

Evaluating Students' Final Examination in Translation

Adel Salem Bahameed*

Abstract

Teachers of translation often find themselves in suspense about how to evaluate the students' translation exams. This paper is an attempt to guide the teachers about how evaluation process should be and it highlights the effectiveness and suitability of using the error analysis method of evaluation. This method was applied to the correction of a third-year translation final exam containing different texts to be translated from English into Arabic and vice versa. It was done by 36 female students at the Faculty of Women – Seiyun, Yemen. The hypothesis regarding the suitability and effectiveness of using this evaluation error analysis method has been verified. This study concluded that the main factor which is clearly identifiable in the study results was translation competence.

KEYWORDS: Evaluating students' translations, method, translation quality, Translation errors

Introduction:

It is really perplexing for translation teachers to evaluate their students' performance in the translation exams due to the fact that the types of translation mistakes are manifold and there is no one translation method, strategy or approach that can tackle all these mismatches of translation. If using one strategy per se can make the teacher handle some translation mistakes fairly, it might not be applicable for others. There is no way to treat all the semantic, cultural, structural, and stylistic mistakes alike. Each case should be treated and evaluated on its own (See de Beaugrande, 1978, Hatim, 2001). On the other hand, a close look at the related literature on Translation Quality Assessment shows that most of the related studies have been descriptive or theoretical and have focused mainly on: (1) Basing quality assessment on text linguistic analysis (House 1981); (2) Defining the nature of translation errors as opposed to language errors (House 1981, Kussmaul 1995); (3) Establishing the relative nature of translation errors (Williams 1989, Pym 1992, Kussmaul 1995); (4) Assessment based on the psycholinguistic theory of "scenes and frames" (Bensoussan & Rosenhouse 1994, Snell-Hornby 1995); (5) Establishing the criteria for a "good translation" (Newmark 1991); (6) The need to assess quality not only at the linguistic but also the pragmatic level (Sager 1989, Williams 1989, Hewson 1995, Kussmaul 1995, Hatim & Mason 1997); among other related things.

In addition, the empirical studies concerning Translation Quality Assessment have been relatively few in number. Campbell (1991) examines translation tests to see to what extent they reveal translation competence and

translation processes rather than comparisons between source and target texts. The study has been applied on 38 respondents who belong to four different ability groups. The test papers have been in English-Arabic translation. The researcher adopted analysis using ten criteria such as lexical variety ratio, average word length, words omitted, etc. On the basis of the correlation matrix for the 38 subjects and ten analyses, Campbell proposes the existence of three separate factors: lexical coding of meaning, global target language competence and lexical transfer competence. This study is similar to Séguinot (1989, 1990) in that it examines the processes of translation as reflected in the quality of the translator's work, although Séguinot concentrates on students' mistakes, whereas Campbell examines other aspects as well. However, these other aspects are mainly linguistic and Campbell ignores higher textual levels and the students' ability to manage the pragmatic elements in a translation. It is also noticeable that Campbell does not use a factor analysis to determine the nature of the components of translation competence.

Stansfield et al. (1992) also aim to "identify the variables that constitute translation ability" (Stansfield et al. 1992: 455) and their study is based on work carried out for the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to develop and validate job-related tests of translation ability. The initial tests conducted with FBI employees indicated that translation competence should be divided into two different skills: (a) Accuracy, which is the degree with which the translator transfers the content from the source text to the target text; and (b) Expression, which refers to the quality of the translator's expression of this content in the target language. The researchers drew up translation skill-level descriptions for each of these aspects of translation competence

* Hadhramout University of Science and Technology, Hadhramout, Yemen.

and applied them to the correction of the subsequent tests held with the FBI employees. A study of the criterion-related validity of these results was then conducted by analysing how they correlated with the following external criteria: ratings provided by the examinees of their ability to translate different types of text, plus four other available measures of the candidates' performance in a Spanish oral interview, an English oral interview, a Spanish reading comprehension test and a Spanish listening comprehension test. Stansfield et al. claim that this validation study supports their division of translation competence into two different constructs, although it also indicates that Accuracy appears to be "the more valid measure of translation ability" (Stansfield et al. 1992: 461).

