Cognition and the Hierarchy of Expertise in Translation: A Matter of Practice Seniority or Academic Maturity. Readings in Some Translators' Prefaces

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Abstract

This paper tackles the relationship between cognition and expertise in translation, its hierarchy and the involvement of seniority and maturity in translation academic and professional practices. Expertise in fields of knowledge and in research is linked to the degree of awareness of prerequisites that make the nature of the activity. It sheds lights on selected remarks and guidance that senior translations gave as pieces of advice to beginner translators. It gravitates on journalistic and literary translation and suggests penetrating some shadow zones in professional translation. Expertise in translation meets not only the way in which texts are conveyed but the degree of involvement of intensive and extended knowledge ,the latter covers the translator's qualifications and the adaptability of language as well as its capacity to host the "foreigner's" structure of thought and mind as well as it "hosts" its strangeness .

The paper came to a conclusion that expertise is neither extended knowledge nor seniority, it's a mixture of

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both added to the reflection capacity to use adapted solution appropriately when needed.

Keywords: Cognition; Expertise; Seniority; Academic maturity; Translation competence.

Introduction:

Being an expert in translation is having notoriety in the eye of either the beginner translators or average users. Specialized or general the text to translate is, requires a sum of experience and competency that guarantee a smooth shift between linguistic and cultural borders through space and time.

In translation, observation and experience have shown that reality is quite different; it is governed by a sum of linguistic, extra-linguistic and cognitive considerations, which provide distinctiveness in translation practice, as well. Seniority and maturity are key requirements in the field of translation competency; nevertheless, the hierarchy of expertise in the field of translation refers to the specialty of the translator and the text type. Cognition appears to gain much importance when the linguistic tools require conveying the meaning of texts and fragments differently; this capacity seems to meets the requirements of the linguistic register, tone, discourse and the aim of the text in the literary and the journalistic text.

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The Translator and Field Knowledge expertise:

Christina Schäffner (2000: 67) states that an expert is somebody who displays:

> *"Consistently superior performance on a specified set of representative tasks for the domain and Expertise in general is great skill or knowledge in a particular field."*

It is also the property of a person who performs an operation or a set of operations in a limited domain with exceptional results when compared to others capable of performing the same operation.

Expertise generally implies useful and large amounts of knowledge and fluent action, such as reflexive models, rather than on knowledge alone. Some documents like medical, legal or highly technical ones require a translator who is familiar with the terms used in the specific field of expertise. *"In any professional environment, performance is judged according to certain clearly defined objectives and needs, which demand a specific type of competence…"* (Schäffner 2000: 6)

For these kinds of documents, we have an Expert Translation service where an expert, senior or native speaker translator performs the translations.

Translators differ from each other in many ways in terms of their knowledge and professional maturity that may directly influence their task. A beginner translator may think that mastering language is enough to

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translate, which is not totally true. Translation requires real and expertise. Besides his mastery of language, the translator must be able to penetrate the distinctiveness of the translation world such as typography rules that vary by language and style beyond consistency and specialized information. Through the performed task, not only does the translator show the linguistic qualities but also an extended knowledge and personal qualifications.

Talented translators conveyed the works of great writers to offer them to readers from different linguistic backgrounds. They played a role in the dissemination of information. With the uprising contact between nations in the past through modern technology means, it has become easier and faster to learn about what occurs in various languages and codes.

If experience is generally praised in many jobs as a pre-requisite, it is not systematic .It is better to acquire experience within continuous practice to get the qualities and 'culture' of an expert.

Generally, inexperience seems not to be a major handicap for applicants for jobs in translation, as long as they have been able to become familiar with the latest technological developments and methods at university. For a freelance translator, experience is essential: hence the fact that most freelancers spend a few years accumulating it. If the question should be looked from the perspective of a completion of experience to

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become expertise, translation agencies see that inexperience can be a more extra requirement that is coupled to technological skills.

