1. INTRODUCTION

AMPARO HURTADO ALBIR
Amparo.Hurtado@uab.es
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

ANNA KUZNIK
Anna.Kuznik@uwr.edu.pl
Uniwersytet Wrocławski

PATRICIA RODRÍGUEZ-INÉS
Patricia.Rodriguez@uab.es
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

The subject of this volume is the research carried out by the PACTE group on establishing competence levels in written translation. The research in question is intended to be a first step towards developing a common European framework of reference for use in translator training and professional translation, comparable to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR). Aimed at describing performance levels in translation, the research has been conducted through a four-year (2015-2018) project called "Establishing Competence Levels in the Acquisition of Translation Competence" (NACT, as per its acronym in Spanish) (FFI2013-42522-P, Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Competitiveness)[1]. The following researchers participated in NACT: Laura Asquerino Egoscozábal, Anabel Galán-Mañas, Amparo Hurtado Albir (principal investigator), Anna

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1. https://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/pacte/en/nactproject

Kuznik, Christian Olalla-Soler, Patricia Rodríguez-Inés and Guadalupe Romero.

PACTE was formed in 1997, and NACT was a continuation of the group's previous experimental research on translation competence and translation competence acquisition.

1.1. Grounds for the research

Translation lacks a common description of competence level scales, unlike other disciplines (language teaching has the CEFR, for example).

There are a number of reasons for which it needs such a description:

1. The importance of translator training. Against a background of globalization and a multilingual Europe (with migratory flows and extensive professional and academic mobility), translator training is vital and requires the homogenization of the performance levels attainable.

2. The specific nature of translator training and translation competence. Translator training is a specific type of training, one that prepares trainees for the profession of translating and is intended to develop translation competence. Translation competence is qualitatively different from bilingual competence, so it is necessary to establish the difference between levels of language competence (e.g. the CEFR) and levels of translation competence.

3. Differences in levels of translator training. In the academic arena, there are currently different levels of translator training in both university education (diplomas and undergraduate and master's degrees) and non-university education. Criteria regarding the necessary levels of training vary greatly. The levels attained in earning the same qualification (an undergraduate or master's degree) can differ substantially from centre to centre and country to country. Additionally, there are countries in which translation is not taught as a specific training programme but rather as part of other programmes (languages, philology, etc.), which could lead to major dissimilarities between the levels reached in training.

4. Requirements for academic standardization in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The EHEA entails homogenization and transparency in each centre's training levels, something that is not being achieved in the case of translation.

5. Differences in levels of performance in professional translation. There are different performance levels and specializations in the translation market: professional and non-professional translators of various kinds (legal translation, technical translation, literary translation, etc.) and with different performance levels.

6. The globalization of the translation market. Globalization has not bypassed the translation market, so there is a need for greater precision as regards the level of performance each translator can guarantee and the requirements to be met in each case.

7. Increasing academic and professional mobility in the area of translation. Such mobility is generating a need for precision and transparency in relation to the performance levels attainable in both the academic and professional translation arenas.

A description of performance levels in translation is therefore crucial to establishing a common framework for translator training and professional translation. Such a description would:

– Act as a guide for creating translator training curriculums: establishing academic and professional profiles; regulating progression; designing assessment procedures (exams and level tests[2], formative and diagnostic assessment); producing textbooks and teaching materials; etc.

– Facilitate comparison between different grading systems: issuing certificates; recognizing and validating academic qualifications; etc.

– Contribute to the regulation of professional translation by establishing guidelines that could be used for professional quality control.

2. See the "Evaluation in the Acquisition of Translation Competence" (EACT) 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. https://webs.uab.cat/eact/en/

1.2. Objectives of the project

The NACT project sought to establish a level descriptor proposal for written translation as a first step in developing a common European framework of reference, comparable to the CEFR for languages, for use in translator training and professional translation.

As is standard in the production of level scales, it was necessary to formulate descriptors corresponding to each level on the basis of certain descriptive categories. The NACT project's descriptive categories are competences; more precisely, specific competences that are part of translation competence (see table 1.1).

Table 1.1. Establishing translation level descriptor scales

	DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES			
LEVELS	Competence (a)	Competence (b)	Competence (c)	Competence (…)
Translation level (…)				
Translation level 4				
Translation level 3				
Translation level 2				
Translation level 1				

The objectives of NACT were thus to: (1) describe the specific competences involved in translation competence acquisition; and (2) describe levels of performance in translation.

