EVALUATION OF TRANSLATIONS: DIDACTICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS – A FOREWORD TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE OF *LETRAS & LETRAS*

Avaliação de Traduções: Implicações didáticas e pedagógicas –
Uma apresentação para o número especial da Letras & Letras

Marileide Dias Esqueda *

Álvaro Echeverri **

Learners are learners. In principle, they do not know. Learners register in a program of study or in a course because they want or they need to learn something new. Therefore, they should be assessed solely on the disciplinary content, the competences or the skills they are supposed to have acquired in a specific learning activity or in a particular course. There is something illogical in asking translation students in their first translation course to translate a whole text and expect them to produce a text similar to those produced by students who are about to graduate, let alone, a text produced by a professional translator. Establishing levels of performance has been an elusive subject in the assessment of translator competence acquisition. Translation as any other form of written communication does not make room for basic or intermediate linguistic competence. Too many efforts have been deployed to enhanced product-centered assessment practices and those efforts have not led us to better practices of assessment in translator education. Assessment of the translation learning process remains one of the most under-researched subjects in translation education. Yet, the accountability of learners, instructors and administrators of a translation program depends

---

* Marileide Dias Esqueda. Associate professor of the Graduate Program in Linguistics and the Undergraduate Program in Translation at Universidade Federal de Uberlandia. ORCID: 0000-0002-6941-7926. E-mail: marileide.esqueda(AT)ufu.br

** Álvaro Echeverri. Professeur agrégé. Département de Linguistique et de Traduction. Université de Montréal, Québec, Canada. ORCID: 0000-0002-1069-7361. E-mail: a.echeverri(AT)umontreal.ca

ultimately on the results obtained through the assessment practices applied in educational contexts.

Research on assessment in translation education has certainly gained some momentum in the last 20 years (WADDINGTON, 1999; MARTINEZ MELIS, 2001; GARDY, 2015; PACTE, 2019) but it is still far from the sound and sophisticated research results that have been obtained on other central topics of translator education as in the case of research on translation competence acquisition. This introductory discussion is limited to assessment of the learning process. Our focus will be on assessment practices used in educational environments with the main goals of, first, checking that learning has taken place and, second, helping learners and instructors to control and foster learning. Ultimately, this kind of assessment will be used to attest that learners have demonstrated mastery of a course content, that they can advance in their program of study or that they satisfy certain conditions for receiving some kind of diploma. After offering a short historical account of the way assessment has been conceived and practiced in translation education, we will review some important developments concerning the assessment of the learning process among translation learners. Before presenting the different articles that make up this special issue of *Letras & Letras,* we will discuss how the concept of constructive alignment offers a theoretical framework suitable for a coherent organization of learning objectives, teaching strategies and assessment techniques.

There was a time when those who applied to a translation training program were asked to translate a text to be accepted to the program. In other words, those who wanted to become translators had to demonstrate that they already knew how to translate if they wanted to engage in a process that would allow them to become translators. The rationale for this selection practice is to be found in the concept of natural translation proposed and studied, among others, by Brian Harris in the 1970s. Harris got interested in the human capacity to translate. He studied the case of bilingual children born from immigrant parents who spoke their parents' language at home but were perfectly conversant in the language of their host country. That natural capacity, though, does not differ from our natural capacity to run. Very few of us can run at the speed of professional athletes. Testing candidates' capacity to translate in order to assess their chances to become translators is just another trait of the experiential conception of teaching and learning that governed translator education for many years. Many

teachers considered themselves experienced translators whose task was to transfer their experience on to candidates who were fit to receive it. The learning process for the would-be translator was to equal, through a process of trial and error, the masters' ability to translate.

The first efforts for a better understanding and, above all, for sounder evaluation strategies of students' learning process turned around the creation of error typologies. Some authors like Isabelle Collombat (2009) have discussed the central role errors play in the didactics of translation. Creating some kind of error typology and give each error a value was the main interest of authors who wanted to systematize assessment in translator education. Traditionally, any translation, no matter the length of the source text would be assigned a value, 100 points, for example. Learners would lose points according to the error typology established by the instructor. Mistranslations would account for three points, grammar errors would account for two points, and so on. The subtraction of points from the total value (100 points) would be the students' grade for that particular assessment activity. Dorothy Kelly (2005, p. 132) listed some of the pitfalls of this kind of assessment strategy, among them:

a. It is unrealistic: it has nothing to do with real-life translation;
b. It is unspecific: it supposed to assess all types of competences without considering that in translation a lot has to do with the process as much as it has to do with the product;
c. It lacks clarity: learners seldom know the criteria by which their learning will be assessed;
d. It is centered on the negative: it only counts errors; it does not count what is correct in the students' performance; and
e. It is unreliable: it does not provide a good idea of what learners have actually learned.

