

Students' Language and Knowledge Background: A Drawback of Translation Teaching

RAFAEL FERRER-MÉNDEZ

Abstract

Translation, in an interconnected world, becomes a need; consequently, translation teaching arises. Thus, we find translation programs in most countries, and México is not the exception. Therefore, we present a study done about the translation teaching drawbacks when taught to translation students who are both learning translation and a second language at the same time. This study has collected the results of 24 translation students and 4 professors. To collect the information, we used an interview, a questionnaire, and descriptive statistics to present such results. Among the most important findings are students' inability to apply linguistic aspects, different language levels among students, and no clear classification placement system for the students, problems in reading comprehension and writing output, and a lack of specialised and general knowledge. Finally, these identified deficiencies or drawbacks affect translation teaching, being a multidisciplinary activity.

Keywords: Translation Teaching, Students' Background, Language, Translation.

Introduction

Translation, in our globalised world, is a means allowing people of different cultures to interact. Consequently, translation has become a part of human life in business, social encounters, and state affairs. Thence, in most countries, translation has become a subject in some universities, and even a degree or speciality to achieve this area of specialisation. In the case of Mexico, due to the proximity of

the USA and the different state agreements, the need for specialised or professionalised translators has become a must. Here, we highlight how students' language and knowledge backgrounds are drawbacks of translation teaching, with students learning the source language as a foreign language and translation fundamentals at the same time.

As is known, the teaching of translation has evolved in the last few decades, especially with the publication of key material focused on the teaching of translation. In most of these publications, translation procedures, translation methodologies, and translation theory are stated to make translation teaching effective. Besides, reference books about translation teaching and translation theory are also available on the internet. Most of this information is freely accessible, updated, and reliable for the teaching of translation. At the same time, publications are of different formats, among these, we can read research report papers, theory articles, newsletters, glossaries, general and specialised dictionaries, and even discussion forums. However, teaching curricula are not available at all, at least publicly, and "there is very little research done on class dynamics in a translation classroom" (Gonzalez-Davis, as cited in Safinaz-Zainudin & Mat-Awal, 2012). As quoted here, translation studies have neglected teaching translation processes, focusing rather on methods, procedures and linguistic matters. Accordingly, a class of translation differ from another, depending on the professor and the material available.

Fundamentals of translation are mainly linguistic or based on a strong linguistic basis. Then, translators must gain a strong linguistic competence to deal with language constraints and stylistic restrictions in message transference. Nonetheless, relying only on linguistic criteria has proved to be inadequate for the translation of texts; therefore, other aspects have been included, such as context, culture, and pragmatics, among others (Nord, 1994).

Considering translation training as a multidisciplinary field, the translator-trainee needs a wide range of general knowledge. On the other hand, both translator trainers and trainees must remember the principle of being trained in translation, which must start when they have a good command of the target language. This way, a translator

must have a command of such a language as that of a native speaker, besides a strong command and knowledge of their mother tongue. Consequently, theoretically, translation hardly occurs when a translator trainee is still learning a second language, but in most translation programs, this is not the case (Wensheng, 2020).

No matter what the literature of translation states, in most translator training schools or universities, translation students join when they are still learning the second language. Thus, they lack a good command of this second language. At the same time, most of these trainees have a low level of their mother tongue. At least, this happens in most countries where translator-trainees have the target language as a foreign language.

In Cd. del Carmen, Campeche, most students join a university program immediately after high school. In the case of the Licenciatura de Lengua Inglesa (Bachelor's degree of English Language), two out of ten students joining our program are under the above situation. Consequently, they get into the program with the English learned in Secondary and Preparatory school, if they were lucky to have had a professor of English, which is not always the case. From the remaining ones, very few students have taken English as an extracurricular class or as a hobby during such time.

A phenomenon observed in the faculty is that some students have joined as a second or third option for a bachelor's degree. Some joined the degree as a possibility to have a place at the University and as a way to transfer to another degree at a later stage. Or they join the degree to learn English, not knowing that the purpose of the degree is to train them to reach translation or teaching competencies, resulting in discomfort or disillusionment for most students.

Students joining the Degree of English Language also have low knowledge and command of their own mother tongue, a requirement for properly recoding a message in the translation process. Besides, they also lack reading comprehension skills and writing abilities, as well as general knowledge. We evidenced this by their low performance in their Spanish courses during their first term in the faculty, the placement exams they took, and their translation output.

Being aware of the difficulties students faced in applying translation fundamentals, professors of the translation classes decided to determine students' language and knowledge background deficiencies. Once these deficiencies or drawbacks were identified, they evaluated how such drawbacks affected the teaching and learning of translation, focusing on students' preparedness and translation output. This way, the study was around the following questions:

What are the main deficiencies that students in the translation program have? How do these deficiencies affect or impact the teaching of translation?

Literature Review

By defining translation, we can state that it is “the replacement of textual material in one language (SL) by equivalent textual material in another language (TL)” (Mehdi & Mehdi 2018, p. 47). This definition clearly highlights that the process of translation occurs at the written level, that is, written documents. However, it does not detail aspects or levels to reach, and it is not clear if it only refers to the product or to the process, too. For Casillas-Avalos (2023), translation implies a process of appropriation of a writer’s ideas by means of the translator’s comprehension and the use of the language, which also implies the comprehension of the translator, hence, the reader of the source text (Casillas-Avalos, 2023). In this way, the final reader or the reader of the translation output comprehends the ideas of the translator who renders his product in the linguistic elements of the translation language.