Waddington (2001) presents paper in which he concentrates on testing in the university context. In order to find out the kinds of methods of correction in Faculties of Translation, he sent out a questionnaire to 48 European and Canadian universities. A total of 52 teachers replied from 20 of these universities and their answers reflected the situation that all the teachers said that they require the students to translate a text. As far as methods of evaluating student translations were concerned, 36.5% of the teachers use a method based on error analysis, 38.5% use a holistic method, and 23% combine error analysis with a holistic appreciation. In accordance with these findings, this paper considers the validity of the results obtained through applying these different types of method to the correction of translations done by students under exam conditions.

The present study differs from Campbell (1991), Stansfield et al (1992) and Waddington (2001) in the following aspects:

- (1) It concentrates on translation course at a different university using other languages which are Arabic and English.
- (2) The subjects of the study sample are all females ranging from 21-23 years old to eliminate the effect of the factors of gender and age.
- (3) In order to find out the kind of translation exam and the suitable correction method, the researcher formulated the final exam of the course of translation (2) that considered the level of the respondents as he has been teaching this course for 5 years so far.
- (4) The researcher applied only one method which is the error analysis method excluding the

holistic method in correcting the final exam of the 36 female translation students to see to what extent the former method is applicable.

(5) This study considers the results obtained through applying this method to the correction process of translations done by students under final exam atmosphere, so the hypothesis of the study is as follows:

The hypothesis is that "the suitability and effectiveness of using this evaluation error analysis method is high and that it is possible to improve the quality of the evaluation of the students' translations in future based on this method." To verify this hypothesis, the results obtained by this method should be reasonable in the sense that students' failure cases do not exceed 50 % of the total number of the students.

Methods of the Study:

Description of Experiment

Error Analysis Evaluation Method

This method is based on error analysis and was designed to take into account the negative effect of errors on the overall quality of the translations (Cf. Kussmaul 1995:129, and Waddington 2001). The corrector first has to determine whether each mistake is a translation mistake or just a language mistake. This is done by deciding whether or not the mistake affects the transfer of meaning from the source to the target text. If it does not, it is a language minor error and is penalized with - 1 mark. If it does, it is a translation serious error and. In this case, it is penalized with - 2-4 marks depending on the corrector who has to judge the importance of the negative effect that each one of these errors has on the translation. All this should be applied to different texts that are supposed to be translated using different translation directions. In order to accurately carry out this correction method, a distinction was made in each of the categories between serious and minor errors as follow:

(1) Serious errors

Spelling = (- 4 marks)

Inappropriate lexical items = (- 4 marks)

Omission = (- 3 marks)

Loss of meaning = (- 3 marks)

Grammar = (- 2 marks)

Missing -s of plurality = (- 2 marks)

(2) Minor errors

Addition = (- 1 mark)

Inappropriate collocation = (- 1 mark)

Inappropriate text style and coherence = (- 1 mark)

Missing -s of third person singular = (- 1 mark)

Punctuation = (- 1 mark)

In the case of the translation exam where this method was used, the sum of the negative marks was subtracted from a total of 100. The student needs 50 (i.e. 50%) marks to reach the lowest pass mark (which is the normal Yemeni system of evaluation).

Sample:

This study is set to explore and describe issues related to translation assessment. This study focused on the sample of translation students. Purposeful non-random sampling is the chosen technique to select sample elements. The students should not be discriminated by factors like gender and age in order to attain a higher validity. The students are in the third year of their study. The justification for selecting these students is that the third year students are supposed to have a relatively good command of English general language skills besides their Arabic (mother tongue). They also have integrated skills in translating texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. They have already attended a translation course (i.e. translation 1) so as to gain the necessary translation skills, which could help them access the written information in their field of study. The study has been applied to the final exam of the second subject of translation 2, which is usually given in the second semester to put students in a better situation to work more confidently in the exam when compared to their capability in translation 1.

