

Some Aspects of Translation Skills Acquisition in a Specialized Context

Galina Koteva

University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy, Sofia, Bulgaria

Received 08 January 2019, Accepted 31 July 2019

ABSTRACT

The concept of translation competence is a term covering the various skills and knowledge that a translator needs to have in order to translate functionally. It has been proposed as an umbrella term to cover the needs of translation business and is based on the technical skills, conceptual skills and interpersonal skills which a translator should have in order to choose the best way to solve translation problems.

In this paper a questionnaire of translation competence questions concerning student perceptions was used as an empirical data collection tool in quantitative research. The questionnaire consists of three sections each of them aiming at finding the students' attitudes to their translation skills. The results can be used to enhance the curriculum design of the subject of English as a foreign language in which engineering students should master translation skills. A model devised for professional translators is used with non-professionals students where the primary purpose of teaching translation skills is to measure and assess the acquisition of linguistic competence.

***Keywords:** Translation competence development, translation practice, translation competence model.*

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to investigate the current status of translation skills development among students in University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy (UCTM) in the English language course in order to make a contribution towards improving its efficacy. The study expects to achieve the following specific objectives:

1) To assess students' satisfaction with regards to current training of translation skills development among UCTM undergraduate students.

2) To identify the sub-competences of translation competence requiring more attention during the training of students.

3) To learn about the students' perspectives on factors hindering or enabling the development of translation competence.

4) To make recommendations of possible solutions to problems facing UCTM students throughout their acquisition of translation skills.

The development of translation skills and competence in students requires the integration of a variety of mechanisms concerning the

*Correspondence to: Galina Koteva, University of Chemical Technology and Metallurgy,
8 Kliment Ohridski Str., Sofia 1756, Bulgaria, E-mail: kotevag@uctm.edu

acquisition of knowledge, skills and aptitudes necessary to carry out the translation tasks. Teaching translation in a specialized context includes several learning outcomes. First is the terminology learning where students must learn about the general theoretical and practical concepts of terminology and how to work with major terminology databases. Also, they need to have translation practice where to learn to be able to distinguish and adapt to the different types of text/discourse and to translate different types of texts, including specialized texts, from English into Bulgarian. Last, but not least, they need to have what PACTE Group calls strategic sub-competence which is the “knowledge to guarantee the efficiency of the translation process and solve problems encountered” [5].

Despite being an everyday phenomenon in our lives, the very term “translation” is hard to define. We will consider translation competence as a specialized form of communicative competence which includes both knowing about translation and knowing how to do translation. Theorists agree that translation competence cannot be achieved without developing bilingual skills first. The language competence implies knowing how to understand grammatical, lexical and idiomatic structures of both the native language and the second language, as well as knowing how to use these in various contexts. Therefore, bilingual skills are an important condition without which one can hardly ever develop translation competence.

One of the most exploited models of translation competence is that of the PACTE Group

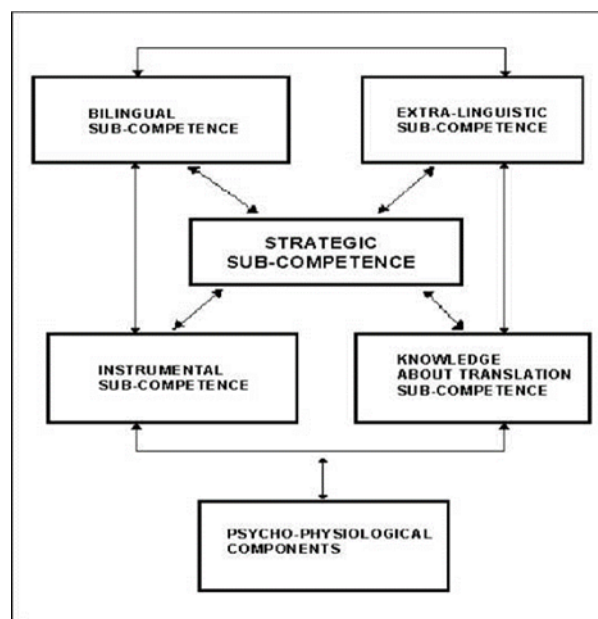


Fig. 1. PACTE model of translation competence (2005).

