Chapter 11

Defining and Developing Translation Competence for Didactic Purposes:
Some Insights from Product–Oriented Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides an outline of the main issues concerning the conceptualisation and modelling of Translation Competence (TC) and proposes the adoption of a product-based definition for didactic purposes. Such definition is based on an empirical longitudinal product-oriented study on TC aiming to identify possible textual features and conventions that can be related to the translator's level of competence. The preliminary results from this longitudinal study presented in this chapter appear to suggest the existence of a possible relation between specific textual and procedural patterns and the participants' translation experience. Such patterns could provide translator trainers and trainees with a set of pragmatic indications for the definition and achievement of specific learning goals and could potentially serve as predictive developmental hypotheses in translator training.

INTRODUCTION

Defining a concept is all but an easy task. Though in some cases it might be or appear to be pure speculation, the definition process itself helps in gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and boundaries of abstract concepts. As many definitions, also the definition of 'translation competence' (TC) is a highly controversial is-

sue, which still remains open despite the various descriptions and classifications devised in the last decades. However, the extensive research on this topic does not represent a mere theoretical debate between scholars but is an attempt to provide a sound theoretical background for both translator training and the professional practice. The definition of TC has indeed major implications for the translator's profession as it would assist service

providers in setting more objective criteria for translators' recruitment and assessment, and – most importantly – could be used to discriminate between translation professionals and amateurs. From the didactic perspective, defining TC is an essential requirement for the design of academic curricula, the identification of appropriate learning goals and the development of suitable evaluation criteria. As pointed out by Toury,

…if translation pedagogy does not wish to renounce all claims to pedagogical validity and go on operating on more or less intuitive grounds […] it has hardly any choice but set up, if only tentatively, its own conceptions and models of the initial and terminal translation competence and of the interdependencies between them, and establish on their basis the most efficient methods of approximating a student from the former to the latter position. (1984, p. 188)

In view of such considerations, scholars have tried to shed light on this central and controversial issue by proposing different definitions of TC and investigating its development (e.g. Bell, 1991; Göpferich, 2009; Orozco & Hurtado Albir, 2002; PACTE, 2001; cf. Hurtado Albir & Alves, 2009 for an overview). Early translation research "did not produce [its] theories from observation data of actual translation performance, but rather from an idea of what translators *might* do" (Rothe-Neves, 2007, p. 128, original emphasis). This has resulted in "translation pedagogy [being] largely dominated by anecdotal evidence and case studies" (Colina, 2003, p. 29), since "most of the proposals concerning TC have not been empirically tested and only a few of them have attempted to validate their models from an empirical-experimental perspective (Hurtado Albir & Alves, 2009, p. 64). However, more recently, research on TC has adopted an empirical approach based on the observation of the actual behaviour of profession-

als and/or translation trainees in order to draw more reliable data and objective conclusions (cf., among others, Colina, 2003; Ehrensberger-Dow & Massey, 2008; Hansen, 2002).

In the next section, a brief overview of some previous studies will be outlined, with a focus on the different investigation methods adopted. The chapter will then report on an empirical product-oriented research on TC carried out at the University of Trieste, analysing the textual features of translations produced by professionals and students in the attempt to devise a norm-based definition of TC. Corpus linguistics methods and tools are employed to explore multiple translations of the same source texts (STs) in order to identify possible trends in the translation strategies adopted by participants with different degrees of experience and TC. Such trends will serve as the empirical basis for the development of an operational definition of TC aimed at providing translation trainers and trainees with a set of pragmatic indications that could serve as predictive developmental hypotheses in translator training.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON TRANSLATION COMPETENCE

Translation Competence: Terminological and Conceptual Issues

Defining Translation Competence

The study of TC has raised several epistemological issues concerning its nature, scope, modelling, acquisition and development. The wide variety of opinions and models proposed is largely reflected in the relevant terminology, which includes a plethora of conflicting and/or overlapping terms. Indeed, despite being widely used, the term 'trans-

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