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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.

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