Translation Competence and Translation Time

Lucía Micaela Giusti; Narela Belén Puga
Universidad CAECE Mar del Plata, Argentina
giusti.lucia@gmail.com; narelapuga@gmail.com

Innovación Tecnológica en la Traducción

Abstract

This research paper examines the relation between translation competence and translation time. It focuses on the connection between translation competence, the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate, and translation time, the amount of time translation students devote to translating a piece of text. We hypothesize that the higher their level of translation competence, the more time students spend to do a translation. In order to test our hypothesis, we compare the translation time of first-year and fourth-year students. The data are drawn from the translations done by sixteen students from *Universidad CAECE, Mar del Plata*. Following the description of the methodology used, the findings of the study, which partly contradict our hypothesis, are presented and analyzed.

Keywords: communicative translation, translation competence, translation time, competence-based approaches.

Introduction

Translation can be defined as a purposeful activity. It is a communicative action carried out by an expert in intercultural communication, the translator, playing the role of text producer, and aiming at some communicative purpose. Communicative purposes are directed at other people who are playing the role of receivers. The translator deals with a source text produced under source-culture conditions for a source-culture audience, but the translation will be used in a different situation determined by target-culture conditions (Nord, 2001). Therefore, the translator's activity involves more than just replacing the textual material in one language by equivalent textual material in another.

Furthermore, translation involves taking decisions and solving problems, and requires expert knowledge, which, in Translation Studies, is known as translation competence. This competence is considered as the underlying system of knowledge required to translate, and it is composed of different interconnected sub-competences. The acquisition of translation competence gradually passes through different stages until the final stage (expert knowledge) is reached (PACTE, 2009).

During the last decades, several researchers have delved into translation competence research. They have examined different issues related to this competence, including its acquisition, its evaluation, translation problems and strategies, translation speed and reference materials. Some researchers and linguists have addressed temporal aspects in translation and have specifically concentrated on the relation

between the level of translation competence, the degree of expertise and translation time.

On the one hand, some research studies demonstrate that more experienced students and translators take less time to translate than novice translators, and that translation speed grows with experience. Sirén and Hakkarainen (2002) stated that the speed of translation can be related to automation, which is generally viewed as a feature of expert behavior. Because of automation, it is expected that it takes less time for more experienced translators to complete their work than for novices. Lesznyák (2008) also pointed out that experienced translators tend to produce better translations in less time. Furthermore, Göpferich (2010) highlighted that professionals translate much faster than novices.

On the other hand, some research studies reveal that novices are the quickest to finish translations. Jääskeläinen (1989) carried a study involving students with different degrees of experience; two first-year and two fifth-year students translated a text from English into Finnish. She found that experienced students take longer to translate the text. Jääskeläinen (1996) also compared professionals, translation trainees and educated laymen, and she observed that laymen were the fastest translators, probably because they did not even realize translation problems. She suggested that reduced translation time may be a sign of superficial work.

In view of the above, it is worthwhile studying the relation between the level of translation competence and translation time. This idea arises from a concern we have as students because we feel that the highest our level of translation competence, the more time we take to translate a piece of text. Since most studies that we reviewed have focused mainly on comparing translation students or laymen with professional translators, we concentrate on investigating first-year translation students with fourth-year students in connection with translation time.

Theoretical Framework

Competence-based approaches to translation began to develop during the 1990's. Many linguists and translators have conducted research on translation competence or on its acquisition, and have examined the issue from different perspectives. Even though no generally accepted model of translation competence exists in the field of Translation Studies, some researchers have attempted to define translation competence and to identify its components.

The PACTE research group (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) considers translation competence to be the underlying knowledge system needed to translate. It has four distinctive features: it is expert knowledge which is not possessed by all bilingual speakers, it is basically procedural knowledge and not declarative, it is composed of various interrelated sub-competences, and it has a very important strategic component.

According to the PACTE research group, translation competence comprises five sub-competences and psycho-physiological components. They are defined as follows:

- *Bilingual sub-competence*: It includes pragmatic, sociolinguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge in each language. It is basically the

knowledge needed to communicate in two languages.

- *Extra-linguistic sub-competence*: It comprises general, domain-specific, bicultural and encyclopedic knowledge.
- *Knowledge about translation sub-competence*: It is composed of knowledge of the principles that guide translation (processes, methods and procedures, etc.) and the profession (types of translation briefs, users, etc.).
- *Instrumental sub-competence*: It involves knowledge related to the use of documentation sources and communication technologies applied to translation (dictionaries, encyclopedias, grammars, style books, parallel texts, electronic corpora, search engines, etc.).
- *Strategic sub-competence*: This is the essential sub-competence that controls the translation process. Its functions are to plan the process concerning the translation project, to evaluate the process and the partial results obtained in relation to the final purpose, to activate the different sub-competences and to compensate for any shortcomings, to identify translation problems and to apply procedures to solve them.
- *Psycho-physiological components*: They are cognitive and behavioral (memory, attention span, perseverance, critical mind, etc.) and psychomotor mechanisms.