Translation as a multi task activity:

Since translation of written texts is a multidisciplinary activity that has a vital role in inter-language and inter-cultural communication, translation is considered rather a mental task and translators are in present times perceived as (Baker 1992: 2):

> *"Translators are not yet sure whether translation is a trade, an art a profession or a business"*

Translation as an occupation and as a skill started to gain recognition as late as in the 20th century with the emergence of translation studies. Initial attempts at defining translation and proposing a theoretical background for translation at the same time one of the interesting areas within the field of translation studies is devoted to conceptualization and further development of theoretical and practical background for translation training gained much interest. In this context the notion of *translation competence* (TC) plays a prominent role going requiring increased automatization of certain processes or concepts and an ability to reflect both upon these "tools" and the translator`s own work.

In term of the hierarchy of expertise, translators can be divided into five categories;

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- *Novice translator* – they are people that are beginners in the field, trying to be acquainted with translation, s/he tries to learn the basic rules and his/her perception of the subject is mainly.
- *Advanced beginner* – is starting to be able to "think outside" the concepts that were introduced in the first stage and connect them to each other, as a result behaviour becomes less atomistic.
- *Competence stage* – trainee gains the ability to prioritize among different choice at hand and perceive it as a goal oriented problem solving activity. Here, the person becomes aware of the responsibility this particular task involves, which in turn leads to a extended involvement in the process.
- *Proficiency* – intuition and personal experience are introduced into the equation, however they both rest on the rules and concepts introduced in previous three stages.
- *Expertise* – the expert is driven predominantly by intuition, the translator is capable of critical self-reflection, intuition is the main mode of operation, an expert is not only someone who is reliable, but he is a guide, and a model to follow in the field.
- Schäffner (2000: 79) states that.
  "...for real experts, things that might be problems for others are merely routine matters"

Some prefaces in translated books mention the necessity to accumulate an amount of knowledge that

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render the translator able to translate reliably among them the translation of Marianne LEDERER's book "Interpreter pour traduire" ,by Faiza Al Qassem she says:

"تستخدم اللغة أداة لنقل المعنى ليس إلا، ولا ينبغي ترجمتها في حد ذاتها" ص7

"Language is no more than a medium to vehicle the meaning, it has not to be translated itself"

وتضيف في الصفحة 11 قائلة إن المترجم مطالب بأن يكون على دراية ب "المكملات المعرفية...إن ما تضمره لغة ما لا يتناسب بالضرورة مع ما تضمره لغة أخرى"

The translator has to have in mind: "extra cognitive knowledge…what contains a given language is not obligatory identical to what a different language may contain"

في الصفحة 13 تضيف:

"لا يصح ان نعتبر ان ضعف المترجم في اللغة التي يترجم منها او اللغة التي يترجم إليها حجة للإقرار باستحالة الترجمة"

"One shouldn't see the incapacity of the translator in the source or target languages as a reason to claim that translation is impossible."

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The Qualifications of an Expert Translator:

As a rule, translators must be capable of expressing, in the target language, ideas that someone else has formulated in the source language. They need to understand the language from which they are translating and be able to write well in the language into which they are translating. This requires having an awareness of style and grammar and language. Expert translators understand the technical area in which they are working and are often expected to possess an in-depth knowledge of highly specialized areas.

Neubert prescribes that change is the only constant in translation practice; it is the change that is constant in translation, he proposes the following hierarchical definition of translation competence that consists of:

- *Linguistic competence*, it includes the knowledge grammatical systems as well as repertoires, terminologies, syntactic and morphological conventions.
- *Textual competence, it* is intertwined with the linguistic competence, and represents an ability to define textual features of technical, legal or literary fields.
- *Subject competence* ,requires textual knowledge, it represents the mastery of what the particular text is

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about, either about encyclopaedic or specialist knowledge,

- *Transferrence competence* – which encompasses the strategies that allow translating the text from source language to target language, it is the ability to perform translation as such quickly and efficiently. This competence is coupled to the previous competencies and is triggered off by the nature of the text or by different parts of a single source text.