As seen, since the translator is the prime reader of the source text, this person must have good reading competencies, first to understand, and second, to transfer the read message. In this way, the understanding of a text, then, reading comprehension is linked to translation. As proved by Faridah and Anam (2022), “The students’ low, moderate, and high level of reading scores give positive effect into translation scores” (p. 62). This remark highlights the need for a high reading competence in a translator, as well as in a translator-student. On the other hand, Sriwantaneeyakul (2018) proved that students with a high critical reading skill produced a higher quality

translation since they not only understand the literal meaning, but also the implied meaning of the source text. Seen this way, reading comprehension is a key aspect to properly deal with meaning and the decoding of a message in a translation activity. But reading comprehension is not enough to deal with translation, because the way we conceive translation also impacts our learning and performance.

Alwazna (2012, p. 50) recounts a brief synthesis of some translation definitions in which translation is perceived as a process and as a product which replaces a textual meaning with an equivalent one in another language. It is also the rendering of meaning or message from one language into another. Some authors also consider translation as a means to communicate ideas or provide information in different languages. As a sum, the word highlighted in most definitions means as an equivalent for message, the fact of being a process or a product, and an attempt to reach the closest meaning or equivalent from the source language. Starting from these aspects, translation implies reading comprehension as well as high writing commands for the decodification and recodification of a message, always having the communicative value of such a process.

Depending on the definition we have made, or how we conceive translation, is how we approach or face our translation practice. In this way, a translator may consider linguistic, semantic, pragmatic, social, cultural or even psychological aspects in the rendering of a message, based on his/her command of such aspects. Cao (2018) states that the translation process implies a series of factors such as “types of source text, purposes of translation, target text readers, positions of source language culture and target language culture, emotional factors and contexts.” (Para. 4) All the above aspects and factors imply translators mastering of, not only the languages involved, but also core and generic competencies to deal with the whole translation process to produce a rendering with the highest quality possible.

Nonetheless, in the recodification of the message, the translator must fit the rendered message into linguistic restrictions and constraints of the target language (commonly the translator's mother tongue), and this is an aspect that also depends on the translator's

command of such language and the cultural aspects involved. Accordingly, a translator must master the source text language as well as the target language of the translation process. This means the translator must be competent linguistically in both languages, have a master knowledge of the cultures involved, stylistic aspects and specialised knowledge of the area in which the translation takes place.

In the case of the translator's mother tongue, if we approach translation from a communicative scope, this will have to produce a written translated output. Thus, any linguistic gap or deficiency in this language is reflected in the recodification of the message, resulting in a gap or a lack of communicative effectiveness. Mother tongue deficiency results in inaccuracies and a lack of quality in the translated texts (Makkos, 2019). For translation students, this is even more evident since they do not have a good command of their mother tongue, as well as the foreign language, in which case, reading comprehension errors and writing errors are expanded by the lack of translation expertise and language command.

The linguistic competence of the translator in both languages is an essential requirement for translation learning and practice. Since translation teaching is commonly faced from a linguistic point of view, neglecting linguistic elements may guarantee a failure in the comprehension of essential elements, as well as in the rendering of a message. The translator, obviously, must have a competence on linguistic components such as linguistic, grammatical, pragmatic and textual aspects of the language, but knowing this is not enough, the translator must also be aware of languages differences since facing different linguistic levels surely provide lack of comprehension, gaps on meaning, and poor or inability to transfer a message (Khany, 2014).

Linguistic aspects of both languages play an essential role, both in translation teaching and translation practice. Meaning components have to be decoded and then recoded from one language into another. In this action, the translator may face difficulties in lexical items at the comprehension stage, and then, some others at the rephrasing of the message, leading to meaningful translation errors. These errors may fall in incorrect forms, written or spoken, the lack

of transferring the source meaning, semantic or syntactic errors, creation of new words, and strange grammar, among others (Aprilianti-Putri, 2019).

For practical and teaching purposes, we perceive translation as an art, a science and a craft. As a science, we confer the qualities of precision and predictability to the translation process and product (Alwazna, 2012; Ordudari, 2008). This also means that, as a science, we have methods, procedures, techniques, and strategies to be applied to achieve translation quality. As an art, translation requires certain skills such as creativity and even the translator's personality traits (Alwazna, 2012). As a craft, translation requires practice and supervision. Hence, we consider translation to be developed through repetition and practice.

Whether you consider translation an art, science, or craft, learning and translation teaching have happened throughout human history. Perhaps, the teaching and learning of translation as the core meaning of teaching and learning is not very possible, but developing translating competence by practice and reflection based on the study of translation fundamentals is a way to reach high standards in translation.

