Evaluation of Translation Assignments at the Beginner's Level: A Pedagogical View

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This paper deals with the evaluation of translation assignments at the beginner's level. The challenges in assessment of translation assignments stem firstly from the fact that translation is a highly complicated activity and secondly, from the fact that at the beginner's level the errors in translation are not visible to the learners who are yet to be initiated into the science of translation. The author introduces a framework of assessment which identifies not only the errors in the translation and draws the learner's attention to its gravity by assigning negative points but also sensitises the learner to what is being done correctly by rewarding the good translation practices of the learner with positive points. This balanced approach to assessment aims at covering all common translation errors of learners as well as providing them with the necessary vocabulary to identify them so that there can be a meaningful discussion in class.

Keywords: translation errors, good translation practices, framework of assessment, learner-centred assessment.

Introduction

Evaluation of translations is a very complex and a relatively less researched field in Translation Studies. Evaluation of literary translations differs from that of translation of specialized texts. Evaluations of translations in a class room differ from the evaluation of professionally done translations. Most ideas on assessment of the quality of translations were born in the 1970s.

Many theoreticians like Juliane House, Katharina Reiss, Wolfram Wilss, and Werner Koller have engaged with the issue of evaluation in translation. Juliane House developed a model in 1977 and then revised it in 1997. In Reiss's opinion invariance on the level of function and test-type of the source text is necessary for a translation to be deemed as adequate.Wills believes that the "norm of usage" in a given language community should be decisive while assessing a translation, Koller suggests a linguistic model of translation assessment which evaluates translation as either "adequate" or "inadequate".[1] Though many theoreticians have dealt with the assessment of Translations, a differentiated assessment scale for evaluating the translations of beginners of translation courses is not found.

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[1] House 15-16

Assessment of translation assignments of students doing translation courses in a university is made further difficult because of the rigid framework within which each university course functions making it all the more difficult for a general framework for assessment of translation assignments by students. This paper focuses on introducing a framework for assessing translation assignments in the various translation courses offered at the beginner's level at the universities in India.

Discussion

The paper begins with an overview of constraints under which translation courses in general and translation courses specifically in India function. This and the complicated and complex nature of the science of translation mandate that a specific system of assessment be developed. After the overview a deliberation on goals, functions and nature of an assessment framework for assessing translation assignments at the beginner's level is presented. Later a typology of common errors as well as good translation practices, which students of translation make while translating, with specific reference to the language pair German - English is presented. Finally the framework for assessing translation assignments at the beginner's level will be introduced.

I. The Need for a Well-developed Framework of Assessment for Translation Assignments

I.a. Translation under Constraints.

Natural sciences like Mathematics, Physics etc. have only one correct answer to problems. To cite an instance " 2+2 is always 4". As against this Translation Studies is a heuristic discipline, where there can be multiple correct translations for one and the same source text unit, depending on the text type of the source and target text, the cultural norms followed in a certain culture, the context in which the translation is done, the 'skopos' of the text etc. To make my point clear, I would like to cite an example. If the function of the translation changes, the source text units will have to be translated differently. German academic texts, for instance, exhibit a preference for nominalizations and the passive voice whereas English texts prefer verbalizations and the active voice. Hence, if the function of the translation of a German academic text is to get a target text which will adhere to the norms of the English academic texts, then , while translating from the German into English the translator would be required to change the German noun forms into English verb forms and change the voice from passive to active. In case the translation brief specified, that the function of the translation is to reveal how German academic texts are written, then the nominalizations and the passive voice would be retained in the English text. So for the same source text units one could have different target text units, depending on the function specified in the translation brief.

Learners who are at the beginner's level have a false notion of translation. They believe that the source text is the "holy original" , that achieving equivalence on the word and sentential level is the main aim of a translation and a bilingual dictionary is the only translation aid. These notions of the learners need to be corrected by the teachers. The learners will have to be told, that there are many aspects such as context, the language style, the genre of the text, the text type, the language register of the text to be translated, the communicative situation, the "skopos" of the assignment, the target culture norms and most importantly the difference between the language systems of the source and the target language etc. which need to be considered before one can arrive at "equivalence". The following will serve as an example for sensitizing the learners to the difference in the language systems which needs to be considered while striving for equivalence, say at the word level. The German word "Informationen " is always in plural in the German language. It cannot be translated into English as 'informations" because it would be wrong. The two language systems are different. In this way the teachers have to sensitize the learners and correct their notions of translation. The framework of assessment introduced in this paper can go a long way in sensitizing the learners to such issues in translation by identifying their errors.