Another pitfall of error typologies is that errors independently of their nature will have a variable incidence on the perceived value of the whole translated text depending on where they appear. The smallest typographical error in a title or in the spelling of a proper name will discredit the producer of the text. In such cases, the text could lose some or all of its worth since translation consumers could become suspicious of the translation producers. In the case of training programs for professional translators, translations are not grammatical or stylistic exercises to demonstrate linguistic competence. When they decide to become professional translators, learners need to understand from the outset that their future job will be to provide

a professional service in interlingual and intercultural communication. That is, they will translate something, for someone in a specific communicational, and commercial, situation. The people who pay for a translation need the translated texts to perform a specific action in their daily lives. In many situations, the translated texts will be the corporate or personal image of those who pay for them.

Another issue with error typologies in the assessment of translation learning is the difficulty to classify them in clear cut categories. As teachers and as evaluators, we have been confronted with the difficulty of classifying errors. An excellent sample of the great variety of translation errors can be seen in Daniel Gouadec's (1981, p. 107) typology of translation errors. Gouadec was able to distinguish 675 kinds of errors that he organized in two linguistic categories: lexical and syntactical errors. From a practical point of view, it is just not possible for any teacher to keep track of all those categories of errors. It is also hard to imagine that students would tell apart such amount of error categories. Gouadec's typology has rarely been used in pedagogical contexts because it is unrealistic and impractical. Gouadec's typology, however, shows that the kinds of errors and their quantity can be indeterminate. It is impossible to foresee all the kinds of problems learners can run into when they are learning to translate.

Besides error analysis, in translation pedagogy, assessment of learners' performance is sometimes carried out according to instructors' global and subjective appreciation of the whole translated text. The instructor would look at the learner's output from the point of view of a reviewer, an editor or a client. The main parameter for the evaluation will be the number of corrections the learner's work would need to be delivered to any potential client. The limits of this approach to translation assessment are once again the lack of clarity concerning assessment criteria. Assessment is centered on the product and little consideration is given to the process; let alone the learning process. This approach brings the assessment activity closer to the work of professional translators, but it runs the risk of bringing students to believe that their work is being assessed according to the instructor's caprices instead of being compared to some established set of norms or criteria. The definition of assessment criteria has been one important step forward in the assessment of the learning process of translation learners.

Research on assessment in translator education has certainly progressed in the last 20 years. The results are evident in the way the discipline has integrated concepts like formative and summative assessment and the interest on the part of teachers on establishing criteria for evaluating the learning process. Those criteria are directly linked to what students are expected to learn in every step of the learning process and are sometimes applied to specific learning tasks. Instructors have also understood that assessment in translator education does not always have to be the translation of a whole text or translate. Research on translation competence acquisition has shown us that the transfer competence is just a component of the whole translation competence construct. Currently, more and more instructors conceive assessment activities in line with learning objectives.

Let's suppose that in an audiovisual translation course the instructor has taught some strategies to shorten subtitles in order to make them respect the number of characters that would make subtitles acceptable. The instructor chooses a fragment of a film not especially difficult to translate so that the assessment could concentrate mainly in the length of the subtitles proposed by the learners. The assessment criteria would be *Excellent, Very good, Good, Satisfactory* and *Unsatisfactory.* And excellent work, for instance, would be one in which learners have succeeded in proposing adequate translations for every subtitle, but, above of all, they have applied the strategies that were presented to them to shorten subtitles. An unsatisfactory result, on the contrary, would be one in which learners have not applied the strategies taught resulting in inadequate translations. Defining clear learning outcomes has been instrumental to the introduction of criteria to assess translation learning activities. Instructors can isolate those aspects of the learning process they want to assess instead of trying to assess all the components of translation competence at the same time.

Another major obstacle in coming with sound assessment activities in translation teaching and learning has been the absence of a system of levels of progression to allow instructors to assess learning according to advancement in a program of study. The levels could be conceived in terms of acquired experience: basic, intermediate and advanced. Learners passing from the basic to the intermediate should demonstrate knowledge, skills and abilities that have been agreed upon in advance. Learners at the intermediate level should display, for example, their capacity to follow a basic translation methodology starting with pre-translation

tasks such as reading for information and organizing translation tools and resources for specific translation projects and ending with revising and editing the final text. A level system of this sort will also be helpful in diagnostic and in placement tests. However, the greatest advantage of establishing levels of progression is that they make possible to determine the expected performance of students at different moments of their training programs and what they are supposed to know in agreement with criteria recognized and accepted by educational institutions and the professional bodies. The latest research project of the PACTE group (2019) aims at describing performance levels to regulate the progression of students within a program of study. The research experience PACTE has accumulated for more than twenty years ensures that a sound proposition for level descriptors will come out of this project.