A competence, in general, is what an individual can perform. It is the ability to do something or the actual performance of something. It is also the ability to use and apply knowledge in a real-world situation. This implies responsibility and autonomy in the performance of something in an autonomous problem-solution situation (Holmes, Polman-Tuin & Turner, 2021, p. 42). On this definition, the performance by using knowledge to solve specific problems or situations is clear. On the other hand, the performer acts as an independent individual showing the gained ability to accomplish a task. For the PACTE group, translation is "the underlying system of declarative and fundamentally procedural knowledge required to translate; a combination, thus, of knowledge, skills and attitudes." (Hurtado-Albir, Kuzkik & Rodríguez-Inés, 2022, p. 29) In this way, we perceive translation as a metacognitive activity, one that gathers diverse knowledge and skills, but also the attitude to perform the task, guiding the translator toward an integrative competence.

Developing translation competence in translator students or novice translators means making them aware of translation theory and fundamentals. However, they must already cover certain minimum requirements to start their training and learning of translation. To begin with, they require a command of both languages involved in the translation process, as well as other linguistic and communicative competencies. At the same time, they must have generic and specialised competences, reading comprehension, and a good knowledge of writing. Besides these, a strong background knowledge is essential to select the right equivalent as well as to understand the source text message (Al-Mufti & Al-Rubai, 2024).

The teaching of translation theory and fundamentals is not an easy task, especially if the students are learning the language and translation theory and fundamentals at the same time; besides “their different educational background” (Sdobnikov, Shamilov, Shlepnev, 2020, p.1228), a condition that affects comprehension and communication. In this stage, students’ linguistic and language command, and other deficiencies arise, making the process a difficult task or an impossible one for some students. Most students present difficulties in identifying linguistic components, transferring the source text (ST) meaning properly, re-codifying the message, or simply failing to transfer translation units; this mainly depends on students’ subjectivity and individual skills (Al-Mufti & Al-Rubai, 2024). For the professor of translation, the teaching of translation fundamentals and the practices to develop translation competence by applying the acquired knowledge becomes a complicated task since students are not able to comprehend, and consequently, lack translation competence development.

A translation professor also needs to consider “professional translation competences, common didactic competences, specialised pedagogic competences, [language and communicative competences to deal with students in developing translation competences]” (Sdobnikov, Shamilov, Shlepnev, 2020, p.1233). Most of these aspects are under the professor’s control, but the students’ performance is not. That is, the students’ success does not entirely depend on good teaching strategies, techniques or methodologies,

but also on students' practice and responsibility to follow the professors' directions. Besides, students' language background also impacts translation rendering in the way of errors such as "inversion of meaning, addition of meaning, omission of meaning, deviation of meaning, and modification of meaning" (Aprilianti-Putri, 2019).

Students' background knowledge, poor linguistic command, and translation fundamentals teaching may affect the learning and application of this knowledge in the transference of a translation unit. Being aware of this, we try to evaluate how students' deficiencies of language and general knowledge affect or impact the teaching of translation, since, based on gained experience, most students get a good command of learning translation theory and fundamental concepts, but in their application to actual translation activities, most of them fail. We realise this when they can speak about translation theory and fundamentals, but their translations are poor, or their practice exams fail. At least, in the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FES) at the Unacar, students succeed in dealing with translation theory, but fail in dealing with translation practice.

Materials and Methods

This study sample consisted of 4 professors and 24 students of the Program of English Language from the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Universidad Autónoma del Carmen in México. We invited both the professors and the students to participate in the research by means of an email invitation. In the case of the professors, three of them had translation classes at the time of this research, and one had classes in previous terms. In the case of the students, we invited all students from the three classes of translation taking place at the time of this research, being 54 students. All of them agreed to participate and answer an online questionnaire, but in the end, only 24 participated in answering it. The selection of the participants depended on their free willingness to participate in the research, so we can say that it was a random sample, not complying with specific lineaments or requirements for the research purposes. In the case of the professors, we selected the ones who have taught or were teaching translation classes this term. However, not all of

them cooperated on the study, with only four who responded, which also made a random sample, since no specific characteristics were set.

To collect the information from the participants, we carried out a structured interview with the professors. This interview consisted of a guide. We asked the same questions to the four professors in the same way. Nonetheless, they were free to express their answers. Thus, this was a structured interview (Lazaro Gutiérrez, 2021, p. 67). In this research, the interviewees were the four professors with translation teaching experience. For the translation students, we did a survey by means of an online-administered questionnaire. This questionnaire was structured, having as a basis the interview guide used with the professors, and was mainly to complete a series of items. Most of the questionnaire had closed questions, and only the last one was open (Navarro-Soler, 2021).

Both the interview and the questionnaire were organised into five indicators. The first ‘knowledge of linguistic aspects’, with three items, the first focused on the ability to identify linguistic aspects, the second on identifying parts of the sentence, and the third focused on having had linguistic classes. The second indicator, ‘command of English’, had three items, the first had the purpose to identify the level of English based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), the second was to identify the level of English based on the faculty classification, and the third one, to identify the command of the students’ English level. The third indicator, ‘command of Spanish’, had three items: the first was to identify the level of Spanish based on the CEFR, the second focused on identifying the use of vocabulary the students had, and the third was the students’ capability to express meaning. The fourth indicator, ‘Reading comprehension,’ had five items. The first to identify students’ reading comprehension in Spanish. The second item was to measure or rate students’ reading comprehension, the third item focused on identifying the capability to express meaning, the fourth item was to identify the students’ comprehension of different types of texts, and the last item was to determine the type of information the students could understand. The fifth indicator, ‘writing command,’ had six items. The first was to identify if the

students could write different types of sentences. The second had the purpose to identify the quality of the sentences, the third was to determine the quality of the students' paragraphs, the fourth had the purpose to identify the components of students' paragraphs, the fifth was to determine the capability of the students to write paragraphs or documents, and the sixth focused on rating students' writing production. The last item, not classified in any of the previous indicators, was to identify drawbacks or deficiencies of translation output.

