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6. FUTURE AVENUES OF RESEARCH

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This final chapter suggests some possible future avenues of research on establishing performance levels in translation and identifies difficulties that such research involves.

6.1. Future avenues of research

6.1.1. *Need for validation on a larger scale*

The NACT project's first proposal, which was produced in 2017, was only examined by 99 experts from the academic and professional translation arenas (see section 4.3). The second proposal, which arose from the expert judgement process and is presented in this volume (see chapter 5), should be validated on a much larger scale, in such a way as to guarantee a high level of geographical and linguistic representativeness and involve all the relevant sectors (translator trainers, translators, associations of translators, translation accreditation bodies, institutions working in the sphere of languages, and employers), with a view to further refining the proposal and obtaining greater consensus. One of the original objectives of the European



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project EFFORT (“Towards a European Framework of Reference for Translation”) was to have the NACT project’s proposal for translation levels A and B validated on a large scale. Funding for doing so was not made available, however, so the EFFORT project partners will revise it internally instead.

The points that should be examined are:

1. The descriptive categories proposed, their names and their characteristics: language competence, extralinguistic competence, instrumental competence, service provision competence, and translation problem solving competence.
2. The translation levels proposed, their names and their characteristics: translation level C (specialist professional translator), translation level B (non-specialist professional translator), and translation level A (pre-professional translator).
3. The suitability of using texts to distinguish between translation levels, the progression proposed, and the distinction made between specialized, semi-specialized and non-specialized texts.
4. The descriptors proposed for each competence.
5. The global scale.
6. The three annexes of examples.

Additionally, the pros and cons of establishing further sub-levels within each level should be weighed up.

Another matter requiring greater consensus is that of the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) established as the minimum desirable (rather than required) for each translation level. The CEFR levels suggested as such in the second NACT proposal are reading comprehension level C2 and written production level C2 for translation level C; reading comprehension level C1 and written production level C2 for translation levels B1 and B2; and reading comprehension level B2 and written production level C1 for translation levels A1 and A2. Nonetheless, for the academic arena in particular, this is a question that ought to be discussed further and on which greater consensus should be sought.

6.1.2. Description of transversal (or general) competences

The NACT project focused on the description of and progression in the specific competences that make up translation competence and distinguish translators from non-translators; it did not include so-called transversal or general competences. Owing to their importance to translator training curriculum design in the academic arena, the general competences involved should be identified, their progression described, and the corresponding descriptors for each level established.

6.1.3. Description of learning outcomes for each level

While the proposal produced did not describe any learning outcomes, doing so is of great importance for the academic arena. Learning outcomes should therefore be defined in each educational context, according to its needs and the specific characteristics of its curriculum design.

6.1.4. Specification and description of learning tasks for each level

The NACT proposal did not specify or describe learning tasks for the different levels. Examples of such tasks are identifying problems or errors, translating key ideas, gist translation, and correcting texts. Establishing learning tasks for each level would be particularly useful for the academic arena, and further research is required to that end.

6.1.5. Specification of a degree of translation quality for each level

In the NACT project, degrees of translation quality were not specified for the different levels. That was due to quality being deemed to be directly related to the concept of competence, in that an individual cannot perform competently at a level if the translations they produce lack quality. Nonetheless, such degrees of quality could be defined in each educational and professional context according to its needs.

6.1.6. *Establishing level tests*

Establishing descriptor scales is only a first step in the assessment of competence levels. It is also necessary to establish tests, like those used in other disciplines (such as language teaching), for evaluating correct competence development at each level.

A relevant initiative in that regard is the EACT (“Evaluation in the Acquisition of Translation Competence”) project. A continuation of the NACT project, EACT aims to establish assessment procedures for each level of translation competence in undergraduate degree translator training in Spain.

6.1.7. *Description of translation level C*

As explained elsewhere in this volume, translation level C, the highest level of translation, was described in the NACT project in general terms only. Work to describe the level in question is thus necessary. The NACT project defined Level C as corresponding to a “specialist professional translator” and encompassing the following areas of professional specialization in written translation: legal; economic and financial; scientific; technical; and humanistic.

Before describing level C, it would be necessary to:

- Determine the current characteristics of the areas of professional specialization in translation (areas with the highest levels of demand, emerging sectors, etc.).
- Describe the specific competences of each area of professional specialization.
- Identify the text genres translated in each area.
- Identify the thematic fields translated in each area.
- Establish what instrumental resources are used in each area.
- Describe the actors involved in each case.
- Identify the professional tasks other than text translation performed in each area (adaptation, terminology database creation, technical writing, revision, post-editing, etc.).

Describing level C would pave the way for establishing performance levels, with possible sub-levels, and producing descriptors for each sub-level.

With regard to the description of translation level C, there are two important matters that need to be thought about very carefully. The first is the question of how translators who do not specialize in any particular area but are highly competent might be included in level C. The second concerns the possible sub-levels of level C and what the characteristics of the highest sub-level would be; the characteristics in question would be related to those of translation expertise.

Further research is thus necessary for the purpose of describing translation level C. The objective of the previously mentioned EFFORT project, a continuation of the NACT project, consists of developing a first proposal of descriptors for level C and, as stated earlier, revising NACT's description of translation levels A and B.

6.2. Difficulties

Research aimed at making headway in the production of a common European framework of reference for translation entails different types of difficulties.

First, translation competence (TC) and translation competence acquisition (TCA) have intrinsic characteristics that complicate their study (see section 2.2) and, thus, hamper the development of level descriptor scales. Two aspects of particular relevance in that respect are:

- The complexity of the relationship between all the components of TC, owing to the wide range of activities and cognitive areas involved. As stated previously (see section 5.2.4.1), the descriptive categories used (competences) in the production of translation level descriptor scales are not discrete, so they overlap and are difficult to operationalize.
- The heterogeneous nature of TC and TCA, in that they involve a range of capabilities of different types; this hinders operationalization too. Furthermore, those capabilities vary from one area of professional specialization in translation to another, hence the need to advance in describing translation level C.

A second impediment to the production of translation level descriptor scales is the lack of empirical studies on TC and TCA (see sections 2.3.1 and 2.4.1 respectively), resulting in a shortage of empirical data to draw on when describing descriptive categories and establishing their level descriptors.

A third obstacle, which is probably a consequence of the previous one, is the fact that, unlike other disciplines, translation studies has no tradition of producing level descriptor scales (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). Language teaching has a long tradition of establishing levels (and level tests) for different languages, something that simplified the task of developing the CEFR. The absence of such a tradition in translation studies is another factor holding research back and underlines the need to make progress in that regard.

Lastly, a translation level descriptor scale has to be useful for both the academic and professional translation arenas, and that entails getting all the relevant sectors involved, which is the only way to ensure the broad, representative consensus that guarantees such usefulness. Convincing all those sectors to participate will not be easy if they cannot be made fully aware of the importance of the task and without the backing of the academic and professional institutions involved.

Additionally, the European institutions must be made aware of the need to have a framework of reference comparable to the CEFR for professional translation, given the singular nature and the importance of translation and translator training in the context of a multilingual Europe and globalization, and the European Higher Education Area's requirements for academic standardization.

The NACT project was intended to be a first step towards developing a common European framework of reference comprising level descriptor scales for translation. The way is open for future research.

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