ESTABLISHING COMPETENCE LEVELS IN TRANSLATION

PACTE group
Anabel Galán-Mañas, Amparo Hurtado Albir, Anna Kuznik, Christian Olalla-Soler, Patricia Rodríguez-Inés, Lupe Romero

Principal investigator: Amparo Hurtado Albir
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

Speaker: Amparo Hurtado Albir
Current research project:

“Establishing Competence Levels in Translation Competence Acquisition in Written Translation”

Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad (FFI2013-42522-P)
1. Objectives
2. Rationale behind project
3. Participants
4. Conceptual framework
5. Methodology and research stages
6. Results so far
OBJECTIVES
**Aim:** Establishing performance levels in translation competence acquisition in written translation

1. To describe the specific competences involved in translation competence acquisition
2. To define the specific competences of different fields of specialization in translation
3. To describe each level’s learning outcomes

> To provide a common framework for academic and professional activity in Europe

🔍 Establishing scales of performance level descriptors (progression)
RATIONALE BEHIND PROJECT
- No common framework of performance levels (comparable to the CEFR) in translation
- No standard criteria or levels in translator training centres (undergraduate and master’s degrees)
- No specific training in some countries
NEED TO STANDARDIZE CRITERIA:

- Different performance and specialization levels in the translation market (professional and non-professional translators of various kinds and at various levels)
- Different professional profiles
- Translation market globalization
- Different levels of translator training in universities and the non-academic arena
- Increasing academic and professional mobility
- Requirements for academic standardization in the EHEA
A COMMON FRAMEWORK (comparable to the CEFR):

- Would facilitate comparison between different grading systems

- Would serve as a guide for:
  - creating translation study programmes
  - issuing official certificates
  - recognizing and validating academic qualifications
  - establishing professional and academic profiles
  - designing assessment procedures (exams, formative and diagnostic assessment)
  - producing textbooks and teaching materials
  - establishing professional quality control criteria
PARTICIPANTS
Participation: 23 translator training centres from 15 European countries

- **BELGIUM**
  Vakgroep Vertalen, Tolken en Communicatie, Universiteit Gent
  Faculteit Letteren en Wijsbegeerte, Universiteit Antwerpen
- **FINLAND**
  Filosofinen tiedekunta, Itä-Suomen Yliopisto, University of Eastern Finland
- **FRANCE**
  Ecole Supérieure d’Interprètes et de Traducteurs, Université Paris III
- **GERMANY**
  Institut für Übersetzungswissenschaft und Fachkommunikation, Universität Hildesheim
  Faculty of Translation Studies, Linguistics and Cultural Studies, Johannes Gutenberg Universität Mainz, Germesheim
- **GREECE**
  Σχολή Ιστορίας & Μετάφρασης – Διερμηνείας, Ιόνιο Πανεπιστήμιο, Ionian University
- **ITALY**
  Dipartimento di Interpretazione e Traduzione, Università di Bologna
  Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici, Università del Salento
  Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori, Università degli Studi di Trieste
- **NETHERLANDS**
  Faculteit International Business and Communication, Maastricht
- POLAND
  Wydział Filologiczny, Uniwersytet Wrocławski
- PORTUGAL
  Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, Universidade Nova de Lisboa
- ROMANIA
  Facultatea de Litere, Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza
- SLOVENIA
  Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani
- SPAIN
  Facultat de Traducció i d’Interpretació, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
  Facultad de Traducción e Interpretación, Universidad de Granada
  Facultat de Ciències Humanes i Socials, Universitat Jaume I
- SWEDEN
  Tolk-och översättarinstitutet, Stockholms universitet
- SWITZERLAND
  Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation, Université de Genève
  Institut für Übersetzen und Dolmetschen (IUED), Zücher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften
- UNITED KINGDOM
  School of Languages and Applied Linguistics, Open University
  Department of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Westminster
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
1. Results from two of PACTE’s previous experimental research projects:
   - Translation Competence (TC): 35 professional translators, 24 foreign-language teachers
   - Translation Competence Acquisition (TCA): 130 trainee translators (undergraduate degree)

→ Validation of TC and TCA models

2. Research on descriptor scales (e.g. CEFR; NAATI)
**PACTE’S RESEARCH INTO TC**

**TC:** the underlying system of knowledge, abilities and attitudes required to be able to translate

- Translation competence involves declarative and predominantly procedural knowledge.