For the questionnaire, we tested its reliability by means of a pilot study in which we obtained the same results in six different subjects' responses under the same conditions. For the face validity of this questionnaire, we considered the operationalisation of the constructs by means of five indicators in it. Also, the researchers considered these indicators and their corresponding items as relevant to the research as they were organised in a good format and style, clear, and consistent with the literature of the research topic. Regarding the content validity, all items were analysed in terms of how essential they were for the research. Passing this by the analysis and detailed examination of colleague scholars in the faculty (Taherdoost, 2016).

We used descriptive statistics to report and examine the information stated by the professors in the interview. The purpose was to identify the perception the professors had about their translation students and delve into the drawbacks these could have in their learning of translation. For reporting the information, we proceeded as stated by Lázaro-Gutiérrez (2021, p. 79) by transcribing the information, coding the participants, organising and selecting the data and interpreting the results.

By the collecting techniques and instruments and by the way of dealing with the presentation and analysis of the data, we used a mixed methods research design. Mixed-methods research focuses on quantitative data, but also considers qualitative data to support and provide a deeper comprehension of the arguments and conclusions stated in a study. In this study, we followed the collection of qualitative and quantitative data by using a guide for the interview and a detailed focus on the questionnaire. The use of this mixed-methods research guarantees superior results and a wider

comprehension of the arguments and results presented in this paper in reference to students' language and communicative command deficiencies as drawbacks of translation teaching (McLeod, 2024).

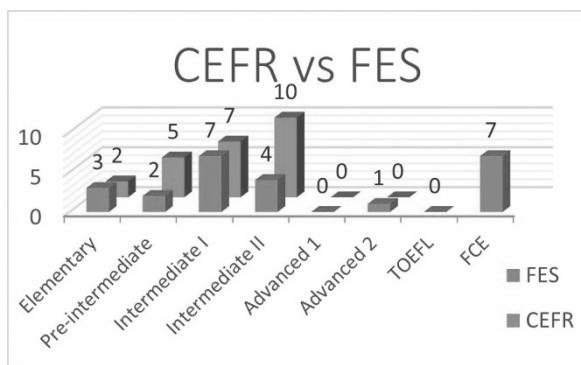
Presentation



At the time of this research, there were three groups of translation with 54 students. We invited all students to answer a questionnaire sent by email. After three weeks, we ended up with twenty-four questionnaires answered; thus, the results and percentages presented here are from these 24 participants. As seen in *Fig. 1*, 58% of the students

stated that they are able to identify linguistic aspects. However, 21% answered that they were able to deal with such aspects, and 17% considered themselves able to apply such linguistic aspects.

The above data is surprising since 83% of these students have already taken general linguistics. This is because students from different academic terms integrate the courses. Besides, 8% have taken both general linguistics and applied linguistics, and the other 9% have not taken linguistics classes yet.



As mentioned before, students differed in terms of academic backgrounds when they joined the translation. We asked them to grade themselves on their command of English, considering the

CEFR criteria. Consequently, 42% (10) of them considered they were in B2, 29% (7) in B1, 21% (5) in A2, and 8% (2) in A1. However, in accordance with their degree classification, 29% (7) of these were in First Certificate Exam (FCE) preparation, while the other 17% (4) were in Intermediate II. 29% (7) in intermediate I, and 13% (3) in Elementary (See *Fig. 2*). Therefore, their perception of their level of English differs depending on whether we asked them to take the CEFR or their actual faculty parameters. An important point on having this as a reference for the students' performance in the translation class is that CEFR considers six general levels, while the faculty also considers six levels equivalent to those of the CEFR and adds two more, which are special courses to get students prepared for the TOEFL and FES exams. However, a concern in these two systems of equivalences is how much the faculty parameters really match the CEFR, especially because their command of English determines their ability to decode messages.

The competence to decode a written message in English is a key point in translation. Based on this, we asked participants to grade their reading comprehension on a scale from 01 (low) to 10 (high), both in Spanish and English. In their Spanish reading comprehension, 8% (5) of the participants ranked it at a 10, which means they perceived their reading comprehension at a high level. 8% (5) evaluated their reading comprehension with a 9, which means they considered themselves to have a good command of decoding messages, but not at the highest level. Nonetheless, 8% (5) ranked their reading comprehension with an 'eight'. 12% (3) graded their reading comprehension with a 'seven', and there were two participants who ranked their reading comprehension below the media, grading themselves with a 'four' (one) and with a 'five' (one). Considering that this ranking was in their mother tongue, their expected reading comprehension was high, but the participant themselves seems to consider themselves to have a low level.

