Quality Aspects in University Teaching of Translators

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1. Historical determinants of the problem of quality in translation

1959: the Third Congress of FIT (International Federation of Translators). Its theme was: **Quality in translation**

As an illustration of our discussion today, I would like to quote some relevant opinions:

In the article of R.W. Jumpelt (1959): "Scientific and Technical Translation" we can find the discussion concerning the criteria of a good translation in which he says that scientific and technical translation it is not only the problem of terminology. Moreover he compares human translation and machine translation.

1. Historical determinants of the problem of quality in translation

Günter Kandler : "On the problem of quality in translation: Basic Considerations": "Translations cannot be simply judged as wright or wrong. We should rather have a scale of valuation according to the degree of coincidence of interpretability of the translation with the interpretability of the original and we should not forget that quality cannot possibly be assessed apart from the purpose of the translation. **The practicable system of assessment should be based on a survey of typical aims or typical "points of view" of translations in particular spheres of life**". (p.295)

Kandler: "The problems of translations are still largely unexplored. Professionals translators and experts in linguistics might join forces in studying these problems more closely." (sic!)

1. Historical determinants of the problem of quality in translation

Today's meeting is in some way, one of many realizations of Kandler's appeal.

QUALITY is in constant evolution

2. Modern European Standard

In this debate, a reference point may be the European standard (PL-EN 15038) that specifies the quality of translating services. However, as many scholars have pointed out, this standard focuses primarily on the quality of service and not on the quality of the product.

"As stated, the standard focuses on the process of providing services, and not on the target text. As it relates to the whole industry of specialist translations, it was formulated with a reasonable degree of generality, so relatively little is said about the determinants of the quality of the translations [...]. " Ł.Biel (2011)

We must distinguish the concept of quality translation services from the concept of quality of the product of this service itself, although both of these issues are closely related.

3. Elements needed to achieve the quality of a service and quality of a product

- Appropriate teaching program for future translators provided by the relevant learning centres;

- The implementation of this program requires the right teachers who are able to pursue this program;

- These teachers must be guided by relevant progress assessment of students in the educational process, in order to issue certificates corresponding to the quality of skills possessed by students;

- Assessment of students by teachers must take into account the needs of the translation market applicable at the time.

4. Translator Training

During the last 10 years, the DGT and EMT have contributed to the promotion of high quality in the translation programs. EMT wheel of competences which the universities should teach was adopted. Those competences, as we well know are:

- TRANSLATION SERVICE PROVISION: INTERPERSONAL DIMENSION
- TRANSLATION SERVICE PROVISION: PRODUCTION DIMENSION
- LANGUAGE COMPETENCE
- INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: SOCIOLINGUISTIC DIMENSION
- INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: TEXT DIMENSION
- INFORMATION MINING COMPETENCE
- THEMATIC COMPETENCE
- TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE (mastery of tools)

4. Translator Training

All translator training programs accepted into the EMT network should, by definition, provide learning of these competences for future translators. In operation descriptions of these programs, theoretically, providing teaching of such competences is implemented. Nevertheless, there still remains a question of assessment of such competence in the educational process by competent teachers. What are teacher competences, has been outlined in the document: Trainers competences (OPTIMALE)

5. Trainers competences (OPTIMALE)

The list these competences are as follows:

- Fundamental Requirements

- Field Competence

- Interpersonal Competence

- Organizational Competence

- Instructional Competence

- **Assessment Competence**

5. Trainers competences (OPTIMALE)

Fundamental question: How do teachers assess the quality of students translation work?

In the above-mentioned document, these skills are even more specific:

- Ability to define assessment methods and criteria to evaluate each task relevant to the course
- Ability to assess students' entry level
- Ability to assess student's level of attainment (competences they have acquired and competences they lack in relation to the EMT benchmark)
- Ability to evaluate a curriculum, syllabus and lesson as a self-reflective practitioner, re-assessing practices, knowledge, and competences at regular intervals
- Ability to adapt to the results of the evaluation of a curriculum, syllabus and a lesson.

6. Criteria for assessing the state exam for sworn translators

When we talk about how to evaluate, a yet another point of reference may be the criteria that have been developed to assess sworn translators during the state examination.