Translators are required to keep up-to-date with respect to terminology and must be able to look at a text for meaning and pragmatically. To update their knowledge, translators should consult specialized articles, glossaries and be in harmony with the changes and challenges terminological considerations pose. Translators need, as well, access to be aware about necessary technological tools use.

Hierarchy of Expertise and Translators' Ranking:

Translation competences have to provide translators with the ability to reexpress the source text in a different context either in language or/and in culture. Moreover, translators are categorized according to the notion of bilingualism and cognitive processes involved in it, Schäffner (2000:91) proposes the following typology of translators as the following:

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1) *The Associative translator* correlates lexical and textual elements of the source language with the corresponding elements the target language; while doing this, he does not associate them with any mental content.

2) *The subordinated translator* associates mental content only with the source language. Thus she has to correlate lexical elements of the target language with lexical elements of the source language, which later provides him with a mental content. The translator has to translate in order to understand.

3) *The compound translator* has a single mental content association for both source language and target language; it implies that elements of both languages lead him/her to a single meaning.

4) *The coordinated translator* associates source language with its own content and then correlates the mental contents of the source langauge with the mental contents of target language, which in turn leads to producing textual/lexical elements of it.

The stage of *coordinated translator* is the most desirable one. Acquiring the skills of a *coordinated translator* should be a cultivating translation competence through changing *bilingualism* into *interlingualism*, which is achieved by improving and strengthening the

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shift between two languages .Those are the characteristics of trainee and expert translators.

The differences between expert and novice translators are based first on the *wide-band* and the latter *narrow-band* translator.

Another translator of the book" Cross-cultural Transgressions -Research Models in Translation Studies II-Historical and Ideological Issues", by Theo Hermans,2002 and translated into Arabic by Bayoumi Kandil states in page 14 that:

"الترجمة نشاط يخضع للذوق الخاص منذ البدء حتى النهاية، أي منذ عملية الإنتاج حتى عملية الاستهلاك، أي إلى نسق العلم "

"*Translation refers to personal taste through all its process, starting from the production to the reception, that means to the process of science"*

This observation means that the translator is supposed to do multiple changes and faces various challenges in dealing with the text to translate and that translation is a science. A science has rules and since the personal taste is involved, personal taste necessitates dealing with the challenges that undermine the process. This has to do with a hierarchy of expertise as well as with encyclopedic knowledge and the challenges on how to use them to face the test difficulties.

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Experience of the world is of course essential for all humans. Without experience of other people interacting we would never learn norms of interaction. Without experience of written texts and visual media we would never learn about the world beyond our immediate environment. Extensive experience for the translator has a rudimentary working knowledge .It needs to be practical of the field.

A good translator is someone who has already done the job properly, if he is incompetent or inexperienced there is no way to claim expertise. Expectations about future expertise in translation call either extended practice or seniority with a high level of translation problem solving capacity.

Experience means familiarity with words and phrases that are used in unfamiliar ways and the capacity to create new turneries, similar to fluency in language. Expertise is at the same time a sum of problem solving capacity at various levels and seniority in exercise either in academic or professional contexts.

From the perspective of translator's expertise:

- Is ethically bound
- Must have adequate linguistic competence
- Must have knowledge of the pertinent subject matter
- May only alter a text with the author's consent.
- Can accept or refuse to perform a translation.

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- Must respect professional secrets
- Must translate personally by his own

Christina Schäffner(2000: 146) defines Translation Competence

"...as a complex notion which involves an awareness of and conscious reflection on all the relevant factors for the production of a target text (TT) that appropriately fulfils its specified function for its target addressees".