In the case of the participants' grading their reading comprehension in English, the figures went down. Only one participant ranked his reading comprehension with a 'ten'. 8% (2) graded themselves with a 'nine'. 17% (4) ranked their reading comprehension with an 'eight'. 29% (7) graded themselves with a

‘seven’. 8% (2) graded with a ‘six’. Twelve (3) graded their Reading comprehension with a ‘five’, and 21% (5) marked a ‘four’, which means they considered themselves below the median.

When the participants were questioned about how easily they understood or comprehended a written message, 54% of them stated that ‘they got the general idea of a common text in English with difficulties’, while the remaining 46% stated that they easily got the general idea of a common text in English. Specifically, 33% assured to be able to identify the general idea of a text. 21% said to focus on specific information, while 46% can identify the purpose of the text.

In writing, 71% of the respondents stated that they can write compound and complex sentences, which implies a high level of ability to transmit their thoughts. However, 29% considered only writing simple sentences. At the same time, 17% of the participants assured that to write cohesive, coherent, clear paragraphs, while the remaining 83% recognised that they miss at least one of the elements of an effective paragraph. Situation reinforced by the participants’ responses, who assured to write paragraphs with more than two main ideas.

Sixty per cent of the participants joined the degree immediately after high school. While 38% joined the program after some time without studying, this means that they had been working for a while. 80% of the participants stated that they joined the bachelor’s degree to learn English. 29% joined the program to learn how to teach English. 17% joined this program to learn how to translate, and 46% of the students in this program joined without having any idea about its purpose.

Among the many comments students expressed when asked about problems in their translations was “my paragraphs are not complete”. “I often try to make everything fit, but I rarely get it right.” “I can understand a text, but it is difficult for me to translate its paragraphs.” “Sometimes I have some mistakes in the idea of my translation, since I don’t usually perceive the main message.” “I need more vocabulary. I need to practice more.” “In my translations, I have found difficult to write very clearly, concisely, and well-structured texts.”

The first part of the interview collected information related to students' knowledge of linguistic aspects. At this point, 50% of the professors stated that their students could only identify linguistic aspects. A 25% mentioned they can identify and discuss linguistic aspects, and another 25% assured they could identify and deal with linguistic aspects.

As part of the linguistic aspects, the professors could indicate that 50% of their students can identify the parts of the sentence. 25% deal with the parts of the sentence, and the other 25% match the part of the sentence. Another aspect in which all professors agreed, in their students' knowledge of linguistic aspects, is that they all have already taken general linguistics as part of their curricular courses.

The second aspect in which the professors had to provide an answer in relation to their students is their command of English. In this topic, 75% of the professors agreed that the students had a level of B1 in their command of English. The other 25% stated that their students had an A2 level.

We also questioned all professors about the level of English the students had based on the faculty classification level. 50% of the professors stated that their students were in Intermediate II. The other 25% of the professors identified their students to be in Intermediate I and Basic I. At the same time, all professors stated that their students were able to communicate orally in English. However, all of them agreed that students had serious difficulties in their written communication.

Another aspect of interest for this research was the command of Spanish that the students have. For this aspect, the respondents had to identify the level of Spanish and the command of the language the students had. The first aspect we asked the professors was the level of Spanish the students had. Even when the students and the professors are native speakers of the same mother tongue, they widely disagree on identifying their students' level. At this point, fifty per cent of the professors stated that the students had a C1 level. Twenty-five per cent assured they had a C2 level, and the other 25% of the professors considered their students to be in B2.

From the professors' point of view, 50% of them assured their students have a right command of Spanish tenses (structures) that of a university-educated native speaker. However, 25% of them considered their students to have a high command (variety) of vocabulary in Spanish that of a university-educated native speaker, as they are. However, another 25% of the professors considered their students to lack a high and correct command of both vocabulary and structures of their mother tongue.

In the case of the students' way of expression, 50% of the students stated that they accurately expressed meaning by using the right vocabulary, but the other 50% of the professors highlighted that the students poorly expressed meaning by using vague, ambiguous, or incorrect vocabulary.

The following aspects were questioned by the professors, which were related to their students' Reading comprehension. In this aspect, we questioned them about the students' Reading comprehension, both in English and Spanish. They also had to identify if the students could get the general idea of a text.

Fifty per cent of the professors considered that their students had a rank of 8 points on a scale of 10 about their students' reading comprehension in Spanish. However, the other 50% also stated that their students had a scale of 9 in relation to a scale of 10 about their students' reading comprehension in Spanish.

We also asked the professors to identify their students' reading comprehension in English. In this aspect, 25% of the professors considered that their students were on a 4 out of 10 scale. The other 25% of the professors also considered their students to be on a 5 out of 10 scale. Another 25% stated that their students were in an 8 out of 10 scale, and the other 25% considered their students to be in a 9 out of 10 scale.

In the case of identifying the students' ease in identifying the general idea of a text, 50% of the professors stated that their students easily get the general idea of a common text in English, while the other 50% stated that they have difficulties identifying the general idea of a common text in English. According to the professors, their students can understand common texts in English, but half of the

professors also stated that they could understand both common texts and specialised ones.

Fifty per cent of the professors stated that their students could understand the purpose of a text in English. Twenty of them assured their students could only identify specific information in English, and another 50% of the professors considered their students could identify the general idea of a text in English.