- It comprises five sub-competences (Bilingual, Extralinguistic, Knowledge of translation, Instrumental and Strategic) and activates a series of psycho-physiological components.
TC MODEL (PACTE 2003)

- BILINGUAL
- EXTRALINGUISTIC
- STRATEGIC
- INSTRUMENTAL
- KNOWLEDGE OF TRANSLATION
- PSYCHO-PHYSIOLOGICAL COMPONENTS
PACTE’S RESEARCH INTO TC

TESTS
- Exploratory studies on TC (June 2000-January 2001)
- Pilot test on TC (February-April 2004)
- Experiment on TC (October 2005-March 2006): 35 professional translators, 24 foreign-language teachers

→ Validation of TC model
PACTE’S RESEARCH INTO TC

Our results corroborate the distinguishing features of TC:

- To solve translation problems with acceptable solutions **STRATEGIC**

- To have a dynamic and coherent concept of translation (declarative knowledge) **KNOWLEDGE OF TRANSLATION**

- To have a dynamic approach to translation (procedural knowledge) **STRATEGIC**

- To combine the use of cognitive (internal support) and different types of documentary resources (external support) in an efficient manner **STRATEGIC + INSTRUMENTAL**

- To combine automatized and non-automatized cognitive resources (internal support) in an efficient manner **STRATEGIC + KNOWLEDGE OF TRANSLATION**

- To use instrumental resources in an efficient manner **INSTRUMENTAL**
PACTE’S RESEARCH INTO TCA

**TCA:** *a spiral, a non-linear process in which novice knowledge (Pre-translation Competence) evolves into TC, involving the development of sub-competences and learning strategies*

- During the process, both declarative and procedural types of knowledge are integrated, developed and restructured.
TCA MODEL (PACTE 2000)

Pre-Translation Competence

Integrated development of subcompetences

Acquisition

Translation Competence

Learning Strategies
- Pilot test on TCA (June 2011)
- Experiment on TCA (November 2011): 130 translation trainees

*Simulation of a longitudinal study:*
Measurements from cohorts of first-year, second-year, third-year, fourth-year students, recently graduates students

**Advantages:**
- Data collected in one year
- Validated instruments available from the TC experiment
Our results corroborate:

1. TCA is a dynamic, non-linear, spiral process

Different types of evolution:
- *Non-evolution*: no difference in the values between successive groups between the first year and the end of training
- *Rising evolution*: values rise between the first year and the end of training, with each value between successive groups being higher than or equal to the previous one
- *Falling evolution*: values fall between the first year and the end of training, with each value between successive groups being lower than or equal to the previous one
- *Mixed evolution*: a combination of rising and falling evolution between the first year and the end of training

2. TCA involves an evolution
3. TCA is a process in which the development of procedural knowledge – and, consequently, of the Strategic sub-competence - is essential.

4. TCA is a process in which the sub-competences of TC are developed and restructured.

5. In TCA, the development of the Strategic, Instrumental, and Knowledge of Translation sub-competences is particularly important.

6. In TCA, not all sub-competences develop in parallel, i.e. at the same time and at the same rate.

7. TCA is dependent upon directionality (direct/inverse translation).

8. TCA is dependent upon the learning environment.
Each level’s description should include:

- Descriptive categories (horizontal)
- Level descriptors (vertical)
**DESCRIPTOR SCALES (e.g. CEFR global scales)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 1. Common Reference Levels: global scale**
EACH LEVEL SHOULD INCLUDE:

- **Linguistic competence:**
  - L2 reading comprehension level (according to CEFR global scale)
  - L1 written expression level

- **Extralinguistic competence:**
  - Cultural knowledge
  - Field-specific knowledge

- **Knowledge of translation:**
  - Knowledge about how translation functions (main principles)
  - Knowledge of the profession
DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES (horizontal)

- Instrumental competence:
  - Knowledge, use and evaluation of software related to the translation process
  - Knowledge, use and evaluation of documentation resources

- Strategic competence: ability to solve translation problems (types of problems)

  +

  Text genres liable to be translated at each level (highly relevant category)
LEVEL DESCRIPTION (vertical)

ESTABLISHING A 3-LEVEL GLOBAL SCALE:

- **Level A**
  Basic translation competence levels: introduction to translation (*general translation*)

- **Level B**
  Basic specialized translation competences: introduction to fields of specialization in translation (*general translator*)

- **Level C**
  Competences corresponding to each professional profile: consolidation in fields of specialization in translation
  Profiles:
  - Legal translation
  - Sworn translation
  - Economic and financial translation
  - Technical translation
  - Scientific translation
  - Literary translation
  - Audiovisual translation (dubbing, subtitling, voice-overs)
  - Accessibility
  - Localization (websites, software, videogames)
METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH STAGES
FIRST STAGE (underway)

Production of a preliminary version of each level’s descriptors

Based on:

1. Data from the results of PACTE’s previous experimental research on TC and TCA

2. An analysis of 18 European translator training centres’ undergraduate and master’s degree programmes: creation of a database
DATABASE (undergraduate and master’s degrees)

Information related to translation curriculum and subject design (L2 English and Spanish):

- L2 level at beginning of training
- Translation subjects taught (compulsory and optional)
- Specific and general competences
- Learning objectives
- Content
- Text genres translated
  (etc.)