I.b. The Peculiar Case of Translation Courses at Indian Universities.

The teaching of translation in the German departments in India, which is probably true for other foreign language departments in India as well, is unique, because of our colonial past. The translation courses run at universities teach the students to translate from one foreign language into another, namely, English. For us, both the languages are of foreign origin, and neither is our mother tongue. In spite of this situation one finds that while selecting the students for translation programmes the focus is on the proficiency in the source language and the target language competence is taken for granted. This creates a huge problem at the beginner's level which can be brought into focus by making use of a framework of assessment developed exclusively to correct translation assignments.

Connected to the above is also the issue of multilingualism in India. The student community that comes for Translation courses to the German departments can speak at least two other languages in addition to the source and target language. German is their third or the fourth language that they learn.[2] This increases the instances of interference not only from one source but multiple sources. Hence an early sensitization to the phenomenon of interference can be achieved by giving visibility to such errors in the framework of assessment.

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[2] Kamath 1570

I.c. The Heuristic Nature of Translation Science.

Translation is a skill where, as already mentioned earlier, there is nothing like "a" correct answer. There can be many ways of translating a particular sentence, word, phrase and yet not any and all translations will be right. Only some will be considered as correct. Sometimes the line between the right and the wrong translation can be very thin and it is sensitization to such aspects of translation that an exhaustive and well-structured assessment framework can contribute. To cite an example of a text which is universally standardized let us consider the text type "sales and delivery conditions". The content as well as the form of these texts have been standardized all over the world in interest of facilitating ease of business. Even in case of such texts one sees that there are slight culture and language specific differences. The learner is unaware of such differences at the beginning of the course. That the correctness of a translation can depend on the cultural norms of the target culture, is not known to her/him. The English legal texts for example show a tendency to use two words for one German word for instance, for the German word "Widerspruch" the translation is "conflict or controversy" for the word "Sorgerecht" the translation is "custody and support".[3] A beginner of a translation course is bound to translate "Sorgerecht" as simply "child support" because that is what the German word means and make an error if s/he has not been sensitized to the above phenomenon of contrastive phraseology, which plays a role in the translation of highly standardized texts. The learner will have to be sensitized through a system of assessment framework where an error is identified to belong to a certain specific type without which there will be no progress attained through assessment.

Depending on the text, even the translation unit would differ from a word level to a subsentential level, later to a sentential level even the textual level. That a translation unit can be as small as a symbol and as large as a complete text needs to be pointed out at an early stage to students. Some errors occur on word level for example, take the case of a word which exhibits polysemy. Some errors occur on an above-word-level, for example, the collocation is wrong. Some errors occur because the sentence structure is not correct and some occur because the cataphoric and anaphoric references of words have not been considered.

To have a framework of assessment which can do justice to this plethora of possibilities of errors, of which only a few have been mentioned here, one has to think in terms of a well differentiated and exhaustive framework which can help assessment to have a pedagogical value.

I.d. Translation as a Research based Activity.

The layman's idea of translation is that translation entails substitution of the source language word by a target language word with the help of a bilingual

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[3] Stolze 50-51

dictionary. That two third's of the work of a translator is taken up by research is not known to most students.[5] To impress upon the students the need for this important aspect in translation it is necessary to give visibility to such errors as may have been caused due to lack of research.

To sum up the first part of this paper, there is an urgent need to introduce a framework of assessment for assessing the translation assignments at the beginner's level mainly because of the complex nature of the discipline of Translation Studies, the unique situation regarding translation in India and keeping in mind a learner centric approach because translation is largely an individual, skill-based activity.

II Function, Aims and Nature of Assessment Framework for Translation Assignments at the Beginner's Level.