The last aspect the professors had to give information about their students was that of the writing aspect. In this case, 50% of the professors stated that their students could write well-structured, simple sentences. However, another 25% stated that they were able to write complex sentences, and the other 25% stated that they had identified that their students could write compound sentences.

In relation to the qualities of the sentences the students wrote, all professors stated that their students had different levels of sentence writing. Twenty-five per cent stated that the students write clear sentences. Twenty-five per cent stated that they write complete sentences. Twenty-five per cent stated that the students could write sentences containing all qualities, which means clear, complete, concise, and coherent sentences.

In relation to students' paragraphs, fifty per cent of the professors stated that their students could write coherent paragraphs. Twenty-five per cent considered that the students could write cohesive, coherent, and clear paragraphs, while another 25% of the professors assured their students could write paragraphs without the qualities of an effective and well-written paragraph.

With reference to the students' paragraphs' content, the professors stated that their students had one main idea, an introduction, and a development. However, 25% of the professors stated that their students have not learnt the elements of a well-written paragraph.

Fifty per cent of the professors stated that their students could write simple paragraphs. Twenty-five per cent can only write brief documents, and the other fifty per cent of the professors stated that their students could write simple paragraphs, brief documents, and complex documents.

In the case of the students' level of writing production, all professors absolutely disagree about their students' production. In this way, each professor ranked their students from 2 to 5 points on a scale of 10.

Discussion

We can realise from the professors' interview results that all students joining the Degree of Foreign Language of the Faculty of Educational Sciences of the Universidad Autónoma del Carmen do not have a heterogeneous linguistic command. Though in this article we focus on identifying necessary aspects to do a translation by means of eliciting from the students most translation errors, their deficiencies in language and background knowledge, so we can indirectly determine their weaknesses, therefore, drawbacks of translation teaching, since translation occurs at the written level as stated by Mehdi and Mehdi (2018).

As seen, professors agree that most students (75%) can identify linguistic aspects, and just a few of them (25%) handle such aspects. In the students' questionnaire, this fact was verified since only a few students (17%) considered being able to apply linguistic aspects. This is an expected phenomenon, even when most of them have already taken linguistics, they all come from different academic as well as social backgrounds. This fact causes students to lack comprehension and learning opportunities while studying English and other subjects taught in English at the same time; an aspect stated by Sdobnikov, Shamilov, and Shlepnev (2020), students' background, which affects their learning, as well as producing errors in their translation outputs (Aprilianti-Putri, 2019). Besides, participants study linguistics as a class or as another subject from their curriculum, and they lack core elements of both languages, English and Spanish; consequently, they are not able to get the necessary command of such linguistic aspects as to master them and be able to apply them, as proved by Khany (2014).

The professors' results showed that students also have a different background of language level, which was also verified by the students' answers and by having no clear institutional placement or language classification criteria. The students' language level not

only affects them at the personal level, but also affects the whole class, having less translation practice or less effective translation analysis. Even when professors identified some students at the B1 level, this is not a required level to be able to translate properly (Wensheng, 2020); besides, in the translation classes, we also have students at a lower level, as well as other general knowledge mishaps. These knowledge deficiencies in students are the consequences of the faculty's language classification, as well as students' placement in each class.

Most students not only lack knowledge in their English learning, but also in their mother tongue. As seen in the professors' results, even professors lack effectiveness in identifying their students' Spanish level. Therefore, this affects students' translation output as stated by Makkos (2019), indicating that the result of such deficiencies may lead to translation errors. The percentage of students having a low level of Spanish is higher than that of the students with a suitable level for a translation class.

The professors' results demonstrated that most students have problems in reading comprehension, both in English and in Spanish. We also verified these problems by the students' results, which seem to demonstrate that their reading comprehension and their ability to decode a written message are not sufficient. Just a few students, based on professors' perception and students' results, can accomplish higher reading abilities; this means they have the autonomy to perform such a task, as Holmes, Polman-Tuin & Turner (2021) state. Consequently, students cannot properly decode written messages. Lacking reading comprehension is a fact that affects translation since a translator requires comprehension skills to decode a read message properly (Casilla-Avalos, 2023), and he/she is the prime reader of the source text, the one who transfers such a message, and the one whom the final reader relies on.

Participants also have problems in recoding a written message. Especially, most students lack competencies in written communication. Professors stated that, even when these students can write simple, compound and complex sentences, they are not able to write paragraphs properly since most of them lack elements of an effective paragraph. We also verified this by the participants'

responses, since a considerable percentage (83%) agreed to lack paragraph components, having mistaken or lacking vocabulary, which allows them to choose the right equivalent in the ST, as also Al-Mufti & Al-Rubai (2024) found in their research. In the case of translation, this may affect the re-structuring of a message with the consequences of producing nonsense or a misunderstood paragraph, as Alwazna (2012) states that translation is a textual meaning; therefore, a translated written paragraph would be a problem for the message rendering. We can realise that this lacks the desired translation principle, in which someone must study translation when such a person has reached an almost native speaker language level. Besides, students' lack of knowledge and other skills directly affect translation aspects highlighted by the PACTE group as requirements to translate (Hurtado-Albir, Kuzkik & Rodríguez-Inéz, 2022).