where “translation competence is the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate”, made up of five sub-competences and psycho-physiological components depicted in Fig. 1, namely (1) bilingual, (2) extra-linguistic, (3) knowledge about translation, (4) instrumental and (5) strategic, whereby a series of psycho-physiological mechanisms are at work [5]. Moreover, at the heart of the PACTE model is the strategic competence, because the authors believe it to be the most important of all the sub-competences that interact during the translation process, since it serves to make decisions and to solve problems.

According to the PACTE Group, apart from the five sub-competences, there are some physiological components to be considered which refer to diverse types of cognitive and attitudinal

Table 1. Rating of students’ sub-competences according to the PACTE model.

Sub-competence	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
bilingual	6	12	4	2	0
extra-linguistic	2	8	10	4	0
knowledge about translation	0	8	8	4	4
instrumental	8	12	4	0	0
strategic	2	14	8	0	0
psycho-physiological	4	12	4	4	0

Table 2. Distribution of means by translation sub-competencies.

Translation sub-competencies	Rank	Means	Standard Deviation
Bilingual sub-competence	1	4.32	0,45
Thematic/cultural sub-competence	2	4,18	0,41
Strategic sub-competence	3	3,85	0,21
Knowledge about translation sub-competence	4	3,66	0,16
Instrumental sub-competence	5	3,43	0,04

components and psycho-motor mechanisms, including cognitive components (e.g. memory, perception, attention), attitudinal aspects (e.g. intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigour, critical thinking) and other abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis, synthesis and the like.

The PACTE group model postulates that “translation competence acquisition is a process of restructuring and developing sub-competencies of translation competence” [4]. In such a model, translation competence acquisition is defined as:

1) A dynamic, spiral process that, like all learning processes, evolves from novice knowledge (pre-translation competence) to expert knowledge (translation competence); it requires learning competence (learning strategies) and during the process both declarative and procedural types of knowledge are integrated, developed and restructured;

2) A process in which the development of procedural knowledge and, consequently, of the strategic sub-competence are essential; and

3) A process in which the translation competence sub-competencies are developed and restructured.

A notable feature of the PACTE group’s model of translation competence acquisition is its recognition of relations, hierarchies and variations involved in the process of acquiring sub-competencies. Thus, in the acquisition of translation competence, the sub-competencies: (1) are inter-related and compensate for each other; (2) do not always develop in parallel; (3) are organised hierarchically; (4) variations occur in relation to translation direction, language combinations, specialisation and the learning context.

Methodology of the research

The main objective of the research is to describe the acquisition of the sub-competencies of translation quantitatively in a way to establish a model of translator’s competence which can be used for educational purposes.

A questionnaire consisting of three different sections was administered to 24 engineering students at the UCTM who were in their final year of study in the summer semester of 2018/2019 when they study English as a foreign language according to their curriculum plan.

The first section established students’ own rating of the level of confidence when translate a specialized text from their thematic area. The second section focused on the students’ perceptions of their own translation competence based on the PACTE model; and the third section contained 20 statements regarding the five sub-competences in the PACTE translation model and the data analysis was done by finding the mean score and standard deviation for each of the 20 questions and thus the ranking of the five parameters (sub-competences) became possible. The results are presented in Table 2.

The ultimate goal of the research was to come up with suggestions for improving pedagogical practices in the UCTM English training programme. In order to achieve this objective the following questions need to be answered: How do the UCTM students perceive their own level of translation competence; from the students’ point of view, what are the factors contributing to developing a good level of translation competence and how could the UCTM training improve its students’ translation competence?