Her model is based on the following translation subsidiary competencies:

- *Linguistic competence* – in the languages concerned
- *Cultural competence* – general knowledge about historical, political, economic, cultural, etc. aspects in the respective countries
- *Textual competence* – knowledge of regularities and conventions of texts, genres, text types
- *Domain/subject specific competence* – knowledge of the relevant subject, the area of expertise
- *(re)search competence* – general strategy competence whose aim is the ability to resolve problems specific to the cross-cultural transfer of texts
- *Transfer competence* – ability to produce TTs that satisfy the demands of the translation task

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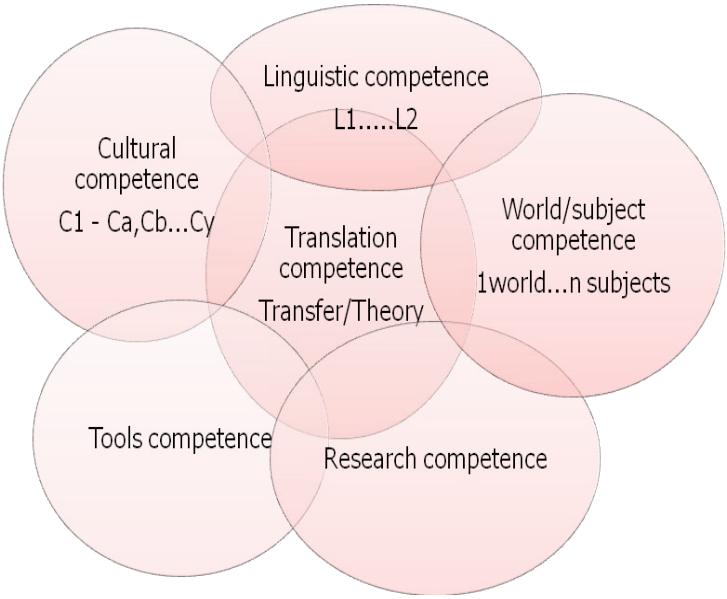

Components and interaction of translation competence

These competencies are interrelated and interact together depending on a given translation task. Both Transfer and Research competence are of procedural nature.

Transfer competence is specific only for translation and is facilitated by all the other competencies.

Proficiency: has to do with certain special bilingual skills, and has a developmental dimension. Proficiency consists of three aspects: lexical coding of

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meaning, global target language competence and lexical transfer.

Translation has become a pioneering discipline and an essential field of work in most of organizations. As a consequence, the need for qualified and expert professional translators and interpreters has become more important than any time before.

Among duties of a professional expert translator in organizations and institutions, we can group the following:

- Proofread and revise translations.
- Adhere to industry quality standards.
- Ensure that all completed work follows legal and ethical obligations.
- Be a consultant on the field of work.
- The ability to generate inventive translation solutions.
- Train beginner translators.

Conclusion:

Nowadays, cognition is coupled to the high demand for expert and competent translators in many languages and professions. Since then, the advanced states of science, the subject-matter specialization are a

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must for the translator, as is highly developed cognitive competencies. That led people to translate extensively feeling that translation is a must.

The present article dealt with the concept of translation competence from different backgrounds, and how these backgrounds were formed while employing the principles of cognition. Some elements of the previously mentioned theoretical backgrounds were used to highlight the extent to which not only translators are tied to an obligation of being competent and sometimes experts, but to the necessity to accumulate a different kind of knowledge that encloses computing, problem solving capacity and adaptation faculty in terms of the translation decision making . Moreover, translation competencies as manifested in the models exposed in terms of translation subject-field knowledge were predominantly highlighted upon translators' prefaces combined with the hypotheses that were proposed concerning the comparison between expertise hierarchy and cognition for both academic and professional environments. Furthermore, further research relating competency and expertise management strategies in translation is a must to furnish the path to putting in practice the encyclopaedic knowledge in the field of problem solving.

The results are not meant to imply, that the translators reflect a lack a certain of competence, but may

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be a lack of tools on how to use these competencies to enhance their ability to use the competencies as a problems solving strategy. Among the competencies that reflect a requirement in translation expertise there exist core translation competence that contain the following sub competencies such as world sub-competence**,** linguistic sub-competence, cultural sub-competence, tools sub-competence, research sub-competence, subject sub-competence and then ethics knowledge.

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