The way the faculty accepts and places students may also be a factor affecting students' translating competence. As seen, the number of students selecting the program for its translating training is very low (17%), as well as the number of those who selected this program because they really considered it as their prime goal. This, plus the fact of having students directly from high school, results in a lack of general knowledge, social competencies, and real knowledge to comprehend different types of text, be able to transfer it into another language and restructure it in the target language. As seen, these differences in students' educational background directly affect students' translation learning and practices, as Sdobnikov, Shamilov, and Shlepnev (2020) found as a factor affecting students' developing translation competences.

As seen, the main findings of this research seem to highlight that no matter the teaching approach the translation professor applies, the learning of translation ends up at the empirical level. This is proved by the students failing in the application of linguistic and translation aspects to their output, as well as the different deficiencies identified in the students' performance. In this way, we can assume that teaching translation occurs as a craft (Alwazna, 2012; Ordudari, 2008) in which the translation student, even when being taught fundamentals of translation, linguistics, and other subjects, translates by trial and error. Most students do not have the desired level of

English or general knowledge to translate, and they have not matched theory and practice, at least in the first courses of translation.

Conclusion

Teaching, being a human activity, is influenced, affected, and determined by humans' actions and attitudes. Thus, the teaching of translation may not be otherwise. This means that translation results directly depend on students' background, knowledge, skills, competencies, and soft human skills, as seen in this report.

Throughout this paper, we have seen how students of translation present some lacks and deficiencies in their general knowledge and competencies. Besides this, not having admission criteria to the program and to the translation classes makes it even more difficult for the students to succeed in developing translation competencies. This also contributes to the heterogeneous groups with big differences among individuals, both at the learning and application stages. Thus, this fact affects not only the teaching and learning processes, but also the learning and development of the translation fundamentals.

Not having clear students' language level criteria has also affected the translation class management and development. In this way, we can see, based on the students' and professors' results, that the institution and the CEFR language criteria classifications have not matched. Therefore, students are in a translation class having a low level of English, but also of Spanish, and having difficulties in dealing with the translation material, as well as following the professors' directions. As we have read in the literature, for joining a translation class, the students must have an equivalent language level of an educated native speaker; this means their English and Spanish for these students must be at the same level, but this is not the case.

The consequence of accepting any student-prospect for the program and for the translation class is that these individuals are unable to comprehend and handle the linguistic aspects necessary for the translation process. Besides, the differences in students' background knowledge of English and Spanish clearly result in a

difference in the comprehension of a conveyed message in a text, resulting in a lack of the rendering of a message.

Among the differences in the students of translation, reading and writing deficiencies have highly affected the process of translation, as well as the communicative level of the people involved in the translation class. Especially when students have to decode and recode a written message, this is more evident if the students also lack knowledge of the translated topic. This last aspect is a constant in most translation students since they have joined the Educational Program, lacking reading and cultural concerns and highlighting the fact that they are not all specialised in any area of knowledge.

In sum, among the main students' background deficiencies identified in this research are no clear student selection criteria, deficiencies in both languages involved in the translation process, low reading and writing skills or competencies, a lack of general background knowledge and other skills. These deficiencies cause drawbacks affecting the decodification and recodification of a message; therefore, difficulties for translation teaching to students learning a second language at the same time they join a translation program, especially if we are aware that translation is a complex multidisciplinary activity, requiring the mastery of many different competencies.

Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of this study may include the number of subjects involved in it. However, this was a variable far under the researcher's control; even when we invited all students having translation classes to participate by answering the questionnaire, the responses of these students were short. There were three other professors who neglected to cooperate with this study because they stated that at this moment, they weren't teaching translation. Even when the response was not the expected one, the results allowed us to identify deficiencies and drawbacks students have in learning translation, and then, in translating.

The conclusions of this study may be generalised if we consider subjects who present the same or similar conditions at the time of

joining a translation class. Also, the information and rationale presented in the conclusions may shed light on teaching translation in different parts of the world and make a good contrast between what is expected and what really happens in a translation class.

Recommendations for Further Research

We strongly recommend considering a wider population or sample for a similar study on this topic. At the same time, we suggest focusing on a specific aspect of what we consider as drawbacks or deficiencies, for example, isolating students' language command, or any other, but not many. Since a questionnaire is used, sending this to other educational institutions would provide more data for analysis and reach stronger arguments and conclusions.

Reference

AL-MUFTI, Z. M., & AL-RUBAI, M. H. A. (2024). Translation Difficulties Encountered by Translation Students at University Level. *Academic Journal of Nawroz University*, 13(1), 140–153.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378171062_Translation_Difficulties_Encounteted_by_Translation_Students_at_University_Level

ALWAZNA, R. Y. (2013). Is Translation an Art, Science or Both? *University of Sharjah Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 10(1), 45–73.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280261318_Is_Translation_an_Art_Science_or_Both

APRILIANTI PUTRI, T. (2019). An Analysis of Types and Causes of Translation Errors. *Etnolinguial*, 3(2). <https://shorturl.at/KVD2S>

CAO, X. (2018). *Influential Factors on Translation*. Francis Academic Press. <http://doig.org/10.25236/iwacle.2018.049>

CASILLAS-VALLOS, I. (2023). La traducción como apropiación comprensiva: Preguntas para leer textos de tradiciones pedagógicas. *Innovación e Investigación Revista Histórica*, 7(2).
<https://doi.org/10.19130/irh.2022.7.2.00X27S0032>