DISCUSSION

To find out the students' perceptions regarding translation competence, the students were asked to rate their confidence when translating to and from their second language. The main reason for including these questions was the need to assess the student's confidence to translate into English or into Bulgarian, which should mirror their perception of their own development of translation competence. Thus, next step of this research could be to compare the student's self-evaluation against the results of the textual analysis of their translations.

As can be seen from the results (Fig. 2), most students feel confident to do translations especially from English into Bulgarian. This is due to the fact that they feel confident in knowing their native tongue at an advanced level and also many of them have a high level of English acquisition so they feel translation is an easily attainable skill. However, when they need to translate into English, almost one third claim little confidence, since they are aware of both linguistic and terminological difficulty they may need to face. And a very small percentage doesn't feel confident at all which means that these students need to work harder on their linguistic and extra-linguistic competence and skills.

The second section of questions focused on

the student's perceptions of their own translation competence based on the PACTE model [6]. Thus students had to rate their sub-competences as "Excellent", "Very Good", "Good", "Average" or "Poor" under PACTE model of translation sub-competences. PACTE model was devised in response to the needs of the European Union to ensure translation services of quality in order to meet the needs of the translation sector in a multi-lingual/cultural environment. As a project which proposes a model of translation competence, PACTE defines translation competence as: "the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate" [4].

This team conducted empirical-experimental research with the aim of eventually being able to define the concept of translation competence and the process of acquiring it in written translation and they claimed four distinguishing features of translation: (1) it is expert knowledge and is not possessed by all bilinguals; (2) it is basically procedural (and not declarative) knowledge; (3) it is made up of various interrelated sub-competencies; (4) the strategic component is very important, as it is in all procedural knowledge.

The model is made up of a set of sub-competencies that are inter-related and hierarchic, with the strategic sub-competence occupying a dominant position (Fig. 1):

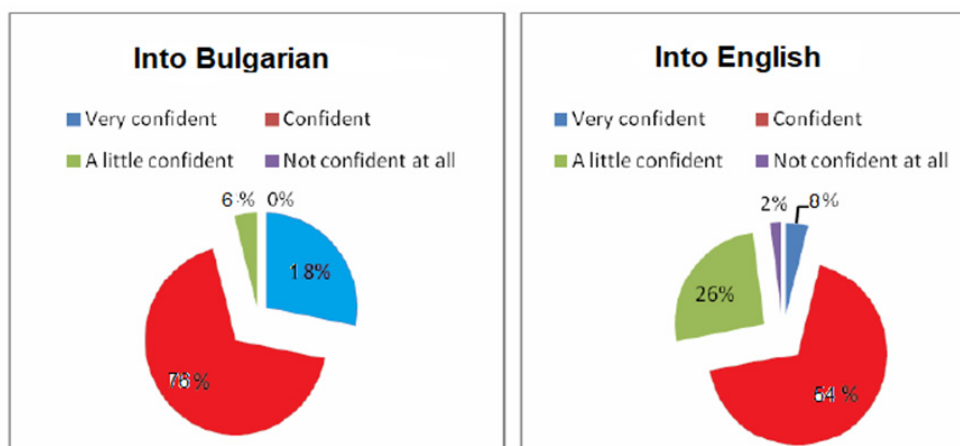


Fig. 2. Students' own rating of their confidence to translate a specialized text from their subject area of study.

- bilingual sub-competence
- extra-linguistic sub-competence
- knowledge about translation sub-competence
- instrumental sub-competence
- strategic sub-competence
- psycho-physiological components

The bilingual sub-competence consists of the underlying systems of knowledge and skills that are needed for linguistic communication to take place in two languages. It is made up of comprehension and production competencies, and includes the following knowledge and skills: grammatical competence; textual competence (which consists in being proficient in combining linguistic forms to produce a written or oral text in different genres or text types); illocutionary competence (related to the functions of language); and socio-linguistic competence (concerned with appropriate production and comprehension in a range of socio-linguistic contexts that depend on factors such as the status of the participants, the purpose of the interaction, the norms or conventions at play in the interaction, and so forth).