The Final Translation Exam:

The exam paper (See appendix) was quite similar to other final exams of the same course adopted in last 5 years. It consisted of written texts in both translation directions (i.e. from English into Arabic and vice versa) so as to make a balance or moderation in the degree of the exam difficulty assuming that translation into one's mother tongue is always easier. The exam included four relatively long sentences that contained collocations and one English proverb and two general passages. The English passage of the exam paper which the students had to translate discussed a general figures and facts about the

country of Costa Rica while the Arabic one discussed the negative effects of chewing qat in Yemen (Qat is small leaves of a tree chewed by people to give feeling of comfort and relief). Using dictionaries is allowed in this final exam. The total number of the English texts was 158 words long while the Arabic text was only 134 words long and the students had 3 hours to translate this exam. Since the English text was a bit longer, it was given 55 marks out of 100 while the Arabic text was given the remaining 45 marks.

How the Method Was Applied:

To verify the hypothesis, this method was applied to the correction of a third-year translation exam done by 36 English department female students on the undergraduate degree course of Translation (2) at the Faculty for Women in Hadhramout University of Science and Technology, Yemen. This assessment method was applied by a professional corrector whose major is Arabic-English translation and has got 5 years experience of translation teaching. He applied this method to the 36 translations considering the lessons of the translation syllabus that the students have taken in the translation course of that semester. Applying the correction process was straightforward, objective, and systematic. One line is drawn under the minor mistake and more than one line is drawn under the serious mistake in accordance with the evaluation method in question. All the lines are counted and subtracted from the total marks of the exam to get the result of a student.

Analysis and Results:

In order to get high degree of objectivity in the research, the students' translation exams have been corrected horizontally. That is to say, the teacher has corrected the answer of the first question for all the students at first. He then corrected the answer of the second question. Using Kussmaul (1995:129) error analysis correction method stated above, Table 1 below shows the general detailed result of the students.

Table 1: The General Detailed Result

Student No.	Marks out of 100	Result
Student 1	78	Pass
Student 2	91	Pass
Student 3	97	Pass
Student 4	74	Pass
Student 5	69	Pass
Student 6	55	Pass
Student 7	86	Pass
Student 8	54	Pass
Student 9	38	Fail
Student 10	94	Pass
Student 11	95	Pass
Student 12	84	Pass
Student 13	90	Pass
Student 14	25	Fail
Student 15	96	Pass
Student 16	38	Fail
Student 17	25	Fail
Student 18	89	Pass
Student 19	59	Pass
Student 20	54	Pass
Student 21	61	Pass
Student 22	88	Pass
Student 23	60	Pass
Student 24	41	Fail
Student 25	59	Pass
Student 26	97	Pass
Student 27	35	Fail
Student 28	92	Pass
Student 29	27	Fail
Student 30	45	Fail
Student 31	46	Fail
Student 32	91	Pass
Student 33	33	Fail
Student 34	23	Fail
Student 35	26	Fail
Student 36	60	Pass

The first look at Table 1 above indicates that applying this correction method resulted in a significant number of failure cases. The student needs 50 (50%) marks to reach the lowest pass mark. This goes in harmony with the normal

system of assessment at Yemeni Universities. In order to precisely calculate the number of those who failed in the exam, we can take a look at Table 2 below.

Table 2: The General Accumulative Result

Type	Fail	Pass	Total
Frequency	12	24	36
Percentage	33.33 %	66.67 %	100 %

Table 2 above reveals that 12 cases which is equal to one third (33.33 %) of the whole number of the study respondents did not manage to get even the lowest pass mark. The local policy of the faculty considers this to be a bit high percentage of failure rate which does not normally exceed (25 %) in most subjects taught in this particular English department. To go

further in the analysis, other calculation has been made on the factor of the translation direction to see whether this factor has any impact. Table 3 below shows a detailed outcome of Q1 which contained texts to be translated into Arabic and Q 2 which contained a text to be translated into English.

Table 3: The Impact of the Translation Direction on Failure Rate

Student No.	Direction to Arabic (55 marks)	Direction to English (45 marks)
Student 1	51	27
Student 2	55	36
Student 3	55	42
Student 4	40	34
Student 5	46	23
Student 6	34	21
Student 7	51	35
Student 8	31	23
Student 9	33	5
Student 10	55	39
Student 11	53	42
Student 12	39	45
Student 13	48	42
Student 14	25	0
Student 15	51	45
Student 16	30	8
Student 17	25	0
Student 18	53	36
Student 19	46	13
Student 20	45	9
Student 21	45	16
Student 22	52	36
Student 23	53	7
Student 24	36	5
Student 25	24	35
Student 26	55	42
Student 27	28	7
Student 28	55	37
Student 29	27	0
Student 30	45	0
Student 31	29	17
Student 32	52	39
Student 33	33	0
Student 34	23	0
Student 35	22	4
Student 36	46	14
Total of Failure percentage	6 16.7 %	18 50 %

* The dark boxes indicate failure while the bright boxes indicate success.

