ethics.
- Psychophysiological competence. Self-confidence, attention / concentration, memory.
- Interpersonal competence. Ability to work with other members of the translation process (translators, managers, editors, terminologists, customers, authors). Teamwork, negotiation skills, leadership skills.
- Strategic competence. Organization and planning skills. Identifying and solving problems. Evaluation and correction of one's work (Kelly 2007: 161-162). We believe that Kelly's model of translation competence is quite relevant but the author herself stresses out the uncertainty of the above mentioned components and their correlation. We believe that defining translation competence implies not only specifying its components as an organised whole but also their interrelation and interdependence.

In this context we find the model of translation competence developed by the PACTE group the most comprehensive one. The PACTE group is a group of researchers from the Barcelona University who have organized a long-term empirical research to study the acquisition of translation competence. PACTE group offers the following model consisting of 5 sub-competences and psychophysiological components:

1. Bilingual competence: mainly practical knowledge necessary to communicate in both languages. This is pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual, lexical and grammatical knowledge.
2. Extralinguistic competence: mostly declarative knowledge, explicit and implicit, about the world in general and specific areas. This is bicultural, encyclopaedic and thematic knowledge.
3. Competence of translation knowledge: mostly declarative knowledge, explicit and implicit, of translation principles and professional aspects. Knowledge of translation principles deals with the translation unit, techniques and strategies in use as well as various types of problems. Knowledge of the profession is related to the labour market (professional associations, tariffs, etc.), different types of customers, clients, etc.
4. Instrumental competence: mainly practical knowledge about the use of documentary sources and ICT for translation (various dictionaries, encyclopaedias, translation programs, editing programs, parallel texts, search engines, etc.)
5. Strategic competence: practical knowledge to effectively translate and solve problems. This competence plays a major role. It affects all the other competencies, connects them and controls the translation process. This competence allows to plan the process, evaluate it and its results, activate different knowledge and skills to make up for the gaps, identify translation problems and apply the methods to solve them.
6. Psychophysiological components: cognitive components, various behavioral aspects and psychomotor mechanisms. These are cognitive components such as memory, perception, attention, emotion, behavioral aspects such as curiosity, persistence, punctuality, critical mind, self-confidence, the capacity to assess one's abilities, motivation, the ability to think creatively and logically, analysis and synthesis skills.

All these competencies are intertwined during the translation and there is a hierarchy between them. Strategic competence has a crucial importance as it controls the translation process and corrects defects in the other competencies (PACTE 2007: 96-97).

The PACTE group defines translation competence as a "hidden system of knowledge required to translate" (PACTE 2007: 96). Typically, this knowledge is declarative (knowledge of the principles governing translation and

other aspects of professional translation practice) and practical /procedural (the way in which subjects approach the translation of a specific text and the units it comprises).

The translation competence model developed by the PACTE group has become a kind of reference for many researchers (Albir 2008, Albir, Alves 2009, Beeby 2000, Göpferich, 2009, Orozco 2000, Peterlin 2014, Pezza 2010, Presas 2000), although it is often criticized (Pezza, 2010; Kuznik 2007).

On the positive side, the PACTE group models has been developed on the basis of empirical research (PACTE 2011), it is a model of analytical and component type, based on the principle of the division of the research object (translation competence) into five competencies and psychophysiological components. All competencies (bilingual, extralinguistic, translation knowledge, instrumental, strategic) are differentiated but interconnected and have their own function, while the strategic competence is the most important. Pezza, commenting on the PACTE group model, stresses the importance of practical, expert knowledge in their model. The fact is that there are studies showing that no direct connection between the students' knowledge of translation principles and the efficiency of translation tasks they perform. This implies the importance of practical knowledge.

On the negative side, as Kuznik points out, the PACTE group model does not specify the interconnection of translation competence with other translator competencies not directly connected with translation (Kuznik 2007: 119-120).

Also, as suggested by Pezza, rather than assuming that declarative (knowledge of the translation principles and other aspects of professional translation practice) and practical (the way in which subjects approach the translation of a specific text) knowledge are separate components of translation competence, it would be useful to think about how different types of declarative knowledge can interact with practical knowledge in the development of translation competence. This would explain the influence of declarative knowledge on the translator performance and the development of translation competence (Pezza 2010: 167-168).