6. Criteria for assessing the state exam for sworn translators

Sworn translators exam written part assessment components

Assessment components	Weight
1. Content compliance transferred in a translation from the original content	10 points (20%)
2. Terminology and phraseology of the specialistic sublanguage	15 points (30%)
3. Grammatical, spelling and lexical correctness (Non-specialized vocabulary)	10 points (20%)
4. The use of the register (functional style) of language appropriate to the nature of the text	10 points (20%)
5. Formal rules for implementing certified translations	5 points (10%)

7.Survey: overview

The purpose of this survey was to verify how individual teachers assess the quality of translation work of students? This research was so important that the assessments of individual teachers refer to different moments of the educational process:

- Entrance exam
- Particular assignments marks
- And finally, the big question is: What is taken into account in the final assessment, which is a requirement in order to issue a translation studies diploma, which is the gateway to practice this profession.

7. Survey: overview

The survey was distributed to 25 people, of which 17 responded, so in relation to this group the results are reliable. It was preceded by my statement as follows: all the questions are about your assessment of the quality of translations done by students and their evaluation.

7.1. Quality of the translation

The first question concerns **the quality of the translation**. Each criterion could be granted from 5 to 1 point. The results are not conclusive for the entire group.

- All (100%) gave their top ranking to "**compatibility with the original meaning**"

  But in other categories the weight of the individual components is assessed variously:
- **Terminological correctness**: 25% weighted 5, 57% weighted 4, and weights 3 and 2 were granted by 9% each
- **Language correctness**: 58% granted weight 4, and 25% a 3
- For **stylistic correctness**, 45% weighted 3, and 18% weighted 2
- For half of the respondents **correct punctuation** is generally of little importance: 25% - weight 2 and 25% - weight 1.
- Mentioned here are other criteria such as: **correct edition; functional equivalence; the ability to assess the gravity of the cultural context of the text and to select the appropriate equivalent.**

7.2. Quality in different exams

The second question was designed to assess whether the teachers evaluate the **quality of student's work equally during an entrance exam, each particular exams and at the end of the educational process**.

The results also vary but 20% of respondents stated that the criteria in all cases are the same.

7.2. Quality in different exams

- However, the majority (55%) states that in the case of an **entrance exam assessment, the most important is the linguistic correctness in the target language** (understood as grammatical, or alternatively, stylistic correctness). Several people stressed that **at this stage, terminological knowledge is not an important element of the assessment.**

However, in a case of an entry exam, there are still such answers like: student's usefulness for these studies; substantial level; ease of formulating thoughts in the target language.

7.2. Quality in different exams

- When it comes to **individual examination evaluation**, a belief dominates, that in the course of learning the weight of individual elements of the assessment should increase. Several people stated that **grades for passing an exam, and the final grade, relate to the same criteria**.

There are, however, single statements such as: the progress of education and backlogs improvement are being assessed, requirements should continue to increase.

7.2. Quality in different exams

- At the **final exam**, in the opinion of majority, same criteria should be applied as mentioned in point 1, but in the end, the emphasis should be primarily on the **accuracy of the translation, and the linguistic correctness**, understood as grammatical, and only further terminological or stylistic correctness.

7.3. Notion of error

Assessment of quality is inextricably linked with the notion of error, which is why I asked about understanding of the concept of translation and linguistic error. I think everyone surveyed, properly distinguishes these two types of errors, but the wording is in some degree different. Here I am presenting only selected elements:

7.3. Notion of error

- **translation error**: missing or inadequate equivalent; factual and terminological errors; wrong register; linguistic error resulting in change of the meaning; an error resulting from misunderstanding the original meaning; changing, and especially inversion of the meaning expressed in the output text; omission of information; a mistake in expressing the meaning or a terminological one; excessive cultural elements adaptation.

Certainly, all of these elements make up a definition of a translation error, but each and every of them occurred in a different survey, which means that the idea of such errors is understood differently by individuals.

7.3. Notion of error

- In the case of **linguistic errors**, the terminology is similar: grammatical, stylistic, orthographic, punctuational, logical, mostly grammatical + the ability to adjust the language register.