The extra-linguistic sub-competence is made up of encyclopedic, thematic and bicultural knowledge. The translation knowledge sub-competence is knowledge of the principles guiding translation, such as processes, methods, procedures, and so forth. The instrumental sub-competence comprises the knowledge required to work as a professional translator, such as the use of sources of documentation and information technologies applied to translation.

The strategic sub-competence integrates all the others and is the most important, since it allows problems to be solved and ensures the efficiency of the process. It consists in the capacity to follow the transfer process from the source text to the production of the final target text, according to the purpose of the translation and the characteristics of the target audience.

The strategic sub-competence intervenes by planning the process in relation to the translation project, evaluating the process and partial results obtained, activating the different sub-competen-

cies and compensating for deficiencies, identifying translation problems and applying procedures to solve them. The psycho-physiological components are cognitive and behavioral (memory, attention span, perseverance, critical mind, etc.) and psychomotor mechanisms [6].

By summarizing the essence of the model we can arrive at the following conclusions:

Translation competence is qualitatively different from bilingual competence. It is not just an advanced command of linguistic competence. Bilingual competence is only one of the sub-competences that make up translation competence.

Translation competence is a multi-componential concept and is made up of a system of sub-competencies that are inter-related, hierarchical and that these relationships are subject to variations. Translation competence is the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate.

The models of translation competence are empirical and objective.

In drawing up the model of translation competence the concept of it is dismantled into smaller sub-competences which, in turn, make up translation competence itself.

Translation competence is one of the constituents that the translator's competence is made up of. Conceptual skills and interpersonal skills are the other constituents. These three skills constitute the model of translator's competence. Translation competence is the technical aspect of the translation process. A model of translator's competence can give an insight into the skills a student must have in order to practice translation. We need to look at the translation sub-competences/skills more closely i.e. to distinguish between the core competencies that play a part in order to translate. Then, we can make use of these skills as the foundations upon which we can build the concept of translator's competence.

As can be seen from Table 2, the distribution of means by translation sub-competencies indicate that bi-lingual sub-competence has the highest value with a percentage of 4,32. The

QUESTIONNAIRE ON TRANSLATION SKILLS					
Section 1					
How confident do you feel to translate a specialized text into Bulgarian?	Very confident	Confident	A little confident	Not confident at all	
How confident do you feel to translate a specialized text into English?	Very confident	Confident	A little confident	Not confident at all	
Section 2					
How would you rate your bilingual sub-competence?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your extra-linguistic sub-competence?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your knowledge about translation?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your instrumental sub-competence?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your strategic sub-competence?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your psycho-physiological components?	Excellent	Very good	Good	Average	Poor
Section 3					
	Completely disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree, nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Completely agree 5
Management of time, stress, and budget					
Planning to upgrade competences by constant training					
Being able to work in a team					
Finding ways to solve translation problems appropriately					
Doing self-evaluation and taking responsibility					
Selecting strategies for the translation of a document					
Justification of translation choices and decisions					
Knowledge of the linguistic structures in SL and TL					
Recognize elements proper to the cultures of your working languages					
Compose a document in accordance with the conventions of the genre					
I know strategies for research into subject-matter and terminology					
Extraction of relevant information for given tasks					
Development of criteria for the evaluation of documents accessible on Internet					
Searching for appropriate information for the thematic aspects					
Knowledge in specialized fields concepts and terminology					
Awareness of the possibilities and limitations of machine translation					
My mother tongue is at advanced level					
My English is at advanced level					
Defining strategies for the translation of a document					
Compliance with instructions, deadlines, and standards					

thematic/cultural sub-competence accounts for 4,18, while strategic sub-competence is 3,85 %. The knowledge about translation sub-competence has a percentage of 3,66 and the instrumental sub-competence has the lowest percentage of 3,43 %.