Table 3 displayed the students' result on each question with different translation directions. It has been found out that there is a profound impact of the translation direction on the failure rate. Most failure cases happened in the Q 2 which requires translation to go from Arabic into English. 18 students (50 %) were unsuccessful and got below 50 % of the marks allotted for this question, namely 45 marks despite the fact that Q 2 was only given 45 when compared to Q 1

which was given 55 by the translation exam designer to lessen the impact of this factor. Therefore, this is a strong indication that students' competence of the English language, especially in writing skill, is remarkably poor.

On the other hand, the faculty evaluation system is also keen in its correction scale to show the students' assessment ranks in all the subjects in accordance with Table 4 below.

Table 4: Rank Correction Scale

Marks	Assessment Rank
From 90 – 100	Excellent
From 80 – 89	Very good
From 65 – 79	Good
From 50 – 64	Acceptable
Below 50	Weak (Fail)

Applying the correction scale above gave us the outcome of our study respondents as shown in the following table.

Table 5: Detailed Result of Applying the Rank Correction Scale

Student No.	Marks out of 100	Rank
Student 1	78	Good
Student 2	91	Excellent
Student 3	97	Excellent
Student 4	74	Good
Student 5	69	Good
Student 6	55	Acceptable
Student 7	86	Very Good
Student 8	54	Acceptable
Student 9	38	Weak / Fail
Student 10	94	Excellent
Student 11	95	Excellent
Student 12	84	Very Good
Student 13	90	Excellent
Student 14	25	Weak / Fail
Student 15	96	Excellent
Student 16	38	Weak / Fail
Student 17	25	Weak / Fail
Student 18	89	Very Good
Student 19	59	Acceptable
Student 20	54	Acceptable
Student 21	61	Acceptable
Student 22	88	Very Good
Student 23	60	Acceptable
Student 24	41	Weak / Fail
Student 25	59	Acceptable
Student 26	97	Excellent
Student 27	35	Weak / Fail

Student 28	92	Excellent
Student 29	27	Weak / Fail
Student 30	45	Weak / Fail
Student 31	46	Weak / Fail
Student 32	91	Excellent
Student 33	33	Weak / Fail
Student 34	23	Weak / Fail
Student 35	26	Weak / Fail
Student 36	60	Acceptable

In order to know the exact total number of the students in each rank, the following table is illustrative.

Table 6: General Result of Applying the Rank Correction Scale

Rank	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Acceptable	Weak / Fail	Total
Frequency	9	4	3	8	12	36
Percentage	25 %	11.11 %	8.33 %	22.22 %	33.33 %	100 %

Discussions:

This correction method is said to be "eating the students' marks" and resulted in the failure rate to reach a third (33.33 %) out of the total. This could be justified by the fact that spelling mistakes got - 4 marks while some translation teachers assume that it is a trivial mistake. However, the other teachers' assumption was groundless and unjustifiable. One should bear in mind that this criterion was sensible since the students were given 3 hours long which is considered enough time to check the spelling in dictionary. This supports the idea that the correction method was solid and strict enough to make only the studious respondents pass the exam. Furthermore, it is felt that this method eliminated the subjectivity in the correction process and increased the objectivity in return. On the other hand, eating marks may be manifested in the penalty of subtracting 4 marks for the inappropriate lexical items which means that a student chose a wrong word or selected a wrong meaning out of many meanings of a polysemous word. However, this penalty was reasonable also simply because committing such a serious mistake could negatively affect the general meaning of the adjacent sentences or probably the whole passage. In addition, omission mistake happens when the student skip translating a lexical item while loss of meaning can happen when the corrector felt that the meaning of a translated sentence was blurred or incomplete. The latter two cases were penalized with - 3 marks which were also reasonable as these mistakes can also affect the meaning of the whole source language text. It was observed that

the direction of the translation was a remarkable factor and had a clear connection with the degree of difficulty of the exam questions. In accordance with result shown in Table 3 above, it was quite clear that most mistakes were committed in the question in which students were asked to translate a text from Arabic into English. This supported the assumption that translating into one's mother tongue is easier.