Although translation instructors can currently rely on shared knowledge that has been produced thanks to continued research efforts like those of PACTE, in some places, those advances in translation pedagogy have not yet made their mark. Many translation students at the outset of their studies are still being asked to translate a text, they are still calculating the numerical value of their errors. The kind of teaching illustrated in the sentence: "Just translate, I will later tell you where you got it wrong" is still practiced. In this kind of approach, instructors assess learners' natural capacity to translate. They do not assess what students are specifically supposed to learn in every course module, in every learning activity. This goes against the principle of accountability in assessment. That is, you assess what you have taught and you do it in the same way you have taught it. In the end, it all boils down to structure teaching, learning and assessment in a coherent way. That is what the concept of constructive alignment has brought to translation education. In a nutshell, constructive alignment is the coherent combination of the three main components of educational structuring: first, it is important to define intended learning outcomes (What learners are supposed to learn). Second, design learning activities that would help the students acquire the content and the skills needed to attain a specific learning outcome (What learners need to do to learn). Third, design well-suited assessment tasks that will allow students to demonstrate that learning has actually happened. For a better understanding of constructive alignment see Veiga and García (2016), Hurtado Albir (2015), Marais (2013).

Concerning assessment and as many other things in life, the degree of difficulty of a task is often related to the knowledge a person possesses about that task. In other words, tasks are difficult when we do not have the minimal knowledge required to perform it. Until very recently, research in translator education was limited to impressionistic and experiential discourses that were hard to replicate outside the places where they originated. The situation has changed and translator educators and trainers can now rely on a significant body of shared knowledge – the product of sound scientific research – about methods, activities and tools to assess not what the students already know when they entered a program of study but to assessing what they are supposed to learn with every learning activity in every course.

Thus, considering the complexity and emergence of evaluation of translations, this special issue of the journal *Letras & Letras* has been addressed to researchers interested in translation evaluation and assessment with the purpose of grouping together new educational and research perspectives, and contributing to the significant body of shared knowledge on the topic.

After receiving many contributions during the year of 2019, it now contains ten articles, three interviews and translations into Brazilian Portuguese of two sound articles, which all may serve as an update platform to inspire new directions to research and didactical or pedagogical practices designed for the evaluation of translations students produce during their learning processes.

In the first article, titled "UNILA Translation Laboratory: a training experience at Universidade Federal da Integração Latino-Americana", Bruna Macedo de Oliveira presents an outreach project titled "UNILA Translation Laboratory". After basing her discussions on the socioconstructivist paradigm, with emphasis on collaborative teaching approach, she details the project that aims at promoting teaching and learning processes in translation to students from different areas of knowledge, and interested in developing a deeper reflection on Translation Studies, as well as on the role of Portuguese and Spanish languages practiced at UNILA, which is a Brazilian public university located in the tri-border area along the junction of Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

"Theoretical bases for a project of translation reviewing, focusing on the improvement of textual productions by translators in training" is the title of the second article, where Daniel

Alves provides a theoretical debate on reviewing translated texts. The author proposes a pedagogical framework for positive intervention on the translations produced by the students, focused on processes of negotiation of meanings. The pedagogical framework assumes beforehand that translated texts are affected by their contexts of production in a broader sense.

Pedro Henrique Lima Praxedes Filho, Vera Lúcia Santiago Araújo and Kethleen de Almeida Claudino are the authors of the third article titled "Assessment of audio-description scripts: a proposal via interface between Translation Studies and Systemic-Functional Linguistics". Highlighting the fact that Audio-description (AD), defined as translation of images into words, turns (audio)visual products accessible to the visually-impaired via a script and a narration/locution, and that early professionals thought neutrality in both was possible, the authors design a proposal for assessing scripts, demonstrating the impossibility of neutrality. They also discuss possible types of evaluation of scripts and their implications to translator training. Praxedes Filho, Araújo and Claudino also report the results of a pilot application of the proposal for assessing and analysing scripts of a film, a play, and a painting.