One of the major challenges faced by translation teachers is to justify to the students that there are errors in their translation. This can be achieved if the assessment is objective, differentiated, transparent, individual, learner-centred, reflecting the errors as well as good translation practices of the learner, time saving and visible to the learner to the extent that the learner can follow the assessment and learn from it. Objective means that the error can be identified and given a name or a category which can be explained in translation terms like for instance, the collocation is wrong or the selected target language word does not match the register of the target text etc. Differentiated means the error is described as closely as possible. One can say for example that the word selection is wrong. But if one says that the word selected does not match the style of the text, the identified error carries pedagogical value. If it is further specified that the word used is stylistically neutral in the target language when the source language word is stylistically marked, the description helps the student follow the correction in a better way. If the error is further classified to point out that the style of the target language text was not consistent with the source language text, that it was colloquial, aesthetic, technical, vulgar etcetera the correction has more explanatory value than if one were to simply say that the style of the target text is wrong.

The correction of the assignment should be transparent. At the beginner's level each and every mistake needs to be marked and the learner should be able to understand the correction. This can be facilitated by discussing the assessment framework with the students at the beginning of the course and continuously using it for assessing all assignments at least for a semester. If the learner does not understand where s/he has gone wrong then the assessment does not help.

The assessment of translation assignments has to be done on an individual level. Very often translation assignments are not corrected individually but discussed in a group because individual assessment is time consuming. Every

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[5] Kautz 89

individual has his/her specific translation skills and problems. Sometimes a student may have the tendency to use a colloquial style of language for translation while the other students do not have the same tendency. In case of the Indian context, the learner group is heterogeneous when it comes to proficiency in English, the target language. This is reflected in the errors like conjugation of the verbs, tense of the verbs just to name a few. The learner needs to be sensitized to such mistakes at the beginning of the course itself so that s/he can undertake to improve the language skills in the target language over the duration of the course.

The assessment has to be learner-centred i.e. the learner has to be involved in the assessment. This can be done by identifying the error in a way that the student understands which type of error it is and giving the student a chance to correct it him/herself. This is especially required for translation because as professional translator s/he has to revise and correct one's own translation before making a final draft. It is most difficult to spot one's own mistakes. This kind of assessment helps to develop this critical view of one's own translation if the assessment is learner-centred.

The assessment framework should not only concentrate on errors and mistakes but should also take into consideration those translation segments where the learner has shown good translation skills. The assessment should be a combination of negative and positive points. The positive points for good translation practices helps to reinforce good translation behaviour, because one does not know at the beginning how close and how far from the source text unit s/he is allowed to translate. A balanced assessment which is positive as well as negative serves to increase the confidence of a learner which is very crucial especially at the beginning stages:

> "In order to counterbalance our error-based approach we may look for passages in a student's translation which can be evaluated positively"[6]

The last two criteria which any framework of assessment for correcting translation assignments must fulfil are that the assessment should save time and should also be visible for the learner. This can be achieved by the use of specific symbols for specific errors. By using the symbols for the place where the error is committed the teacher can save time required for writing long reports on the assessment of the assignment which still may not be able to address each and every error. The symbols used in the assessment framework are self explanatory and are taken from the ones available in any computer system. The added advantage is that the teacher can use them even while correcting the assignments as a soft copy.

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[6] Kussmaul (Kußmaul) (1995) 153

Literature Review

A classification of errors of translation assignments for the classroom situation has been developed by Jacqueline Joyce. Joyce categorizes the errors in four categories A, B, C und D. The most serious mistakes fall under 'A' and under 'D' the least serious ones. Under A- she categorizes 'Structural/Syntactical' mistakes, under B- mistakes on the level of 'Lexis/Terminology', C - 'Readability/Drafting/Register' und D - 'Errors of Revision'.[7] Nord categorizes mistakes in four categories.[8] She mentions at the outset that her classification presumes that students already have the requisite language competences in their working languages. So mistakes of language are actually not included in her hierarchy. She mentions about pragmatic mistakes, which occur because the functional hierarchy has not been followed. These are the most serious mistakes in her hierarchy and three to five points are deducted for such mistakes. On the second position come cultural translational mistakes that are mistakes caused because of the violation of the cultural norms of the target culture and target language. She specifies that two to three points need to be deducted for such mistakes. The third category is that of language mistakes for which one to two points are deducted and which occur due to the interference of the source language structures. There is also a fourth category, target language mistakes, which occur because of wrong verb form, spelling in the target text and half to one mark is deducted for it.