Furthermore, the EMT expert group, set by the Directorate-General for Translation (the European Commission's in-house translation service), defines translation competence as the combination of aptitudes, knowledge, behavior and know-how necessary to carry out a given task under given conditions. This group considers that translation competence is divided into six competences. All the competences are defined by means of lists of components, and some competences are additionally broken down into dimensions (Chodkiewicz and Sklodowska, 2012).

The six competences identified are the following:

- *Translation service provision competence*: It encompasses two dimensions: the interpersonal and production dimensions. The interpersonal dimension relates to the translator's social role and the translator-client relationship, seen both from a macro perspective (market demand and marketing to potential clients) as well as from a micro perspective (negotiating with clients, estimating the cost of the services provided). It also includes elements of planning, management and self-evaluation. The production dimension concerns the translation of the text according to the client's request and the translation situation. Translators may also need to justify some of their decisions to the client and use appropriate metalanguage to address them.
- *Language competence*: It comprises knowledge about grammar, lexis and idiomatic structures as well as the graphic and typographic conventions of the languages used.
- *Intercultural competence*: It is a two-dimensional construct.

The sociolinguistic dimension encompasses intercultural competence. The textual dimension involves, among others, identifying and comparing cultural elements as well as being able to analyze the macrostructure and coherence of a text and reproduce it in accordance with the conventions of a particular genre and rhetorical standards.

- *Information mining competence*: It includes strategies for documentary and terminological research. Moreover, it involves extracting and processing relevant information and using technological tools effectively.
- *Thematic competence*: It refers to the information which helps translators understand a piece of text better, and it includes knowledge about specific fields and their concepts and terminology.
- *Technological competence*: It is the effective and rapid use of software tools which assist in translation, documentary research, etc.

Considering the foregoing approaches to translation competence, we develop the following operational definitions. In our study, *translation competence* is the underlying system of knowledge that translators need to perform a translation task. It comprises different sub-competences, and its acquisition involves gradually moving through a series of stages. Moreover, *translation time* is the amount of time that undergraduates devote to translating a piece of text from English into Spanish or vice versa. In addition, the *degree of expertise* refers to the number of years of translation experience that students have.

Objectives

This research study pursues three major objectives. It aims at exploring how much time translation students take to translate in first year and in fourth year. It also attempts to discover the reason, if any, of the difference in translation time between the two groups, first-year students and fourth-year students. Lastly, it aims at highlighting the importance of managing time efficiently when translating.

Hypothesis

Our hypothesis is that the higher their level of translation competence, the more time translation students spend to translate a piece of text: the higher their expert knowledge, the more time undergraduates take to do a translation.

Methodology: Participants, Materials and Procedure

Participants

The participants of this study were 16 undergraduate students from the translation training course at *Universidad CAECE, Mar del Plata*. They were 8 first-year students who were taking *Traducción Técnico-Científica I* in 2014, and 8 fourth-year students who were taking *Práctica Profesional de la Traducción IV* in 2014.

Materials

The instrument selected for this study comprises a piece of text in English. It is a scientific text about cells to translate into Spanish, and it has 144 words.
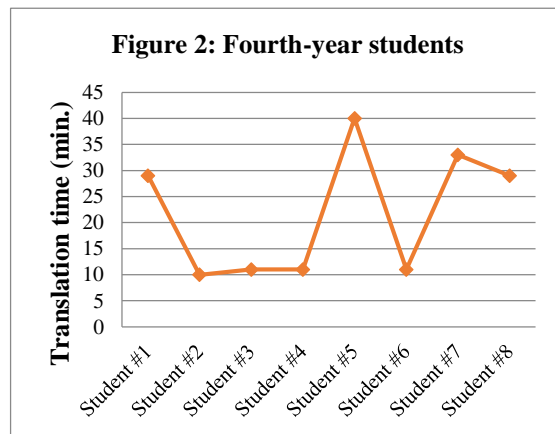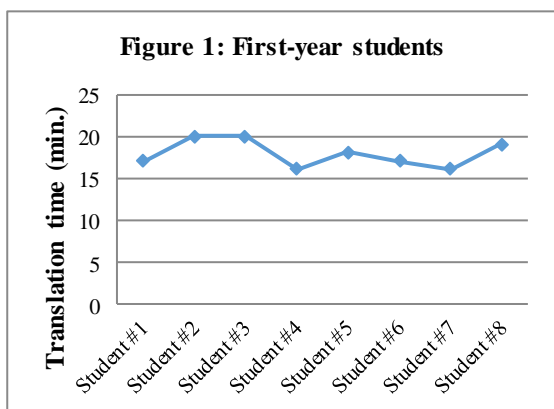
Procedure

Students translate the text, that is, they do a direct translation (from English into Spanish). They must perform the task and monitor the time they spend to translate the text. In other words, students must exactly state how much time they devote to doing the task.