In the fourth article, Silvia Helena Benchimol Barros describes a translation activity performed in the higher education context at Universidade Federal do Pará, Bragança. With the article titled "Skopostheory in the classroom: a multimodal experience mediated by the digital apps technology", Barros reflects on issues related to new technologies, and the use of digital graphic design applications to support interlingual and intersemiotic transpositions, which enable the production and evaluation of multimodal, creative and different scope texts along with their translations. Some conceptions on translation competence are discussed in the article, with special emphasis on instrumental sub-competence. Barros reports that the apps Canva, Prezzi, Flipsnack, Storyboard have been chosen by students for the production and presentation of their translated texts.

Sofia Paiva de Araújo and Norma Barbosa de Lima Fonseca are the authors of the fifth article titled "Domain Knowledge and bilingual, instrumental, and knowledge about translation sub-competences in translation quality assessment: a study from the evaluator's perspective". As the title of their article goes, the study investigates the impact of domain, bilingual, instrumental and knowledge about translation sub-competences on the quality assessment of translated texts. Excerpts from an instruction manual translated from English into Portuguese

by professional translators were evaluated by Brazilian informants, who were divided into four groups: bilingual informants (professionals from other occupations rather than translators); professional translators; healthcare professionals; graduate-level translation students, translation instructors and certified professional translators, who should inform the criteria they use for quality assessment. The most informed criterion used by the four groups was the equivalence of meaning amongst the source and target texts.

Christiano Sanches do Valle Silva is the author of the sixth article whose title is "The use of self-assessment in the development of expertise in interpreting". The author argues that adopting a model based on developing expertise and capacity for autonomous learning creates the need for students to be able to self-assess in order to determine which elements they should invest in. Silva presents the use of the self-assessment form proposed by the Interpreting Training Program at Pontifícia Universidade Católica, Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio). For the author, the self-assessment tool proved to be effective not only in terms of the assessment itself, but in consolidating a clear and objective common language that structures the relationship amongst students and teachers, and students themselves.

In the seventh article, Glória Regina Loreto Sampaio discusses the preliminary stages required for an interpreter training. Titled "The Interpreter-to-be: Basic Requirements, Strategies for the Development of the Preliminary Skills, and a Formative Approach to Evaluation", Sampaio's article provides a brief reference to the prerequisites and desirable qualities the budding interpreter should have. The author focuses on teaching strategies that pave the way towards the acquisition of specific competences needed to different interpreting modes, and on the evaluation of these competences throughout students' learning processes.

Reynaldo José Pagura is the author of the eighth article titled "An overview of assessment in interpreting – a conversation with our colleagues in language testing". Pagura's article suggests that the interpreter education community would benefit from cross-fertilization with the language testing community, which has been around much longer. For the author, the main principles used in testing speaking (or communicative competence) developed along the last decades by language testing experts and institutions can – and should – be applied to the testing of interpreter performance, mainly in high stakes examinations, such as those used for certification, employment at an international institution, or graduation from

an educational program. Pagura discusses the concept of quality in professional interpretation and some relevant studies in this field.

Even though the ninth and tenth articles of the issue are not directly intended to discuss the evaluation of translations in educational contexts, both of them critically evaluate literary translations, highlighting the characteristics of translations, in comparison with their respective source texts, and the decision making of their translators, which indirectly provide insights for the evaluation of literary translations commonly requested in most translation programs.

"The first translation of Patrick White's *The Solid Mandala* into Spanish: a brief analysis" is the title of the ninth article written by Mônica Stefani. The author examines some aspects such as the use of footnotes, intertextuality, punctuation and maintenance of cultural elements of *Las esferas del mandala*, the first Spanish translation (by Silvia Pupato and Román García-Azcárate, published in Barcelona in 1973) of *The Solid Mandala*, written by the Australian Nobel Prize winner Patrick White, in 1966. Selecting excerpts from the original, which were considered problematic to be rendered into another language, Stefani discusses the translation strategies adopted in the Spanish translation.

"Rilke: a 'French man' amongst the French" is the title of the tenth article written by Camila Bozzo Moreira. For her, Rainer Maria Rilke is one of the German poets most acknowledged in Brazil, and his work has been broadly translated, albeit not integrally. Moreira highlights that French symbolist poetry throughout Rilke's production lacks a careful analysis, especially through the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, which influenced many of Rilke's poems. Moreira examines some selected poems written by the author with the purpose of justifying why Rilke should be considered a 'French man' amongst the French.

Three interviews were also carried out for making up this issue. One interview was carried out with Martha Lucía Correa Pulido, Professor at the Translation Department of Univeristy of Antioquia, in Medellín (Colombia), another one with Dorothy Kelly, Professor of Translation at the University of Granada (Spain), and the third one with Donald C. Kiraly, Professor of Translation at the Translation Department of Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz (Germany). From their extensive experiences as translators, teachers and researchers in the field of Translation and Interpretation Studies, the interviewees offer us important reflections on the role of evaluation in translation teaching.