And so, it is easier for us to determine a linguistic rather than a translation error.

7.4. The most important errors

As a consequence, I asked the following question: **What kind of error has the strongest influence on downgrading a student's final grade?**

 - **During an entrance exam**:

In this case, the opinions are divided. Some respondents emphasize high importance attached to incompatibilities, twisting the original sense, which they consider as misunderstanding of the original meaning, but also, part of the respondents emphasizes that on this stage, linguistic correctness is most important, and terminological errors, stylistic, punctuation ones, are being treated with "greater understanding".

7.4. The most important errors

- **On a particular exam:**

In this case opinions are consistent: weighting of translation and linguistic errors is even. Also, weighting of terminological errors is emphasized. One of the respondents stresses: lack (in the given educational period) of progress in acquiring of the intended skills: mostly understanding B (insuperable deficiency of language knowledge).

- **On the final exam:**

It shouldn't be too shocking if I say that almost all of the respondents believe that above-mentioned errors, whether translational or linguistic, do affect the final grade.

7.5. Other professional competences

The 5th question was most likely more complicated. The idea was to assess **if only the quality of the translation operation product is being taken under consideration while evaluating students, or are, and to what extent, other competences above-mentioned in the DGT Competence List also considered.** I am aware that we teach these other competences, it is apparent from the reply given to the asked question, but the conducted study clearly shows that there aren't any consistent rules of evaluating such competences. The question was:

Does the respondent, at any moment or context, evaluate the competences of our students. If YES, how?

7.5. Other professional competences

Generally, after analysing all the replies, an opinion emerges, that: Such competences are being taught while performing different translation tasks, sometimes **the lecturer's evaluation is formulating during a discussion, descriptively and with a justification, but rarely point wise or towards a specific assessment.**

7.5. Other professional competences

Competences relating to the **provision of translation services in the context of interpersonal dimension**

25% of the surveyed responded that they do not take that aspect under consideration.

The rest responded that yes, and it applies to, generally speaking, meeting the client's needs, adapting to the situation; issues related to accepting jobs, timely delivery or contact with the customer and working in translation projects.

7.5. Other professional competences

- **Competences relating to the provision of translation services in the context of document edition**

In this case, 12% responded with a NO.

The rest emphasized aspects such as: editorial techniques; text editing (i.e. misspellings) and its influence on the recipient; text structure, text genre characteristics; editorial consistency and naturalness in the target language; font and spacing uniformity, proof-reading skills.

Two people indicated that the correct form of the text is rewarded with additional points in individual grading.

However, here we have also observed a lack of precise assessment methods.

7.5. Other professional competences

- **Intercultural competences**

In this case all agree that this particular competence is very important in the educational process, it is evaluated basing on different cultural knowledge, translated to the appropriate vocabulary and terminology.

7.5. Other professional competences

- **The ability of acquiring informations, their selection, analysis, synthesis**

In the respondents replies, this competence is introduced in the educational process, and the issues discussed are: internet addresses; source reliability; internet-found information usage; terminology development; reformulation; collaborative translation; parallel texts; terminology preparation, nevertheless, again, the assessment criteria differ or do not exist.

7.5. Other professional competences

- **The ability of using new IT tools**

The answers to this question are various, maybe because only part of the lecturers teaches using different computer technologies, familiarizing oneself with appropriate software. Thus, part of the respondents mention particular programs implemented in teaching (i.e. MultiTrans or WordFast, Trados or memoQ). While others say that they do not teach this at all.

7.6. Translation competences vs professional competences

The last question was intended to summarize: **Please answer clearly and definitively if while making a final evaluation of a student finishing our university, we take under consideration his translation competences, but also, in any way, professional competences, mentioned in the 5th point.**

Generally, the replies come down to the conclusion that these aspects are important, but during a student's final evaluation, the translation competences are taken under consideration, because **there are no conclusive rules of evaluating professional competences**. Even though an evaluation of the latter occurs in the whole education process, in a form of individual grades.

8. Summary

Evaluation is closely linked with quality. The translator's quality depends mostly on his preparation during university studies. The above survey shows, that in the matter of unifying some quality assurance criteria, we probably still have some.