FARIDAH, F., & ANAM, S. (2022). The Influence of Students' Level Ability of Reading Comprehension on the Students' Translation Ability. *Jurnal PTK dan Pendidikan*, 8(1), 46–56.
<https://doi.org/10.18592/ptk.v8i1.5767>

HOLMES, A. G. D., TUIN, M. P., & TURNER, S. L. (2021). Competence and Competency in Higher Education, Simple Terms yet with Complex Meanings: Theoretical and Practical Issues for University Teachers and Assessors Implementing Competency-based Education (CBE). *Educational Process International Journal*, 10(3), 39–52. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1312102.pdf>

HURTADO ALBIR, A., KUZNICK, A., & RODRÍGUEZ-INES, P. (2022). Translation Competence and its Acquisition. In A. Hurtado Albir & P. Rodríguez-Ines (Eds.), *Hacia un marco europeo de niveles de competencias en traducción. El proyecto NACT del grupo PACTE/Towards a European Framework of Competence Levels in Translation*. The PACTE Group's NACT Project (MonTI Special Issue 7trans, pp. 23–44). https://ddd.uab.cat/pub/artpub/2022/2f953369ce6b/revmontra_a2022_ne7p23iENG.pdf

KHANY, R. (2014). Translation Students' knowledge of Lexical Cohesion Patterns and their Performance in the Translation of English Texts. *Procedia – Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 98(1), 925–931. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.501>

LÁZARO-GUTIÉRREZ, R. (2021). Entrevistas estructuradas, Semi-estructuradas y libres. Análisis de contenido. In J. M. Tejero-González (Ed.), *Técnicas de investigación cualitativa en los ámbitos sanitario y socio sanitario* (pp. 65–83). Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

MAKKOS, A. (2019). Mother Tongue in Translation Training. In A. Sohár, I. Limpár, & D. Galambos (Eds.), *Getting Translated* (pp. 52–60). Tinta Konyvkiadó.

MCLEOD, S. (2024). Mixed Methods Research Guide with Examples. ResearchGate. <http://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.31329.93286>

MEHDI, Z., & MEHDI, Y. (2018). The Translation Approach to English Language Teaching: Opportunities and Challenges. *Literary Endeavour*, IX(2), 47.

NAVARRO SOLER, I. (2021). Encuestas de opinión. In J. M. Tejero-González (Ed.), *Técnicas de investigación cualitativa en los ámbitos sanitario y sociosanitario* (pp. 113–143). Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.

NORD, C. (1994). Translation as a Process of Linguistic and Cultural Adaptation: The Functional Approach and its Consequences for Translation Teaching. In Benjamins Translation Library: Vol. 5.

Translation Studies: An Interdiscipline (pp. 59–67). Benjamins.
<https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.5.11nor>

ORDUDARI, M. (2008). Good Translation: Art, Craft, or Science? *Translation Journal*, 12(1).
<https://translationjournal.net/journal/43theory.htm>

SAFINAZ-SAINUDIN, I., & MAT AWAL, N. (2012). Teaching Translation Techniques in a University Setting: Problems and Solutions. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 46(1), 800–804.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.05.202>

SDOBNIKOV, V. V., SHAMILOV, R. M., & SHLEPNEV, D. N. (2020). The Basic Requirements to Translator Trainers' Competence. *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 89(1), 1146–1153.
<https://doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2020.08.141>

SOHÁR, A., LIMPÁR, I., & GALAMBOS, D. (Eds.). (2019). *Getting Translated*. Tinta Konyvkiadó.
<https://publikacio.ppke.hu/id/eprint/1695/1/Sohar-et-al-2019-GettingTranslated.pdf#page=52>

SRIWANTANEYAKUL, S. (2018). Critical Reading Skills and Translation Ability of Thai EFL Students: Pragmatic, Syntactic, and Semantic Aspects. *English Language Teaching*, 11(4), 1–10.
<http://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v11n4p1>

TAHERDOOST, H. (2016). Validity and Reliability of the Research Instrument; How to Test the Validation of a Questionnaire/Survey in a Research. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management*, 5(3), 28–36. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3205040>

TEJERO-GONZÁLEZ, J. M. (Ed.). (2021). Técnicas de investigación cualitativa en los ámbitos sanitario y sociosanitario. Ediciones de la Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha.
http://doi.org/10.18239/estudios_2021.171.00

WENSHENG, D. (2020). Teaching Translation: A House with Windows Facing Different Directions. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 10(1), 60–66. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1001.08>

Acknowledgment

We strongly thank our colleagues and translation students for their valuable responses to fulfil this research.

About the Author

Rafael Ferrer Méndez holds a PhD in Educational Technology. He has taught translation fundamentals and translation practice at the Faculty of Educational Sciences in the Universidad Autónoma del Carmen, Campeche, MX. He is a co-author of translation and English teaching articles with the links in ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3157-2311> or in google scholar <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=0IZVWL0AAAAJ&hl=es>

Cite this Work:

Ferrer Méndez, Rafael. (2025). Students' Language and Knowledge Background: A Drawback of Translation Teaching. *Translation Today*, 19(2). 21-45.

DOI: 10.46623/tt/2025.19.2.ar2