Conclusions:

The conclusions of the study can be summed up in the fact that if this correction method is accused to be a bit unfair as it did what we called "eating the students' marks", it remained dependable and solid because it was justly applied to all students without distinction. If we adopted other subjective assessment such as Waddington (2001) holistic method for example, the evaluation will just be relative and would depend mainly on the teacher's subjective intuition which is too flexible and hard to measure. On the other hand, one advantage of this method is that it can easily distinguish the studious respondents out of those weak or rather inexperienced ones. That is to say, it can give success to only those who really deserve it while the rest should be reexamined next year according to Hadhramout University Assessment system. Indeed, the commonsense supports the idea that to get success after many attempts would surely be better than giving easy success in the first attempt to someone who lacks the required translation competence. Being strict like this will be positively reflected in the long run on the assessment quality system and the teaching

process at large and the graduates would be of high standard. This is consequently good for the university academic reputation.

The high rate of failure cases (33.33 %) is an indication that this method is strict and serious enough to measure the students' translations and it is still within the reasonable range since the failure rate did not reach 50 % out of the total number of the students. This would make us confidently say that the hypothesis regarding the suitability of using this evaluation error analysis method and the possibility to improve the quality

of evaluating the students' translations in future based on this method has been verified.

Finally, it is also concluded that the high rate of failure cases (33.33 %) is a clear indication that the students' linguistic mastery and command in English is rather weak and a recommendation is, therefore, worth mentioning here. It is that there should be an entrance (written and oral) exam for the new comers who want to join the English department in this particular faculty so that only those with highest potentials who should not exceed 35 students per year are to be accepted.

References:

- 1- Beaugrande, R. de. (1978). *Factors in a Theory of Poetic Translating*. Assen: van Gorcum; Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- 2- Bensoussan, M. and J. Rosenhouse (1994). "Evaluating student translations by discourse analysis," *Babel*, 36-2, pp. 65-84.
- 3- Campbell, S. J. (1991). "Towards a Model of Translation Competence," *Meta* 36-2/3, pp. 329-243.
- 4- Hatim, B. (2001). *Teaching and Researching Translation*. Pearson Education Limited, Edinburgh: Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE, England.
- 5- and I. Mason (1997). *The Translator as Communicator*, London, Routledge.
- 6- Hewson, L. (1995). "Detecting Cultural Shifts: Some Notes on Translation Assessment," *Cross-Words. Issues and Debates in Literary and Non-literary Translating* (I. Mason and C. Pagnoulle, eds.), Liège, L3, Liège Language and Literature, pp. 101-108.
- 7- House, J. (1981). *A Model for Translation Quality Assessment*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr.
- 8- Kussmaul, P. (1995). *Training the Translator*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- 9- Newmark, P. (1991). *About Translation*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.
- 10- Pym, A. (1992). "Translation Error Analysis and the Interface with Language Teaching," *Teaching Translation and Interpreting. Training, Talent and Experience*. Papers from the First Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark, 31 May–2 June, 1991 (C. Dollerup and A. Loddegaard, eds.), Amsterdam, John Benjamins, pp. 279-288.
- 11- Sager, J. C. (1989). "Quality and Standards: The Evaluation of Translations," *The Translator's Handbook* (C. Picken, ed.), London, ASLIB, pp. 91-102 [This is the second edition of *The Translator's Handbook* (1983)].
- 12- Séguinot, C. (1989). "Understanding Why Translators Make Mistakes," *TTR*, 2-2, pp. 73-102.
- 13- (1990). "Interpreting Errors in Translation," *Meta*, 25-1, pp. 68-73.
- 14- Snell-Hornby, M. (1995). "On Models and Structures and Target Text Cultures: Methods of Assessing Literary Translations," *La Traducció Literària* (Josep Marco Borillo, ed.), Castelló de la Plana, Publicacions de la Universitat Jaume I, coll. "Estudis sobre la traducció," no 2, pp. 43-58.
- 15- Stansfield, C. W., M. L. Scott and D. M. Kenyon (1992). "The Measurement of Translation Ability." *The Modern Language Journal*, 76-iv, pp. 455-67.
- 16- Waddington, C. (2001). "Different Methods of Evaluating Student Translations: The Question of Validity" *Meta : Meta: Translators' Journal*, vol. 46, p. 311-325.
- 17- Williams, M. (1989). "The Assessment of Professional Translation Quality: Creating Credibility out of Chaos," *TTR*, 2-2, pp. 13-33.