Furthermore, students use word-processing software, and they have access to the Internet. They can also use all kinds of dictionaries, monolingual or bilingual, and the glossaries that they have prepared for their classes or the ones available on the Internet.

Results

To test our hypothesis, we compared the translation time of first-year students and fourth-year students. The findings are presented in the following figures. Figure 1 shows the time first-year undergraduates spent to translate the text given, and Figure 2 illustrates the time fourth-year undergraduates took to do the translation.

Figure 1: First-year students

Figure 2: Fourth-year students

Analysis of the Results

As illustrated in Figure 1, translation time among the 8 first-year translation students ranges from 16 to 20 minutes. In other words, students took between 16 and 20 minutes to perform the translation task assigned. Generally, all first-year students who participated spent almost the same amount of time, and thus, there is no marked variation among their translation time.

Furthermore, as showed in Figure 2, translation time among the 8 fourth-year undergraduates fluctuates between 10 and 40 minutes. Therefore, there is a significant variation among fourth-year students. In turn, such group of students can be divided into two groups: those students who spent between 10 and 15 minutes to do the translation, and those who took between 30 and 40 minutes.

In view of these results, our hypothesis was partially confirmed. We have hypothesized that the higher the level of translation competence, the more time students take to translate. However, the results of our study revealed that only half of the fourth-year students took more time than all first-year undergraduates to do the translation. The other half of fourth-year students actually spent less time than all first-

year students. Consequently, this demonstrates that our findings partly contradict our hypothesis.

Conclusion

In this research study, we examine the relation between the level of translation competence and translation time. Firstly, we have included some prior research projects carried out by linguists and translators. Secondly, we have delved into two competence-based approaches to translation developed by two research groups. Lastly, we have compared first-year translation students with fourth-year students specifically in connection with translation time.

As previously mentioned, we have hypothesized that translation time depends on the level of translation competence. Nevertheless, the results of the study partly contradict our hypothesis. In fact, half of the group of fourth-year students spent more time to do a direct translation than the 8 first-year undergraduates who carried out the same task, and the other half of fourth-year students took less time than first-year students.

Even though it is not possible to exactly state the reasons why translation time varies between first-year students and fourth-year students, it is relevant to highlight that some other variables may influence the relation between translation competence and translation time. Such variables comprise consultation of dictionaries and glossaries, specialization, directionality (direct or inverse translation), place where the translation was done and time of the day, among others. These variables may also explain the major difference in translation time among fourth-year undergraduates.

To conclude, it is fundamental to mention a limitation of this research study and to put forward some suggestions for further research. Since we analyzed a small sample, the findings of our study cannot be generalized to a larger population. Moreover, further research projects can examine translation competence and translation time when doing inverse translations, or can compare legal translation competence among students of translation.

References

Alves, F., Göpferich, S. & Mees, I. (2010). *New Approaches in Translation Process Research.* [Google Books Version]. Retrieved from http://books.google.com.ar

Chodkiewicz, M. & Sklodowska, M. (2012, January). The EMT framework of reference for competences applied to translation: perceptions by professional and student translators. *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, *17*, 37-54. Retrieved from http://www.jostrans.org

EMT Expert Group. (2009). *Competences for professional translators, experts in multilingual and multimedia communication.* Retrieved from http://ec.europa.eu/emt

Jääskeläinen, R. (1989). Translation Assignment in Professional vs. Non-Professional Translation: A Think-Aloud Protocol Study. In: C. Séguinot (Ed.), *The Translation Process* (pp. 87-98). Toronto, Canada: H.G. Publications, School of Translation, York University.

Jääskeläinen, R. (1996, March). Hard Work Will Bear Beautiful Fruit. A Comparison of Two Think-Aloud Protocol Studies. *Meta: Translators' Journal*, *41*(1), 60-74. Retrieved

from https://www.erudit.org/revue/meta/1996/v 41/n1/003235ar.pdf

Lesznyák, M. (2008). *Studies in the Development of Translation Competence* (Doctoral thesis). Retrieved from http://nydi.btk.pte.hu/sites/nydi.btk.pte.hu/files/ pdf/LesznyakMarta2009_2.pdf

Nord, C. (2001, November). Dealing with Purposes in Intercultural Communication: Some Methodological Considerations. *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses*, *14*, 151-166. Retrieved from http://rua.ua.es

PACTE Group. (2009, November). Results of the Validation of the PACTE Translation Competence Model: Acceptability and Decision Making. *Across Languages and Cultures*, *10*(2), 207-230. Retrieved from http://www.akademiai.com

Sirén, S. & Hakkarainen, K. (2002, April). The Cognitive Concept of Expertise Applied to Expertise in Translation. *Across Languages and Cultures*, *3*(1), 71-82. Retrieved from http://www.akademiai.com