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Assessment Peculiarities of Future Philologists' Translation Competence

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Abstract

The article deals with the up-to-date problem of organization and implementation of the efficient assessment system of future philologists' translation competence. The author singles out the peculiarities of the university assessment procedures taking into account the students' current training and future professional activity.

Keywords: translation competence, assessment, future philologists, translation competence acquisition, translation product, translation process, translation performance

Introduction

In the age of booming globalization translation is used almost everywhere. So training highly skilled philologists-translators is considered to be one of the top-priority tasks of contemporary linguistic universities. That is impossible without deep insights into the main mechanisms contributing to its efficiency. Assessment is deemed an integral consolidating component responsible for both putting training system into effect and regular evaluation of its performance and outcomes. Therefore, it should be flexible enough to reflect the main trends of modern translation findings and relevant translation users' requirements, on the one hand, and the principles of linguistic education system functioning – on the other. So this paper is aimed at the examination and interpretation of the typical and specific features of the efficient assessment of future philologists' translation competence caused by foregoing factors.

The main challenges translation competence assessment faces

The first problem we encounter in this aspect is closely connected with the ambiguous and complicated nature of translation itself. According to J. House and other researchers, it can be treated as both an exposed result of linguistic-textual operation in which a text in source language is re-contextualized in the

target one providing communication across cultures (House, 2015, p. 2, 5) and a specific hidden multi-disciplinary process based on continuous problem-solving and decision-making of bilingual nature (House, 2015, p. 5; Darwish, 1998, p. 4; O'Brien, 2013, p. 6).

It is an obvious fact that the translation product quality depends on the translation process performance and indirectly reflects it. In its turn, translation process is ensured by the efficient use of plethora of underlying knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and psycho-physiological mechanisms by a translator which constitute his or her acquired translation competence according to PACTE group (PACTE, 2003). It means that the translation competence in general may be assessed by analyzing the quality of the translation product (target text) on the basis of the agreed set of criteria. No wonder, that different translation certification examinations are focused on the assessment of the translation product quality only (Darwish, 2001; Floros, 2013; Liu, 2013). At the same time this analysis is not likely to provide enough information on the translation process and help indicate the students' gaps in translation knowledge and skills acquisition, so important to the training feedback. So students' translation competence level can be traced not only in the translation product quality but throughout translation process which directly influences the achieved result. We presented the idea of the correlation of translation competence, process and product in Figure 1.

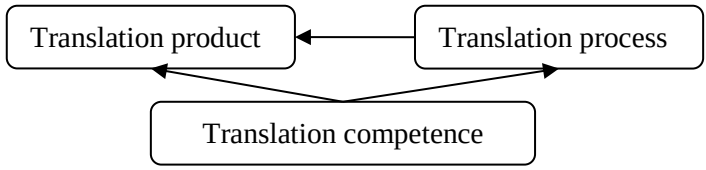

Figure 1. Correlation of translation competence, process and product (our interpretation)

Since translation result or product and translation process are based on the acquired translation competence they should be both assessed in the process of translators' training (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 269). For this reason the components of translation competence should be singled out and described in details. After that they should be matched with the relevant actions /stages /problems taken or solved with their help in the process of translation as well as with the target text qualities they assure. Finally, they should be associated with each specific type of assessment.

Here we should also keep in mind that summative academic assessment must be as similar as possible to the assessment in real professional world conducted in the form of either certification examination or ordinary test translation for a freelance specialist.

The second problem is caused by the complicated and scattered nature of translation competence acquisition. As stated by PACTE group (PACTE, 2003) it includes a set of psycho-physiological components and five sub-competences:

– bilingual (procedural knowledge, skills and abilities to communicate with the means of two languages);

– extralinguistic (declarative expert / background knowledge);

– knowledge of translation (declarative knowledge about translation as a profession and activity);

– instrumental (procedural knowledge and skills related to the use of documentation, different information sources and technologies in the process of translation);

– strategic (procedural knowledge, skills and abilities to solve problems in the process of translation providing its high performance). Bilingual and extralinguistic sub-competences are mostly acquired by the students at their language practical courses and affect indirectly translation performance and result that are assessed at their practical translation course. To our mind, in such a way the assessment procedures of different university training courses get overlapped and should interact efficiently to provide the expected training outcomes due to their strong interdisciplinary links.

So some propaedeutic translation-oriented tasks should be included into the syllabi of other related courses to avoid this possible negative effect. At the introductory stage any translation assessment task should contain built-in or implicit questions to differentiate the sources of possible translation mistakes between low acquisition level of bilingual and extralinguistic sub-competences and proper translation ones (knowledge of translation, instrumental and strategic).

Special attention should be paid here to the influence of psycho-physiological mechanisms on the translation performance. For this reason we recommend to involve some diagnostic tests to outline the peculiarities of the essential psychological functions (short term memory, attention concentration etc) which can affect the translation process, especially in case of different types of interpretation.