Being a first step towards establishing performance levels in translation, and having obtained funding for just four years, the project did not extend to describing translators' different specialized professional profiles (legal translation, economic and financial translation, technical translation, scientific translation, literary translation, etc.), a task for another research project[3]. NACT covers basic and intermediate translation levels.

The project aimed to propose not learning outcomes or criteria for each stage of education or area of professional practice, but rather performance levels that could be used according to the needs of each educational or professional context. Its description of competence levels is independent of language combinations and directionality (direct translation, i.e. into L1; inverse translation, i.e. into L2), as well as of the number of hours involved (a curricular consideration that can vary depending on the context).

1.3. Methodology

The research undertaken had a dual conceptual framework: (1) research on translation competence and translation competence acquisition; and (2) research on descriptor scales.

It essentially involved the use of qualitative methods, as well as descriptive quantitative methods. The project was carried out in three stages:

– Stage 1 (2015-2017): production of a first level descriptor proposal. This stage involved the compilation and analysis of 18 European translator training centres' undergraduate and master's degree curriculums (see section 3.4), as well as of proposals from the academic and professional arenas regarding the competences

3. See the "Towards a European framework of reference for translation" (EFFORT) project. A continuation of NACT, EFFORT is a European project aimed at revising NACT's proposed description of levels for non-specialist translators and establishing a first proposal of descriptors for the highest level of translation (specialist translator). <https://www.effortproject.eu & https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2020-1-ES01-KA203-082579>

translators require (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). A bilingual (Spanish and English) document entitled *Nivelación de competencias en traducción. Propuesta 1 revisada / Establishing competence levels in translation. Proposal 1 (revised)* (PACTE 19/6/2017) was then produced. Along with the first proposed level descriptors, it includes a three-level scale (with sub-levels) and five descriptive categories (language competence; cultural, world knowledge and thematic competence; instrumental competence; translation service provision competence; and translation problem solving competence). See section 4.2.

– Stage 2 (2017-2018): evaluation of the proposed descriptors. A questionnaire was used to obtain expert judgement on the proposed descriptors from representatives of the academic and professional translation arenas from 16 European countries. In all, 65 translation lecturers, 23 professional translators and 11 representatives of associations of professional translators participated in the evaluation. See section 4.3.

– Stage 3 (2018-2019): analysis of data from the expert judgement process and production of a second revised proposal. See sections 4.4 and 5.

Figures from the academic and professional translation arenas participated in the project[4]:

1. Representatives of the academic translation arena (institutions and lecturers). A total of 23 European translator training centres from 15 countries (Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) contributed to the first stage of the project. Their role was to provide information on their centres' curriculums and act as a panel of experts to evaluate the proposed level descriptors.

2. Representatives of the professional translation arena. Non-specialist translators and representatives of associations from no specific area

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4. See the appendices at the end of this volume.

(such as technical translation, legal translation, literary translation, etc.) from different European countries took part in the evaluation of the first descriptor proposal.

Additionally, two experts unrelated to translation — one specializing in establishing levels and the other in education project management — contributed to the project in an advisory capacity. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (Spanish Language Department) also collaborated with the project.

1.4. Structure of the volume

This volume deals with the conceptual framework, design and results of the research carried out as part of the NACT project. It firstly presents the bases of the research, i.e. the characteristics of translation competence and translation competence acquisition. Secondly, it describes the conceptual framework for the development of level scales in translation, presenting the defining traits of descriptors and looking at proposals (from the professional and academic arenas) concerning translation competence descriptors, as well as a study by the PACTE group on the situation as regards establishing levels of translation competence in Europe. Thirdly, it presents the NACT project's first proposal for level descriptors, the proposal's evaluation through an expert judgement process, and the results obtained. Fourthly, it presents the main changes made to the first proposal following the expert judgement process and formulates a second proposal, before finally outlining future avenues of research.

At the end of the document there are three appendices listing the people who and institutions that participated in the project, the undergraduate and master's degree programmes included in the study on establishing competence levels in translator training in Europe, and the evaluators involved in the expert judgement process corresponding to the first descriptor proposal.

There are also links to the documents used in the project, specifically the form used for collecting data on undergraduate and master's degree curriculums and subjects (see section 3.4), the document containing the

2017 descriptor proposal (see section 4.2), and the evaluation questionnaire used in the expert judgement process (see section 4.3).