→ Progression involved
DATABASE (undergraduate and master’s degrees)

16 undergraduate degrees
   11 worth 180 ECTS credits; 5 worth 240 ECTS credits
→ 106 subjects analysed

26 master’s degrees (17 analysed)
   6 worth 60 ECTS credits; 2 worth 90 ECTS credits; 18 worth 120 ECTS credits
   1 general programme
   4 general programmes with specialized modules or courses
   12 specialized programmes
→ 132 subjects analysed
FIRST STAGE (underway)

Undergraduate degree:

1. L2 Level at the beginning of the training
   B2 (43.7%), B1 (12.5%)
   It is not required or specified (31.25%)

2. Competence-based design (31.25%)
   - Differences in the design: numbers (33, 27, 8, 5) and features; a 20%
     does not refer to them as “competences”
   - Design of the competences’ learning results for each level (40%)
   - Progression regarding the subjects’ specific competences (22.2%)

3. Information about the textual genres being used (33.3%)
Verification of proposed level descriptors (based on expert judgement)

1. Professional opinions
Representatives of Europe’s professional translation sector

2. Academic opinions
Representatives of Europe’s academic translation sphere: curriculum supervisors, teachers of direct and inverse translation at different levels

→ Two questionnaires (one for each group of experts) for:
• correcting descriptors and giving opinions on them
• identifying descriptors that are especially clear, useful and appropriate
• determining each descriptor’s degree of difficulty
• categorizing descriptors according to competence and level
• identifying level boundaries
THIRD STAGE (2018)

Questionnaire data analysis and proposal review

→ Creation of a database for the purpose of analysing the data obtained

‡

Production of final proposal
RESULTS SO FAR
# DESCRIPTOR SCALES: LEVEL A

## LEVEL A1, A2: BASIC TRANSLATION COMPETENCES (introduction to translation: general translation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level A1</th>
<th>Level A2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic competence</td>
<td>Linguistic competence (basic cultural knowledge)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extralinguistic competence</td>
<td>Knowledge of translation (concept of translation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental competence (basic resources)</td>
<td>Problem-solving competence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text genres</th>
<th>(S)he is able to translate:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1: non-specialized text genres in standard language and of different types (narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative, instructive)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2: non-specialized text genres with different registers (tone, mode, style) and of different types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global scale</th>
<th>(S)he is able to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

- L2 reading comprehension level: B1 (minimum) / B2  
- L1 written expression level: C1  
- Types of resources and level of use  
- Types of problems solvable
## DESCRIPTOR SCALES: LEVEL B

### LEVEL B1, B2: BASIC SPECIALIZED TRANSLATION COMPETENCES (introduction to fields of specialization in translation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level B1</th>
<th>Level B2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic competence</td>
<td>Extralinguistic competence (complex cultural and basic field-specific knowledge)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| | L2 reading comprehension level: C1 | Type of knowledge | Type of knowledge | Types of resources and level of use | Types of problems solvable |
| | L1 written expression level: C2 | | | |
| **Text genres** | (S)he is able to translate: | | | |
| | - B1: non-specialized text genres from different fields (administrative, legal, economic, scientific, technical) | | | |
| | - B2: simple specialized text genres from different fields (administrative, legal, economic, scientific, technical) | | | |
| **Global scale** | (S)he is able to: | | | |
## DESCRIPTOR SCALES: LEVEL C

### LEVEL C1, C2: COMPETENCES CORRESPONDING TO EACH PROFESSIONAL PROFILE (consolidation in fields of specialization in translation)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level C1</th>
<th>Level C2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Linguistic competence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Extralinguistic competence</strong> (field-specific knowledge for each professional profile)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge of translation</strong> (related to each field of professional practice)</td>
<td><strong>Instrumental competence</strong> (resources used in each field)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-solving competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of knowledge</th>
<th>Type of knowledge</th>
<th>Types of resources and level of use</th>
<th>Types of problems solvable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L2 reading comprehension level: C2</td>
<td>L1 written expression level: C2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Text genres

(S)he is able to translate:
- C1: somewhat complex specialized text genres
- C2: complex specialized text genres

### Global scale

(S)he is able to:
OUR PROJECT: A FIRST STEP...

Subsequent tasks: validate the proposal

- Test the scale’s accuracy and the descriptors’ suitability with students and groups of examiners
  - analyse the work of sample groups of students in relation to the descriptors
  - evaluate the descriptors

- Develop assessment instruments for each level
Thank you!

谢谢！

PACTE group
Anabel Galán-Mañas, Amparo Hurtado Alibir, Anna Kuznik, Christian Olalla-Soler, Patricia Rodríguez-Inés, Lupe Romero
Principal investigator: Amparo Hurtado Alibir

http://grupsderecerca.uab.cat/pacte/es
https://www.facebook.com/didtrad.pacte
cg.didtrad.pacte@uab.cat
PACTE’S REFERENCES

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- PACTE (2014) "First Results of PACTE Group's Experimental Research on Translation Competence Acquisition: The Acquisition of Declarative Knowledge of Translation." MonTI. special issue 1, p. 85-115.