

# CATERING FOR THE TRANSLATION STUDENTS' AWARENESS OF THEIR TASK

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## Abstract:

Translation education needs to be centered on some elements that a professional translator may require on the work spot and that go beyond the mere linguistic competence. A professional translator needs among many other requirements to be able to decide on the appropriate approach to adopt for the piece of work that might fall in his hands. He needs to weight up the many options he may think about and to make his mind on just one option at a time. In short, he needs to be aware of his role as a translator and language communicator and behaves accordingly to satisfy the task requirements. For this, he needs to evaluate himself and the others and to tell about his strategies and approaches and track his own weaknesses in order to be able to acquire new skills and go further in his translation competence

## ملخص

لابد أن يقوم تعليم الترجمة على مجموعة من المقومات التي يحتاج إليها المترجم المحترف في ميدان العمل إلى جانب احتياجه لإتقان اللغات. فالمترجم المحترف بحاجة إلى أن يكون قادرا على اتخاذ القرار المناسب بشأن المنهج الواجب اتخاذه في ترجمته لأي عمل قد يقع بين يديه. إذ لابد عليه من تقييم مجموع الخيارات المتوفرة لديه و تبني الأنسب منها فقط. و باختصار لابد أن يكون على دراية بدوره في حلقة التواصل كمترجم و أن يتصرف وفقا لذلك ليلبي متطلبات أي عمل ترجمي قد يكون بصدده. ومن أجل هذا يكون من واجبه تقييم قدراته بنفسه و مقارنتها بقدرات غيره، والتحدث عن استراتيجياته و مناهجه و تحديد النقائص التي تكتنف أداءه بشكل واضح و جلي يُمكنه من المضي قدما في اكتساب مهارات جديدة و تحسين كفاءته.

## 1- Introduction

Translation is now being taught everywhere around the world and is taking a firm foundation in educational and training institutions. The aim of such education or training is surely to inculcate practical and principled knowledge translators may require at work whatever form this work may take. Thus, beyond the linguistic competence in the two languages that any translator is required to develop, awareness of this profession and especially this activity is particularly important for the translator to be self-confident and adequately equipped on the work spot and fulfill his role as a language mediator and communicator. Thus, the translator's metacognitive profile should be catered for in a systematic way if any autonomy and independence is ever expected from him. He must be able to take decisions and weigh up options he may invoke about a given translational problem to adopt the only most suitable one. He also needs to draw a clear path of action about whatever translation task he is confronted with and should be able to explain and justify his course of action without confusion or hesitation. This is, in fact, the very difference between a real professional translator and an ordinary bilingual communicator. In what follows is a discussion of the most transient aspects of translation as a professional and special activity distinct from a simple mastery of languages. As the discussion unfolds many issues are brought to light about teaching translation and preparing the translator for the market and for a life-long process of autonomous learning.

## 2- The difference between a bilingual communicator and a professional translator

For a start, a clear distinction must be drawn between a bilingual competence based on learning languages and a translation competence based on an already acquired competence in the languages involved. Surely

mastery of a foreign language other than one's mother tongue is a prerequisite for translation to take place. One cannot engage in any discussion about translation whether in relation to the profession or pedagogy, without taking firm assumptions about ensuring a good linguistic competence in at least two languages including one's mother tongue or habitual language of use. However, this prerequisite although of paramount importance is not what characterizes translation per se otherwise we may take bilingualism to be a synonym or an exact equivalent to translation. Thus, translation is based upon an acute awareness of one's role in a given situation of use to undertake the most secure and practical course of action. In this respect, Mona Baker (1992) eludes to these very same aspects in the introduction to her book *In Other Words*. She plainly says:

[T]ranslators need to develop an ability to stand back and reflect on what they do and how they do it. Like doctors and engineers, they have to prove to themselves as well as others that they are in control of what they do; that they do not just translate well because they have a "flair" for translation, but rather because, like other professionals, they have made a conscious effort to understand various aspects of their work (Baker, 1992: 8).

As such, future professional translators should be able to know if they have done well in their translation or not. They usually receive their feedback from themselves and do not need to be told what to do after they examine and analyze every situation of use they may be faced with. For example, when asked to produce a translation of a document full of mistakes the client may need to prove the incompetence of his employee and justify his decision to fire him, a professional translator is inclined to produce an inaccurate rendition that would satisfy that particular client and not another. The translator here in being aware of the expectancy of his client adopted a unique attitude a non-professional would rather hesitate to take and consider undoable (Robinson, 2003).