One finds a tendency to club errors into "serious", "very serious" and "not serious" which does not tell a learner much. Instead if each error is given points depending on the severity of the mistake and the total amount of marks are counted, it can educate the learner about the type of mistakes s/he should avoid. The suggested framework awards negative points ranging from minus 1/2 to minus 2 for errors and positive points ranging from +1 to +2 for good translation practices. In order to increase the visibility of the assessment it is also suggested that the teacher use colours to communicate to the learner the severity of the mistakes. 'Red' is suggested for 'very serious mistakes', like mistakes which hamper readability, 'yellow' is suggested for serious mistakes and 'green' is suggested for 'not serious mistakes'. For 'good translation practices' where +1 has been awarded 'violet' is used and for 'very good translation practices' which deserve +2 'blue' is suggested. A quick look at the colours on the corrected assignment should tell the learner how well or badly s/he has performed. Too much 'red' means unsatisfactory work and a lot of 'blue' means s/he is on the right track with his/her translation decisions.

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[7] Joyce 145-151
[8] Nord (2010) 179

III Typology of Mistakes and Good Translation Practices.

Following is an attempt to list common mistakes that are found especially in translation assignments at the beginner's level. Though the list appears exhaustive, no claim is being made on the completeness of the typology due to the ever-changing and dynamic nature of Translation Studies which can throw a different set of challenges in the future. There are more than 20 common errors listed below and about five good translation practices.

III.a. Typology of Mistakes

> "At it's most basic, an error is defined as something which reduces the communicative competence or the comprehensibility of the text"[9]

-Mistakes due to carelessness: These are mistakes that are caused due to carelessness like forgetting to write 'e' in the word 'the' or 'd' in the word 'and' or failing to recognize a 'false friend', or searching a wrong word in the dictionary because one did not perceive that the source language word is a noun or a verb which is crucial in German as the former is written in capital letters and the latter in small letters.

- Mistakes of orthography: These are mistakes which learners make such as writing in capital and small letters or spelling mistakes. This happens in case of the language pair German/English because all nouns in German are written in capital letters. Learners who have been used to writing in German forget that in English only proper nouns are written in capital letters. The German language has a tendency towards forming composite nouns. The learners initially create such composite nouns even in English. Here one finds a case of interference from German which causes mistakes in English. Interferences from regional Indian languages are also found and they have a separate symbol.

- Grammatical mistakes: Under this category fall the mistakes regarding use of wrong tense, wrong degrees of comparison, wrong voice etc. Very often learners do not perceive small details like the use of a superlative and instead use the comparative form or positive degree.

- Mistakes of syntax: All mistakes that arise from the sentence structure are clubbed under this category. Such mistakes are considered as mistakes of syntax. These are mainly caused due to the interference from German. The verb position in sub-ordinate clauses in the German language is at the end of the sentence whereas in English it is in the second place. Learners tend to put English verbs at the end of the sentence.

- Mistakes of the target language: These are mistakes that occur due to lack of requisite language competence in the English language. Following are some of them:

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[9] Newmark 55

- Wrong English is used
- The term used is incompatible with the text type norms of the English language
- The collocating noun, verb, adjective or adverb does not exist in English
- The word or the formation of the sentence does not exist in English
- The English translation makes no sense

- Stylistic mistakes: These mistakes occur when the students do not recognize the register of the text to be translated. They either use a higher register, or a lower register or gloss over while translating stylistically marked source text segments.

- Mistakes of comprehension: The reference here is to the comprehension of the source text. If one does not understand the source text segment it is difficult to translate it. Moreover, sometimes, especially in literary texts, a word, phrase or a sentence may mean a lot more than what appears to be the meaning on a purely linguistic level.