APPENDIX

FINAL EXAM IN THE SUBJECT OF TRANSLATION (2)

Hadhramout University of Science & Technology
College For Women – Seiyun



جامعة حضرموت للعلوم والتكنولوجيا
كلية البنات - سينون

Final Exam of the Second Semester 2011-2012

Class: Third Year
Department: English
Course: Translation (2)

Date: Tuesday 11 /6/2013
Time Allowed: 3 hours
Examiner: Dr. Adel Bahameed

Answer ALL the following questions:**Q 1) Translate the following texts into Arabic:**

- a) A total failure happened to our attempt of improving the project. (5 marks)
b) Allowing the farmers to plant the gat is a terrible mistake. (5 marks)
c) There is a branch of the company in almost every main street in London. (5 marks)
d) Birds of a feather flock together. (5 marks)
e) Costa Rica is a country located in Central America between Nicaragua and Panama. It has around 3,773,000 people. Costa Rica is a marvelous place to spend a vacation for two reasons. First, it has a splendid system of national parks where visitors can observe nature. For example, visitors can watch sea turtles come on the shore to lay their eggs in the sand. Then they can come back several months later to see the new babies crawl down to the sea. Second, Costa Rica had many wonderful beaches. For example, the beach of Cocos Island offers perfect conditions for swimming and diving. Indeed, this country is an attractive place if you love the beauty of nature. (35 marks)

Q 2) Translate the following text into English:

a) (45 marks)

الشجرة السيئة

قال صديقي إنه سيذهب ليأكل القات مع اصدقائه. فشعرت بالغضب. وقلت له لا أريد أن أكون صديقك بعد الآن. في الحقيقة إنه أمر غريب يحدث في اليمن. القات شجرة سيئة. يخسر اليمنيون 30 % من الماء لتنمو هذه الشجرة. وقد سمعت أنها السبب لكثير من الأمراض. وينفق الشخص في الأقل 800 ريال ليشتري هذه الشجرة يومياً. سمعت أيضاً أن رجلاً ترك أطفاله بدون حليب لكي يشتري القات. وسمعت أيضاً أن رجلاً سرق ذهب زوجته لكي يمضغ القات. أنا أكره القات كثيراً. وأكره الناس الذين يمضغونه. إنني لا أستطيع أن أنظر إلى وجه الرجل وهو يمضغ القات. إن وجهه يصبح قبيحاً. إن الناس في البلدان الأخرى يضحكون علينا. يقولون إن الشعب اليمني شعب غريب. إنهم ينفقون نقودهم وأوقاتهم ليحصلوا على شي مضر. لذلك يجب على الحكومة أن تمنع زراعته بشكل كامل.

تقييم الامتحان النهائي للطلاب في الترجمة

عادل سالم باحميد

الملخص

غالباً ما يجد أساتذة الترجمة أنفسهم في حيرة من كيفية تقييم امتحانات الترجمة للطلاب. إن هذا البحث هو محاولة لإرشاد الأساتذة كيف ينبغي لعملية التقييم أن تكون. كما يبرز صلاحية وفاعلية استخدام طريقة تحليل الأخطاء للتقييم. تم استخدام هذه الطريقة في عملية التصحيح لامتحان النهائي في الترجمة لطالبات المستوى الثالث في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية. ويحتوي هذا الامتحان على نصوص مختلفة يراد ترجمتها من الإنجليزية إلى العربية والعكس. عدد عينة الدراسة 36 من طالبات كلية البنات - سيئون باليمن. إن تحليل النتائج قد أثبت فرضية الدراسة المتعلقة بصلاحية وفاعلية طريقة تحليل الأخطاء للتقييم. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن العامل الرئيسي والبارز في نتائج الدراسة هو عامل الكفاءة في الترجمة.