A non-professional translator or a bilingual amateur would find the above decision awkward and would rather behave tightly and in a very restrictive way that satisfies an ideal he may the only one to believe in. For a

bilingual, language is everything that really matters in a translation. Translation for him is mostly the accurate rendition of a piece of discourse that is modeled in the same fashion whatever the situation of use. Another example would probably take this discussion further. A translator who meticulously analyses the requirement of his client and comes to know that he does not need the whole manuscript to be rendered in its integrality, makes an appropriate selection of passages that would directly meet the need of that client and save him the extra money he would spend on items he does not actually need. In behaving so, the translator would also save himself time and energy and make him gain respect and trust from his client. These actions and decisions cannot be possible unless the translator is aware of the requirement of the task at hand and knows well about his role and limitations if ever in such a situation. In this matter, Robinson(2003: 8) expresses clearly his disappointment with the overgeneralizations people tend to make about the translation task that do not meet the requirements of individual clients' needs: *"it is perhaps unfortunate, but probably inevitable, that norms and standards appropriate for one group of users or use of situations should be generalized to apply to all"*. Translation is decided upon once a clear understanding of the situation at hand is guaranteed. Thus, the path to a successful translation is not unique and emanates from a judicious analysis of the situation of use and only awareness can make a translator able to make a choice and trust his decision.

### 3-Translation Competence

Translation competence has been defined differently by many researchers in the field, using appellations ranging from aptitude, ability, skill and competence. However, the most used appellation is "competence" as this term has an already long tradition in linguistics. Competence in Chomskyan Generative Grammar denotes the mental ability a native speaker possesses and that makes him able to produce an unlimited number of novel sentences that he has never heard or produced before (1959). In translation, this notion can be extended to denote the translator's ability to overcome translational problems he probably has never met before. In other words, on the basis of a limited number of translations productions, the translator comes to internalize the process by

which he transfers messages from one linguistic code to another. To succeed in such an endeavor, the translator needs besides a near-perfect mastery of the two languages, a kind of a mental agility that makes the switching mode between the two linguistic systems possible. This is what may be referred to as "transfer competence": a special linguistic competence that eases and facilitates the translator shift of command between two different linguistic systems that may overlap in the process of decoding and reformulating the message. A good translator is more agile and more apt to avoid interferences and linguistic blockages than novices and amateurs. This is at the core of translation competence per se. Thus, besides the mastery of the languages involved, a knowledge competence about the domain at hand, a cultural knowledge related to these same languages and a transfer competence are much needed to secure the communication process and the transfer of the message at hand. Thus, translation competence, according to Bell in Faber (1998:9) is made of five types of knowledge: Target language knowledge, text type knowledge, source language knowledge, real world knowledge, and contrastive knowledge. On the other hand, the PACTE group of the University of Barcelona in Preseas (2000) propose a model of translation competence made up of six sub-competences, which are: Communicative competence in both languages, extralinguistic competence, the competence of using tools and documentary sources, psychological skills such as creativity and rigor, transfer competence, and strategic competence. The four first competences can be said to be peripheral to the central transfer competence. These five sub-competences interact between one another in different ways and directions, according to many variables pertaining to the text-type, the subject matter, etc. These different interrelationships, themselves, are governed by the strategic competence which guides the translator in his search for adequate solutions. By the same token, Albrecht Neubert(2000: 6) identifies five parameters of translational competence that can be developed to different degrees in translators and that are responsible together for monitoring translators' performance and enhancing their competence in translation overall. These are (1) language competence, (2) textual competence, (3) subject competence, (4) cultural competence, (5) transfer competence. According to him too, transfer competence again is at the core of all competencies and it integrates them all.

However, the transfer competence cannot be efficient unless secured by the existence of the other competences enumerated above.

All these definitions, however, tend to agree on the existence of a competence apart from the linguistic component that secures the good functioning of the translator's activity. This competence, often called "transfer competence", cannot not be acquired unless sustained by other components that are enumerated slightly differently by different authors. This is amenable to say, that translation is a new set of schemata, translators are made to acquire to achieve a certain degree of creativity and agility that makes for a given cognitive system special for their profession.