- Mistakes with reference to context: Very often for learners at the beginner's level the translation unit is a word and or at the most a sentence. They do not take the entire text into consideration. Such mistakes are categorized under this head. Here three types of mistakes can be identified:

- The broader context has been ignored while selecting the right meaning of the word
- Anaphoric reference of a text segment has been ignored
- Cataphoric reference of a text segment has been ignored

- Semantic mistakes: This category deals with mistakes on the level of meaning. Following mistakes can be identified here:

- In case of a word which exhibits polysemy, the wrong meaning has been selected
- A word or an expression has been translated word to word rather than selecting it's idiomatic meaning

- Mistakes of research: Superficial reading of a source text which requires research is translated with errors. Such mistakes are identified by this category.

- Mistakes of correction: Daniel Gile suggests a 'fidelity test' in his 'Sequential Model of Translation'[10] to ensure that the original text has been completely translated. Learners at the beginner's level tend not to conduct such a test and that causes the following mistakes:

- Deletion: Dropping a noun or a verb which is important

• Addition: Learners sometimes exhibit a tendency to add pieces of information which are not present in the original source text. This is viewed as a mistake.

III.b. Typology of Good Translation Practices.

For good translation practices the learner is rewarded with positive points for the specific text segments.

- Implicitation: If a learner uses this stylistic translation technique which involves making implicit in the target text that which is explicit in the source text in the interest of fluidity of the text the learner is rewarded by giving positive points.[11]

- Explicitation: If a learner uses a stylistic translation technique which consists of making explicit in the target language what remains implicit in the source language because it is evident either from the context or the situation[12] the learner is awarded positive points.[13]

- Change in sentence structure: In case the learner makes changes in the sentence structure so as to increase the readability of the translation s/he gets positive points.

- Exhibition of deverbalization: In case the learner is able to deverbalize i.e. get to the meaning of the word ignoring its linguistic envelope s/he gets positive points.

IV. Framework of Assessment: A Catalogue of Criteria

Based on the above typology of mistakes and good translation practices the following objective, differentiated, transparent, learner-centred, balanced, time saving framework for assessment was conceived with the aim to make corrections, to highlight learner errors, to provide visibility to good translation practices so that corrections become milestones in the learner's progress and attain a high didactic value:

TABLE - 1

Symbol	Points	Type of mistake
X	-1/2	Wrong orthography, wrong spelling
-	-1/2	Unsatisfactory translation but no radical change in the meaning
FF	-1/2	Mistakes due to carelessness like 'false friend'
↑	-1/2	Higher register

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[11] Darbelnet 1958/1995: 344, translation by Sager/Hamel
[12] Vinay / Darbelnet 1958 / 1995 342
[13] (Vinay/Darbelnet 1958/1995: 342, translation by Sager/Hamel)

↓	-1/2	Lower register
↔	-1/2	Glossing
..	-1/2	Word to word translation
ITsl	-1	Interference from source language
ITol	-1	Interference from other languages (mother tongue, Hindi etc)
¢	-1	Deletion of an important word or a verb
≠	-1	Wrong choice of word or a collocation
ID	-1	Idiomatic meaning of the word ignored
TT	-1	Word choice not compatible with the text type of the target text
¶	-1	Addition of unnecessary information
Б	-1	Radical change in the meaning
Қ	-1	Wrong grammatical category
(....)	-1	Larger context of the text ignored
ɗ	-1	Wrong placement of a word
‹	-1	Anaphoric reference ignored
›	-1	Cataphoric reference ignored
R	-1	Lack of research
Σ	-2	Wrong English
¿	-2	Word or phrase does not exist in the target language
++	-2	Sentence or phrase makes no sense
ʊ	-2	Source text message not comprehended
Ø	+1	Implicitation
‴	+1	Explicitation
Dv	+1	Deverbalization
∞	+2	Change in sentence structure
∩	+2	Consideration of the larger context

Conclusion

The application of this framework of assessment is meant to be used for the beginners of Translation courses. Though these criteria were developed for the language pair German –English, it can also be used with a few modifications for other language pairs. The evaluation is not one–sided. It balances the mistakes with good translation practices. The framework can be used to correct translation assignments submitted as a soft copy as well. The use of colour facilitates recognition of one's own mistakes on the part of the students and enables a quick assessment of the learner's performance. Time in writing long assessment reports is saved by using this framework of assessment. Most mistakes have been covered in the framework. In spite of the fact that effort has been made to keep the assessment objective a certain amount of minimal subjectivity cannot be ruled out.

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