Moreover, we believe that strategic competence which can also be found in Kelly's above-cited model appears rather far-fetched and imprecise. Presas explains that strategic sub-competency was introduced to bind together all other competency (bilingual, extralinguistic, translation knowledge, instrumental) since their interrelation is difficult to explain. There are two reasons for this phenomenon: it is impossible to relate comprehensively all the knowledge and skills necessary to translate and explain the relationship between all the sub-competencies (Presas 2005: 180). Still we find the strategic component which is now common to many translation competence models quite unclear.

In addition, there is a tendency at the moment to develop translation competence models which have more and more sub-competencies. For example, Göpferich (2009) offers a model of translation competence based on the PACTE group model with one new sub-component which is a "translation routine activation competence" denoting the capacity to "recall and apply certain – mostly language-pair-specific – (standard) transfer operation (or shifts) which frequently lead to acceptable target language equivalents" (Göpferich 2009:22). Neubert (2000) offers a similar model of six components: linguistic, textual, encyclopaedic, specialist/subject, cultural knowledge as well as transfer expertise. Transfer expertise denotes "tactics and strategies of converting L1 texts into L2 texts" (Neubert 2000: 10), a component which seems to us very confusing. In addition, Neubert does not clearly explain what exactly is meant by textual sub-competence and why this component was chosen as a separate sub-competence.

Plassard comparing different models of translation competence including PACTE group model notes that they have numerous similarities, regardless of the difference in terminology. Translation competence appears here as a "macrocompetence"(Plassard 2009: 230) or "supercompetence" (Pym 2003: 487) embodying various declarative, practical and metacognitive knowledge. It remains only to find out the relationship between the competence and the means to form it, i.e. how to organize a class, which texts to choose, etc.

It seems that new models of translation competence try to include as many components as possible thus trying to create an "ideal profile" of translator. But, as we believe, a mere summation of multiple and unclear components only leads to confusion like the above-mentioned "translation routine activation competence" suggested by Göpferich or Neubert's "transfer" competence. Moreover, as requirements for translators are increasing it is nearly impossible to keep up with the market's needs since translators nowadays have to have a wide range of qualifications: work with electronic tools, translation memories, have a multiple technical skills, work with clients, manage projects, etc. what Neubert calls a "seemingly endless jungle of areas" (Neubert 2000: 3). Trying to put all these skills into translation competence is impossible and misleading in our opinion. As translation studies remain

highly interdisciplinary, the contribution of discourse analysis, cognitive psychology, linguistics and sociolinguistics also contribute to the explosion of translation competence's components. It makes us wonder whether it is possible to clearly define all the skills, knowledge and abilities that make up a translation competence. But we firmly believe that a further increase in components is not an issue since it's confusing and unrealistic.

Thus, having analyzed the concept and the content of translation competence, the goal of translation education, we can conclude that translation competence is always complex and consist of several sub-competencies. There is an opposite approach advanced by Pym (2003) who suggests a minimalist definition of translation competence in contrast to overly complex existing models. We suppose that Pym's minimalist approach is not able to fully describe the nature of translation competence in all its complexity.

Nowadays, there is no consent among scholars which specific components have to be a part of it, which components can be considered "core sub-competencies", how they are delimited and interrelated. We believe that translation competence should necessarily comprise bilingual, extralinguistic and instrumental (practical knowledge about the use of documentary sources and ICT: dictionaries, encyclopaedias, translation programs, editing programs, etc.) components.

3. Conclusion

Following the comparative study of concepts and models of translation competence we have highlighted its following characteristics. The translation competence appears complex, and multidimensional; it's as a "macrocompetence" (Plassard 2009: 230) or "supercompetence" (Pym 2003: 487) including numerous sub-components. The exact skills and knowledge that make up translation competence are a subject of controversy.

Most contemporary translation competence models include elements such as working languages proficiency, extralinguistic or cultural knowledge, professional knowledge, personal qualities as well as a sub-competences connecting all other components such as the strategic competence in PACTE group model. Translation competence comprises both theoretical and practical knowledge.

Though there is no "ideal" translation competence model since it's impossible to describe all the various skills and knowledge needed by a translator, we have chosen the PACTE group model as the most comprehensive and, what's more important, empirical-based. This model consists of psychophysiological components and 5 interrelated sub-competencies (bilingual, extralinguistic, translation knowledge, instrumental and strategic).

We believe that there is a need to define more clearly the different sub-components of translation competence without trying to build "an ideal competence" as over-complication only leads to confusion. Then it will be possible to establish the interrelation of different components because the existing models do not specify their interconnection. Describing the nature of translation competence is necessary in order to organize the education process and to assess the quality of academic programmes.

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