
FINDING WAYS TO INCREASE TRANSLATORS' COMPETENCE

Tanja Pavlović

University of Tuzla, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
tanja.memisevic@untz.ba

Jasmina Hanić

University of Tuzla, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
jasmina.hanic@untz.ba

Sanel Hadžiahmetović Jurida

University of Tuzla, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
sanel.h.jurida@untz.ba

Abstract: Many scholars have so far attempted to answer the question as to what constitutes translation competence. In doing so, it has been established that this competence requires a combination of various types of knowledge and skills, which consequently results in the complexity of the matter. It is precisely this complexity that has yielded in a number of approaches to defining and analyzing translation competence, which is considered to be a number one prerequisite for a successful professional in this field.

Since many scholars who study translation competence agree that it is most effectively developed at an academic institution, modern language faculties that educate future translators and interpreters need to adapt their curricula so as to increase students' translation competence and skills. This article looks at one of the possible ways in which translation classes have been designed in order to pursue this goal. It explores students' perceptions on the presence of a native English speaker during translation classes and direct benefits (or the lack thereof) and presents possible guidelines for the improvement of translation classes.

Keywords: translation competence, modern language faculties, curriculum improvements, in-class native speaker impact

1. INTRODUCTION

Due to market and societal tendencies, the demand for professional translation services in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has been constantly on the increase since around 1992. The current market demands can be met mostly by prospective graduates of modern language faculties as the country traditionally lacks translation education institution and centers.

Hence, the responsibility rests upon modern language faculties (at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels) to create proper curricula and provide appropriate translation-learning instruments and environment. Students need to acquire the foundations of translation competence and the skills needed to produce an acceptable target text, i.e. a target text of high quality.

In order to do this, examining and developing various means of building translation competence of undergraduate and postgraduate students at modern language faculties may be crucial in helping them reach the internationally-recognized standards in translation and interpreting. One of the possible avenues is to raise their awareness of the complexity of the translation process itself, whilst at the same time examining the impact of other externally-driven factors, such as native language competence, professional environment, and the use of technology.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the 1990s, institutional forms of translator training started taking shape in Europe, which consequently caused an increased interest in translation competence. In order to answer the question as to what constitutes translation competence we must take into account that this competence requires a combination of various skills which consequently results in its complexity. However, due to this complexity, the concept of translation competence is still somewhat blurred (Lesznyak, 2009, p. 31).

Lesznyak (2009, p. 34) also states that different approaches to translation competence grasp the concept excellently from one aspect but sometimes tend to neglect this complexity. Some of very important translation competence concepts have been sorted by Stansfield et al. (1992), Neubert (1992), Ulrych (1999), Kiraly (2000), Orozco (2000), Pym (2003), the works of the PACTE group (2005), Malmkjær (2009), and many others. Malmkjær (2009, p. 122)

sees the notion of translation competence as central in translation theory and measures it against the notion of linguistic competence while Pym attempts to redefine translation competence and simplifies its components. Some other scholars focus their research on finding appropriate instruments to measure translation competence (see Orozco, 2000; Adab, 2000; Orozco and Albir, 2002; Castillo, 2015).

According to Presas (2000, p. 28), the translator needs to be able to effectively mobilize the diversity of knowledge and skills and it is precisely this diversity which has given rise to various models of translation competence. One of the most influential models of translation competence has been developed by the PACTE Group of the *Universitat de Autònoma de Barcelona*, which defines it as “the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate.” Their revised model (2005, p. 610) comprises five sub-competences and psycho-physiological components.

Various scholars have so far studied and analyzed translation competence. While doing so they “tend to break translation competence into a set of interrelated sub-competences” (Schäffner and Adab, 2000, p. ix). Consequently, translation competence is nowadays seen as a cover term which includes language competence, textual competence, subject competence, cultural competence, and transfer competence (Ibid.)

Some studies see translation competence through the prism of the product analysis (see Adab 2000 and Orozco 2000) while other focus on the process analysis (see Göpferich 2009; Lörcher 2012). More recently scholars introduce the element of self-assessment (see Ehrensberger-Dow and Massey 2013; Al-Emara 2016), thus providing the perspective of the participants. These studies may help in linking translation competence and its sub-competences to self awareness and translation quality.

As Schäffner and Adab claim (2000, p. x), the contributors to their edition agree that translation competence is most effectively developed at an academic institution, which is why the question of how best to prepare translators for their future careers has been addressed by the emergence of specific programs offered by academic institutions. These programs need to address the issue of translation competence in proper ways so as to build educational and methodological foundations of translation knowledge and consequently facilitate the acquisition of translation competence.

3. METHODOLOGY

A total of twenty-two third year students with previous two-semester experience in translating various general types of texts were included in the study. The surveyed students are native speakers of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S) studying English Language and Literature at the undergraduate level in the English Department of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, the University of Tuzla (Tuzla, BiH). Their overall language competence is expected to be relatively high, keeping in mind that their L2 competence, at the end of their fourth year (the completion of their undergraduate studies) is expected to have reached the equivalent of level C (Council of Europe’s (2010) *Common European Framework of Reference, CEFR*).