Two texts were translated into Brazilian Portuguese for this issue, one written by Professor Daniel Gile, titled "From communication to quality in interpreting and translation: A didactic view" [in Portuguese *Da comunicação à qualidade em interpretação e tradução: uma visão didática*], a condensed version of Chapter 3 of his book *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training* (2009); and the other one written by Professor Georges Louis Bastin, titled "Evaluating beginners' re-expression and creativity: a positive approach" [in Portuguese *Avaliando a re-expressão e criatividade de alunos de tradução: uma abordagem positive*], originally published in 2000 in the journal *The Translator*.

Professor Gile from Université Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris) highlights that professional translation and interpreting act on texts and speeches as a communication service in specific social interaction contexts. For him, when assessing its quality, the relevant human actors and their intentions and other parameters of the communication situation need to be taken on board. He also argues that the variability in their positions and ability to assess various quality parameters makes quality assessment a composite construct with a certain amount of subjectivity.

In his article, Professor Bastin from Université de Montréal (Canadá) focuses on the evaluation of re-expression in translated texts. Based on an in-depth study of various English texts translated into French by some first-year translation students, Professor Bastin points out the difference between expression and re-expression and between creativity and literality in his students' translations. He argues in favour of a positive evaluation in the translator education, given that negative evaluation has a relatively limited impact on the learning process. Both Professor Gile and Bastin's texts deal with the role of the translation teacher in evaluating students' translations, which further enrich the idea of discussing evaluation of translations proposed for this issue.

Regardless of the types of research or arguments presented in the articles and interviews published here, we hope researchers, teachers and students can have the opportunity to reflect on the complex and never-ending discussion related to evaluation of translations.

Have a pleasant reading!

Marileide Dias Esqueda & Álvaro Echeverri (Guest Editors)

Acknowledgments

References

BASTIN, G. L. Evaluating beginners' re-expression and creativity: a positive approach. **The Translator**, v. 6, n. 2, 2000. DOI https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2000.10799067.

COLLOMBAT, I. La didactique de l'erreur dans l'apprentissage de la traduction. **The Journal of Specialized Translation**, Issue 12, p. 37-54. 2009. Resource online: https://www.jostrans.org/issue12/art_collombat.pdf

GARDY, P. **L'évaluation en didactique de la traduction et l'intégration des outils technopédagogiques: étude qualitative et expérimentation.** Unpublished doctoral Thesis. Université Laval: Quebec (Canada), 2015.

GILE, Daniel. **Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training**. John Benjamins Publishing, 2009.

GOUADEC, D. Paramètres de l'évaluation des traductions. **Meta**, v. 26, n. 2, p. 99--116, 1981.

HARRIS, B. La traductologie, la traduction naturelle, la traduction automatique et la sémantique. *In:* McA'NULTY, J. (Ed.). **Problèmes de sémantique**. Montréal: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1973. p. 133-146.

HURTADO ALBIR, A. The Acquisition of Translation Competence. Competences, Tasks, and Assessment in Translator Training. **Meta**, v. 60, n. 2, p. 256-280, 2015.

KELLY, D. **A handbook for Translator Trainers**. Manchester (UK): St. Jerome Publishing, 2005.

MARAIS, K. Constructive Alignment in Translator Education: Reconsidering Assessment for Both Industry and Academy**. Translation & Interpreting. The International Journal of Translation and Interpreting Research**, v. 5, n. 1, p. 13-31, 2013.

MARTINEZ MELIS, N. **Évaluation et didactique de la traduction: le cas de la traduction dans la langue étrangère**. Unpublished doctoral thesis, Universidad Autonoma de Barcelona, Bellaterra (Spain), 2001.

PACTE. Establecimiento de niveles de competencias en la traducción. Primeros resultados del proyecto NACT. **Onomázein: Revista de Lingüística, Filología y Traducción**, n. 43, p. 01-25, 2019. https://doi.org/10.7764/onomazein.43.08.

VEIGA, M. and GARCÍA, M. Constructively Aligned assessment: An Integral Approach to Translation Teaching and Learning. **Meta**, v. 61, n. 2, p. 276-298, 2016. https://doi.org/10.7202/1037760ar.

WADDINGTON, C. **Estudio comparativo de diferentes métodos de evaluación de traducción general (Inglés-Español)**. Madrid: Publicaciones de la Universidad Pontificia Comillas. 1999.