Efficient assessment in translation training requires the development of a wide range of related assessment objects and appropriate tasks to control their acquisition and identify possible problems (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 269). Strategic sub-competence as a consolidating component, to our mind, should be assessed with the help of translation process evaluation and translation product analysis.

Typical features vs. peculiarities of future philologists' translation competence assessment

Well-organized assessment should take into account the basic peculiarities of the training system it belongs to, namely university professional training in our case, and meet its major requirements.

First of all, any assessment system should provide regularity and cover all the existing training stages with the help of relevant types of assessment.

The requirement of assessment regularity is closely connected with the organization of monitoring in every practical class being able to provide ongoing assessment and well-timed feedback and facilitating the process of translation competence acquisition on a daily basis. Monitoring is usually considered to be the most difficult for implementation due to its closeness to training process, under-developed numerous assessment objects requiring the application of varied assessment tools. One more peculiarity of the translation acquisition monitoring is multidimensional nature of its objects. It should cover everything from separate declarative and procedural translation knowledge, particular skills to apply specific translation techniques to translation process and translation product in general.

A translator's training in modern university should provide opportunities for the development of a student's personal qualities and talents, take into account his or her individual training achievements and needs, i.e. to be individualized or even personalized (Bray, McClaskey, 2018). With this aim we suggest to apply formative assessment procedures for both monitoring and thematic assessment. It is mainly directed to the improvement and development of students' abilities to study, their awareness of personal progress (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 269). In case of formative assessment trainer's correction and comment appear to be more important than marking or grading. They provide students with necessary trainer's feedback, consolidate and contribute to their training success, develop skills and strategies of self-assessment and self-correction. To our mind, the concept of formative assessment strongly correlates with the multiple nature of translation (we can hardly ever produce only one equivalent and faithful target text to be fixed in the test keys) and the endless character of translation competence acquisition. Formative assessment combined with great variety of tasks gives opportunity to make monitoring process creative and exciting, getting your students involved into real-life professional situations, eliminate stressful aspect of assessment.

In order to develop students' positive motivation to translation performance, the assessment tasks should be based on different valuable from cognitive point of view texts containing typical and specific translation problems. So they should be selected with the help of agreed criteria to match particular type of assessment. A proper translation task should also model real-life translation situations in terms of translation goal and setting, outline the profile of potential translation users, their information needs, clearly set deadline for translation product submission etc.

Translation competence assessment should intensively involve self-assessment procedures (students assess themselves) and encourage peer-assessment (stu-

dents assess their fellow mates) as well. This idea can be explained by the substantial portion of self-work stipulated by national university training curricula, on the one hand, and the importance of self- and peer- assessment skills and strategies for the efficient translation performance – on the other (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 269). This aspect of translation competence assessment requires the development of lots of additional instruments (guidelines to perform self- and peer-assessment, checklists, translation portfolios, reflective diaries, reports, translation process recordings etc). Anyway, here we see a great number of opportunities to convert assessment procedures into exciting and close to real life interaction.

In order to arrange efficient self- and peer-assessment as well as the assessment by a trainer clear instructions for the objective grading should be developed and provided (Hurtado Albir, 2015, p. 269). For sure, penalty system and deduction of marks for errors in translation are considered to be outdated nowadays (Darwish, 2001). The student should be rather credited for right translation solution and appropriate decision rather than penalized for erroneous ones.

Accepted assessment criteria or norms will be a great help in these terms promoting future translators' training, optimizing problem-solution and decision-making processes, providing the common ground to objective discussion of translation products (Eykmans Anckaert, Segers, 2013), and facilitating the development of students' self- and peer-assessment skills and strategies. These assessment criteria must be available to students before they submit the translation tasks adding assessment clearness to the training system.

Conclusion

On the basis of the examination of modern trends in translation studies and current university training system the assessment peculiarities of future philologists' translation competence have been singled out and described. They can be formally subdivided into typical and specific ones. Typical features of translation competence assessment are caused by general requirements and principles of university training. They comprise assessment regularity, i.e. correlation of each training stage and assessment type; growing importance of monitoring as the most complicated assessment type from the viewpoint of relevant objects and tools; individualization and personification of university training achieved with the use of formative assessment for monitoring and thematic control; formation of students' positive motivation to translation assessment due to the selection of appropriate text materials for translation and modeling real-life situations in the control tasks; introduction of self- and peer-assessment practices with the use of different tools and means. Of course, all these typical features should be interpreted according to the peculiarities of translation competence training and acquisition.

Specific features of translation competence assessment are closely connected with its complicated nature. They include the necessity to consider several aspects such as translation product quality, translation process and separate components of the translation competence at a time to assess its acquisition in general; interdisciplinary and overlapping nature of the assessment procedures; the involvement of psychological tests to measure the students' relevant to translation and interpretation psycho-physiological mechanisms and determine their role in the translation performance.

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