The key element of the study was the presence of a native (American) English speaker in the translation lectures over two semesters. The survey included a questionnaire consisting of a combination of open-ended and closed-ended questions. The students were asked to share their experience gathered at attending these lectures as the aim was to assess the potential benefits of the presence of a native English speaker to the improvement of students’ translation competence as well as general knowledge and linguistic skills.

The research questions the paper investigated are as follows:

- What is translation competence?
- How can it be developed and built?
- In what way the presence of a native L2 speaker can affect the development of translation competence?

These questions were addressed with specific reference to the real in-class situation-related experience as perceived by student translators and the feedback they provided in the form of the questionnaire (each student as a participant in the study was assigned the code consisting of the capital letter P and the corresponding number from 1 through 22).

4. ANALYSIS

This section is a synthesis of the data collected from the questionnaire which was organized around two main themes. The first theme deals with student translators’ self perception of their translation skills, such as strong and weak points, elements that cause satisfaction and dissatisfaction, preferences in terms of the direction of translation, and the main difficulties they identified. The second theme addresses their perception of the contact with the native

English speaker during translation classes and the effects of such contact on their translation competence. Quotations have been included so as to illustrate the ideas which were particularly well encapsulated in the participants' original words.

The analysis outlines the results of the study, focusing on the analysis of the feedback from the surveyed student translators, obtained through the questionnaire. According to the results, the majority of them have done translation outside the university courses (73%), which indicates that they had some prior practical experience in translating general text types in various fields, such as medicine, economics, social sciences, etc. The students highlighted that most of their translation activities are into both directions equally (meaning English to B/C/S and vice versa).

When asked about which aspects of their translation they are most satisfied and why, the data reveal that the participants who have translated outside the classroom are generally satisfied. First of all, they emphasized their satisfaction with the vocabulary they use in their translation, specifically with the specialized terminology (Example 1).

Example 1: (P22) I am mostly satisfied with the particular terminology and texts related to the specific field (law, politics, economics)

They also acknowledged the importance of structuring the sentence in a proper way in line with the target language grammar. In addition, the participants also highlighted paraphrasing and reformulating in their efforts to transfer the proper meaning (Example 2).

Example 2: (P15) I am satisfied with how successfully I can paraphrase the sentences, or reformulate them to make them clearer.

The participants without the practical experience in translation outside the classroom identified field-related vocabulary as their strongest point. It seems as if the vocabulary acquired through the formal education is readily reproduced in translation tasks (Example 3).

Example 3: (P20) I usually remember how to translate parts of language that I have already dealt with.

In addition, they indicated their awareness of their personal weak points. It is not surprising that the majority of the answers point to the naturalness of their translations, as this level of competence is usually achieved through extensive education and practice. Furthermore, they stressed the elements they usually perceive as the source of their errors (articles, tenses, collocations, idioms, cultural terms, etc.) (Examples 4 and 5).

Example 4: (P10) Struggling to overcome cultural differences, no adequate pairs.

Example 5: (P22) I am dissatisfied with translating non-literal expressions and idiomatic phrases because it is difficult to find equivalents in mother tongue.

Issues having to do with specialized registers and terminology are naturally expected at this level due to overall lack of specialized knowledge and experience. Generally speaking, it is a skill that requires time and is developed gradually.

When the participants were asked to identify which aspects of their translation they are most dissatisfied with, the responses revealed some discrepancies between the participants with and without practical experience in translation. Namely, although some participants saw sentence structure and word order as their advantage, there are those who specifically saw these elements as problematic, bearing in mind the differences between B/C/S and English (English articles as a common source of errors for B/C/S participants) (Example 6).

Example 6: (P2) I am dissatisfied with articles. I often forget to put them, or when I think too much about it, I overuse them.

The second section of the questionnaire (Part B) focused on student translators' contact with native English speakers in class and their self-assessment of its impact. It is noteworthy highlighting here that three quarters of the participants found this experience helpful. In explaining the ways in which the experience was helpful, the participants underlined that the presence of the English native speaker helped them to a great extent in terms of spelling, sentence structure, and finding appropriate equivalents, because it provided them with the perspective of the native speaker (Example 7).

Example 7: (P17) Even though I surround myself with the English language on a daily basis, it is still easier to engage with a native speaker...

One of the possible advantages of having this English native speaker in-class was the fact that he was practically bilingual, as he received formal education in the participants' native language (Examples 8 and 9).

Example 8: (P10) ... we benefited from his knowledge of both English and Bosnian, it was easier to overcome cultural differences because he spoke both Bosnian and English, translating some tricky phrases concerning cultural differences was a lot easier.

Example 9: (P6) Since he knew the Bosnian language, we benefited from his knowledge of finding the right synonyms in both languages.