#### 4-How translation competence is developed?

One may also be tempted to ask about the way to go in developing this translation competence in students and future translators and to inquire about the process translators go through to develop their competence. Naturally, teachers need to know about the nature of this development to increase their awareness of what they should do to help their learners in the process. Learners themselves should understand this acquisition mechanism to be able to gauge their progress and monitor the process they go through by themselves.

Chesterman (2000:77) considers that the highest stage a translator may reach in the course of developing his translation competence is expertise. He says, "*Whatever else it is, translation is certainly a skill. And like any other skill, it can be learned. When they have mastered this skill, translators are therefore experts. We therefore need a conception of what expertise is, how it can be learned, and how it can be taught*". Chesterman in this same context found an answer to his question in the Dreyfus brothers' book *Mind Over Machine* (1986) in which the developing course of translation competence towards expertise has been clearly made explicit.

Thus, according to Dreyfus brothers in Chesterman (2000), the learning of any skill goes through five stages beginning with the stage of novices and reaching the final stage of experts.

**Stage one:** this is the novice stage, at which the learners start to acquire basic facts and information about the skill to be learned together with the rules that determine the actions based on these facts. The teacher here provides the

learners with context-free and relevant features to be processed in a simple and preliminary way. For instance, when learning to drive a car, the learner is presented with information pertaining to different parts of the car such as the brake, the accelerator ... and their roles in its functioning. At this stage, behavior is fully conscious and atomistic as the learners do not have an overall understanding of how to drive, but just proceed in basic and separate activities. In the same way, a translator at this stage does not have a full understanding of the whole process of translation, but operates on the basis of simple linguistic activities and explicates the transfer from preliminary chunks of discourse and isolated micro linguistic elements.

**Stage two:** this is the advanced beginner stage whereby the learners begin to recognize other aspects of the situation that were not made explicit for them before. They start to perceive similarities and to draw generalization from previous instances of use. The features they learnt in the previous stage become situationalized and clearer for them. Behavior here is still conscious but not so easily verbalized and less atomistic than it was.

**Stage three:** this is the competence stage whereby the learners develop more experience and are now faced with more relevant features of language and communication to recognize and learn. The learners need to develop a sense of priorities to make a selection from the situational features available for them to be able to decide which one is to be discarded or overruled. As such, the learners are now able to perceive the task situation as a whole in order to make appropriate decisions as regards options and priorities. At this stage, the learners become conscious of the goal they want to attain and aware of the task as a problem solving and not as a mere information processing.

**Stage four:** this is the stage of proficiency at which the learners develop a more holistic vision of the skill in question and become better equipped with their personal experience and intuition. They move instantly between the rational and intuitive mode so that they are "*sometimes inside the skill, and sometimes detached from it*" (Chesterman, 2000: 78).

**Stage five:** this is the stage of expertise *per se* at which the learners become equipped with an intuition they trust as they are able to verify and refine it. At this stage, rationality and conscious behaviour become less prevailing and are brought under control. This rational side, according to

Dreyfus brothers (cited in Chesterman, 2000: 79) "*functions as a kind of monitor that can be switched on at will. It is manifested as what the Dreyfus call 'deliberate rationality'*"

Thus, consciousness of the first stage is different from consciousness of the latter stage. Novices need consciousness all the time to assimilate certain features and basic rules to make the acquisition of the skill in question ever possible. Experts, however, need consciousness from time to time as a monitor. They deliberately switch to this state of consciousness whenever they need to do so. In Chesterman's words, "*conscious rationality seems to be the door through which we must pass although we do not need to stay stuck in the doorway forever*" (ibid:80). This deliberate consciousness is what we may refer to as metacognition as it is an awareness that monitor and regulates one's knowledge and actions towards achieving a goal. A translator does not need to develop a handicapping automaticity, but a kind of automaticity that allows for his working memory to process and deal with more complex issues. "*Our trainees*", Chesterman says, "*should be aware not only of the prevailing norms and the values underlying them, but also of the possibility of refining or breaking these norms, of finding better ways to meet prevailing values, of refining the values themselves*". In a sense, they would become self-independent learners capable of innovation and creation.