Based on the means, the questions and then the sub-competences were accordingly ranked. Thus, the bilingual sub-competence received the maximum mean and also the first rank. By means of ranking, the next highest ranks were related to the thematic/cultural sub-competence, and the ranking continued to the instrumental sub-competence with the lowest ranks. Accordingly, as demonstrated in Table 2, language sub-competence received the first rank with the maximum mean and technological competence had the last rank with the minimum mean.

The results of this study indicated that the bilingual sub-competence has the highest rank for the main competences. Thematic/cultural sub-competence was the second rank in the PACTE competences framework. Strategic sub-competence and knowledge about translation sub-competence occupied the third and fourth ranks, respectively. The fifth rank was determined by the instrumental or technical sub-competence.

As illustrated above, the bilingual sub-competence and the thematic/intercultural sub-competence occupied the highest ranks in the category. This finding can provide more insight to the planning of the design of translation training programs. Furthermore, the data revealed the sub-competences of language competence, including “linguistic structures of the source and target languages, reproduction of grammatical and lexical structures in the target language, and being sensitive to language change and development” [4] are of crucial importance.

The results listed thematic sub-competence as the second-ranked item, which highlights the fact that translator training programs should make an attempt to develop the students’ knowledge in specialized fields by teaching the related concepts or terminologies. This item also included cultural

sub-competence, which emphasizes the important role of translating as an intercultural communication via teaching the appropriate registers or the elements suitable to the working language cultures.

The third rank was associated with the strategic sub-competence, which includes the appropriate management of the translation project as well as the communication with others, including team-work. It necessitates that translation training programs train students to manage time, stress, and budget; find strategies for solving problems and conform to the standards, deadlines, instructions, and professional ethics. The last two items in the list were knowledge about translation sub-competence and instrumental sub-competence, which seem somewhat neglected in the translation training programs. However, the skills of effective use of computer tools are essential for the translation work and hence, including them in translator training courses is recommended.

The findings of this study can be summarized in the above hierarchical model of translation sub-competences (Fig. 3) and used to provide a better insight for developing of materials and planning of translation training programs in order to develop the most needed competences and

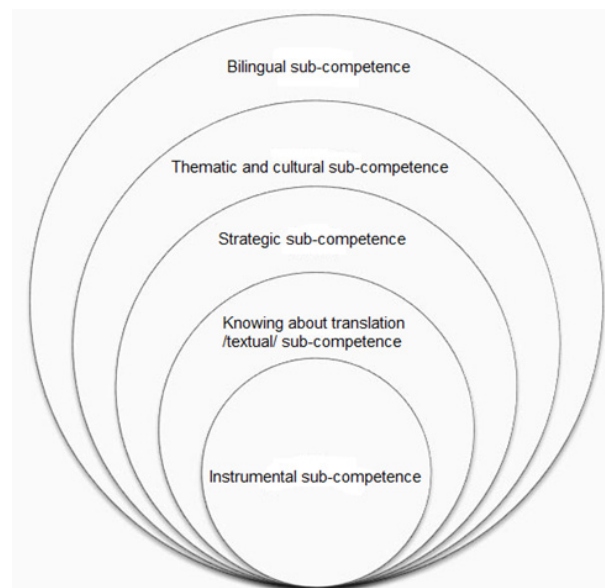


Fig. 3. A hierarchical model of translation sub-competences based on students’ perception of their translation skills.

skills. The results can also enhance the students' knowledge and skills in order to influence them to act more professionally when faced with a translation task.

CONCLUSIONS

What all of this boils down to is that, despite the diversity of opinions and strategies, translation competence is a goal that both translation students and lecturers should pursue. In order to obtain good quality translations, efforts should be made to define translation competence with its sub-competences and skills and to help students achieve appropriate level of competence by reliably testing their translation skills. As was indicated above, the model of translator's competence constituted conceptual and interpersonal skills alongside with technical skills. So translation competence can be viewed as a matrix of various sub-competences and skills which should be defined and developed in the curriculum of translation training.

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