In commenting on what were the most useful aspects of the native speaker's presence and activities in translation classes, most participants agreed on the most salient points, such as help with cultural differences, *inter alia*, stressing that they could get the real sense of a language in every aspect, ranging from the correct use of articles, finding equivalent terms, to help with bridging the cultural gaps. The participants found the native speaker perspective of utmost importance, as it helped them acquire knowledge to become cultural mediators which, in turn, increases their overall translation competence (Examples 10 and 11).

Example 10: (P7) ... cultural insight on why some things are like they are in their country.

Example 11: (P20) We talked to him about some personal experiences which have to do with cultural differences.

In addition, what seems to be particularly important is that some participants appreciated the fact that they could rely on the English native speaker when in need, and this is why we can only assume that the presence of a native speaker largely facilitates the building of the participants' competence. Ultimately, it all depends on the student translators themselves to what extent they will make the best use of this presence and develop various levels of both confidence and competence in doing translation. Example 12 below best shows how one of the participants views and comments on the benefits of in-class native speaker presence.

Example 12: (P5) Him being there available for potential questions.

Some of the studies into translation competence included the direction of translation as one of the important indicators (see PACTE 2003). In line with this, some of the questionnaire items covered the direction of translation as one of the aspects influencing translation competence. When asked about the preference of direction of translation, almost one half of the participants (45%) clearly identified the translation into their mother tongue as most preferred. Seven participants identified translation into a foreign language as their favorite, while five participants stated that they did not have any preference when it comes to the direction of translation. The majority of the participants (63%) stressed that the translation into their mother tongue is easier than the translation into a foreign language. Better sentence structure appeared frequently as one of their explanations (Example 13).

Example 13: (P8) For me, it is much easier to translate into my mother tongue because I am capable of forming better sentences in my native language.

While explaining their preference for translation into the mother tongue, the participants stated a number of characteristics they attribute to the process. They emphasized the naturalness of the translation into their mother tongue, better lexical skills as well as their native language fluency (Examples 14 and 15).

Example 14: (P9) Translating into mother tongue gives me more free space to translate and it feels more natural.

Example 15: (P13) It is easier to translate into my mother tongue because I speak my mother tongue fluently and I have no problems with vocabulary.

However, for some of the participants (36%) the translation into a foreign language seems to be less difficult. They explained this emphasizing the complexity of their mother tongue word order and sentence structure (Examples 16 and 17).

Example 16: (P7) I think English is a lot more simpler in terms of structure than our own language, and they have more appropriate solutions.

Example 17: (P10) Studying English made me know the word order in that language better so I find it easier to translate into English.

In addition, the participants also mentioned vocabulary-related issues as one of the reasons why translation into a foreign language is easier to them (Examples 18 and 19). This can serve as evidence of translation into mother tongue not always seen as the only natural direction of translation.

Example 18: (P5) I am having trouble finding the right expressions in my mother tongue.

Example 19: (P6) In English you can say one thing in different ways.

The examples presented in this section shed light on the main features of translation process as evidenced by the student translators. Apart from the word order, which has been identified as the key element in structuring sentences properly and as such perceived as problematic for every language student, the great majority of the participants

raised the issue of cultural factor as a potential obstacle in finding proper equivalents. It is generally known that culture-specific language is the source of difficulties even for experienced translators. It is therefore not surprising that the participant underlined non-literal expressions and culture-specific phrases as their weakest points when self-assessing their translation along with the extent to which they are least satisfied with their translation. They also identified these as the most frequent source of the problems they face while translating.

5. CONCLUSION

This article reflects on the issues of translation competence, primarily from the perspective of student translators, considering that many scholars agree that this competence is most effectively developed in an academic environment such as a modern language faculty. The article takes a close look at one of the possible manners in which translation classes are designed in order to pursue this goal as it explores students' perceptions on the presence of a native English speaker in translation classes and its direct benefits.

The study is based on the analysis of responses obtained independently by a questionnaire, which covered two central topics - student translators' self perception of their translation skills, and their perception of the contact with the native English speaker in translation classes and the effects of such contact on their translation competence.

The results of this study indicate that the participants' satisfaction with their translation revolves around the acquisition of specialized terminology and knowledge regarding sentence structure. On the other hand, in self-assessing their own work, they were able to single out the most problematic aspects, usually referring to the use of articles, collocations, tenses, idiomatic expressions and cultural terms. This set of items indicates the usual difficulties encountered in the process of translation, pointing to the naturalness of the process as the final step in reaching fully developed translation competence.

As shown in the analysis, what seems to be particularly important is that participants registered the availability of the native speaker during their translation tasks. This fact combined with the participants' awareness of their difficulties might contribute to raising translation competence. It might be expected that they would utilize all the resources to resolve these difficulties. However, the extent to which student translators will make use of this available resource directly correlates to their level of effort invested in overcoming difficulties on the one hand and design of the translation activities on the other. The results of the analysis point to the fact that raising awareness of personal translation competence has the key role in exploring to the fullest the benefits of specifically designed translation classes. It also presents possible guidelines for the improvement of translation classes at higher education institutions where modern languages are taught.

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