Researchers in the field have drawn pertinent conclusions about particular aspects of translation competence to discern its path of development, on the basis of: (1) empirical research comparing translation students' performance with that of professionals and language students, (2) theoretical reflections on the components of translation competence, and (3) investigations of the development of expertise in other domains, conducted by cognitive psychologists (Göpferich and Jääskeläinen, 2009: 174-175). These conclusions revealed the following characteristics which distinguish competent translators from less competent or those on their way to acquire this competence. These mainly concern the tendency of advanced translators to:

- focus on larger translation units.
- tackle more complex problems such as textual considerations instead of searching lexical equivalents.



- take into account more aspects that are relevant to produce a target text that fulfils its specific function for a specific audience.
- proceed in a less ST-oriented and linear fashion and consider larger chunks of discourse in terms of both the co-text and the context.
- have an increasing awareness about translational problems, strategic solutions to translational problems and monitoring abilities.
- use reference works to solve text production problems, in comparison to novices who use them to solve comprehension problems.
- use more dictionaries per a translation item in comparison to novices who tend to look more items in the dictionary-often the same dictionary.
- use monolingual dictionaries in comparison to novices who tend to stick to the bilingual ones.
- develop more automaticity in their translation process, reserving their working memory to tougher and novel issues in comparison to novices who tend to bring to their consciousness every stumbling problem whatever simple it might be.

## 5- Teaching recommendations

Having drawn this picture of translation and the prerequisites for translation competence development, it is necessary to guide the teachers with practical instruction and recommendations in order to make the teaching atmosphere favorable for both teachers and learners.

Learners need to be made aware all the time of the process they are trying to acquire. Their awareness would make their cooperation easy and the teaching process more efficient. In this respect, Kussmaul (in Colina, 2003: 40) argues that, *"the better informed the student translator is about the processes involved in translating and the more he/she knows about translating, the greater degree of self-awareness. Once self-awareness is developed, self-confidence follows as a natural consequence"*. These are highly appreciated qualities in professional translators who need besides everything else to be autonomous learners all the time and to self-regulate their activities. This self-awareness hinted at above can be catered for by encouraging students to scrutinize their work and diagnose their aptitudes by comparing them to those of their peers and their most experienced colleagues. They need also to know about the history of translation and the

different approaches known in the history of the discipline together with the factors contributing to the emergence of given approaches at given points in time.

Thus, part of this awareness is achieved when introducing students to translation theory and the history of the profession most of all. In this way, students will acquire the basic principles in translation laid down by their predecessors. A theory of translation, however, should consist of a set of generalizations deduced from practice and the different translational methods continuously put to use and proven efficient. According to Robert Larose (1992: 7), theory is " *un ensemble de généralisations à partir de pratiques ou de méthodes traductives, de considérations sur les rapports entre les mots et les choses, entre le fond et la forme et même, entre le langage et la pensée*". This theory, thus, concerns every aspect pertaining to either process or product and covers whatever aspect affecting them. It should necessarily stem from the need to clarify how the product is brought into being and explain the possible paths of action to be undertaken. In this same respect, Andrew Chesterman (2005: 208) sustains Baker's idea of professional awareness explained above and in his turn insists that:

The more we understand about translation, and the more we can transmit and develop this understanding in translator training, the more it should be possible for translators to feel masters of their craft, masters of the various conceptual and technical tools that they use. It is surely this feeling of expertise- of knowing what one is doing, how to do it, and why one is doing it in that way- that brings a sense of professional dignity and human value.

Translation, we should again emphasize, is a long life experience and for that translators need to develop their self-autonomy and ability to monitor their progress and gauge their own development. Teachers are required to develop their students' sense of responsibility in giving them the chance to weigh up their options and choose the most appropriate ones according to objective criteria they are taught to use for that matter. As such, teachers should banish the use of a model translation as a correction that students are

implicitly incited to accept without comment. Nothing is more harmful for a translator than a belief that a perfect translation exists and that there is just one approach to adopt and that students learning translation should acquire and never transgress. Thus, once one has acquired necessary linguistic luggage in two languages and has made a decision to embark on translation, he is supposed to develop an acute sense of awareness about his role in his society as a mediator and all the responsibilities this entails.

### Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to show the importance of enhancing translation students' metacognitive profile to enable them to adapt to diverse situations of use to make judicious decisions whenever they are stumbled with difficulties. Translation by nature is more than a mere linguistic exercise and as such requires major attention to macro skills pertaining to expertise and professionalism. A translator should be seen not as a mere decoder but rather as a mediator and communicator who has much responsibility to bear in a modern world eager for development and enrichment.

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