



A Skill-based Approach for Assessing EFL Students' Translation Performance

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Received: 12 January, 2020

Accepted: 08 May, 2020

Abstract

Testing the translation performance of EFL students has not been paid due attention compared with the bulk of the literature on testing other language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening. This has led some translation teachers to face serious problems in measuring their students' translation performance. In most cases, they have to opt for the existing developed rubrics presumably considered suitable for their own classrooms. However, the procedures leading to these developed rubrics are not usually well elaborated on by the original rubric developers. Furthermore, the rubrics that have been developed for measuring this skill are in some cases so detailed that EFL instructors prefer to resort to their own general assessment. Thus, reviewing some of the suggested rubrics for assessing students' translation quality, the present paper which focuses on the testing model proposed by Hughes aims at providing translation instructors with a handy and practical rubric based on the skills and sub-skills needed in any translation practice.

Keywords: Language skills; Rubric; Testing; Translation competence

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of all concerned with translation assessment lies this simple question: How do we know when a translation is good? (House, 2001). However, compared with huge bulk of research produced in Second /Foreign Language Testing, there have been few attempts to assess translation performance in a valid fashion. This lack of attention is usually attributed to the complex nature of translation task (Schaffner2000). Thus, in many EFL contexts, instructors usually have to resort to so called "holistic" approaches for assessing their students' translation performances

defined in terms of two other ambiguous terms like "accuracy" and "quality". The fact that translation is by nature a multi-dimensional and complex phenomenon might account for this lack of resource in translation assessment (Angelelli, 2009).

However, this lack of research in translation assessment should not be taken as if the field is not so important. In fact, educational institutions and industry would benefit from the development of a reliable and valid translation test (Angelelli, 2009).

One of the main issues in translation assessment is the concept of Translation competence

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(hereafter referred to as TC) which has been borrowed from linguistic competence. Although, there is not a consensus among scholars on the nature of TC and its constituent elements, the academic discussion on it would help us “define the exact skills and sub-skills that constitute a translator’s professional ability” (Angelelli, p. 23, 2009).

TC is commonly referred as translators ‘underlying proficiency and skills. In other words, it is “a certain aggregate of expertise, knowledge and skills (EKS) required for a professional translator to provide adequate translation service” (Porshneva, 2002, as cited in Aubakirova, 2016). For most teachers the Ability to understand and transfer the content of a source text and to express the content adequately in the target language is classically considered as TC. (Waddington, 2001)

However, for Nord, (2005: 146) translation competence is composed of the following skills:

- Comprehending the text meaning
- The ability to interpret source language text
- Creating a new text based on the source language
- Verification of the quality of the generated text
- Knowledge of cultural studies

An exhaustive analysis of TC has been put forward by Beeby et al. (2000:5). For them TC is composed of the following sub-components:

- Communicative competence in two languages (understanding in SL and production in TL)
- Extra-linguistic competence (subject knowledge)
- Instrumental-professional competence (use of new technologies)
- psycho-physiological competence (skills for reading and writing)
- Transfer competence (analyzing, synthesizing extra-linguistic knowledge to get the sense of a text)
- Strategic competence (distinguishing between the main and secondary ideas)

Note that the parenthetical information in the above-mentioned phrases is just one realization of the sub-components of the TC. In other words, there are a number of other skills and abilities identified for each of the components.

Rubrics for checking translation performance

For most practitioners in the field of translation, the most important issue in the translation evaluation has been coming up with a translation rubric for checking their students’ translation performances. In line with this trend, having discussed the nature of the translation competence, Aubakirova (2016) presented a complex of criteria for controlling and assessment of translation quality from Russian to English (Appendix 1) that combined both analytical and system approaches to translation assessment.

This translation rubric consisted of four criteria, two of which were holistic ("accuracy of translating original text content" and "quality of expression in translation"), and the other two were analytical ("a number of mistakes", "negative influence of mistakes on rendering original sense"). As the name suggests the first holistic criterion, namely the *Accuracy of translating original text content* aimed at measuring the extent the translator succeeded in rendering the source language **content** while the second one, *Quality of expression in translation* holistically assessed how the translated text gave an impression of the source language text. The two analytic criteria, namely *Number of mistakes* and *Negative influence of mistakes on rendering original sense* focused on the number of the lexical- grammatical/orthographical mistakes and their influence in the target language respectively.

Waddington (2001) worked out a rubric for the assessment of the Spanish EFL students’ translation (Appendix 2). The rubric checks three different aspects of the students’ translation performance namely, transfer of ST information, lexical/grammatical and spelling errors measured in five levels. The total score devoted to this rubric is 10.

Khanmohammad and Osanloo (2009) administered two questionnaires – one open-ended and one using Likert scale – to a total of 41 translation instructors inquiring about their methods for assessing students' translations. Based on the results obtained from both questionnaires and also the existing scales of assessment, they developed a comprehensive and detailed rubric (Appendix 3) for assessing students' translation performance. As evident in the rubric, the total score devoted to this rubric was 100. The rubric included different aspects of translation including, namely Accuracy (30%), Finding equivalent (25%), Register, TL culture (20%), Grammar and ST style (15%), Shifts, omissions, additions and inventing equivalents (10%). The noticeable advantage of the presented rubric is the weight given to the comprehension of the source text realized in the first two categories; the thing that is totally missing in the previously developed rubrics by the other authors.

Generally speaking, translation teachers can make use of any developed rubrics suitable for their own classrooms. However, most of the offered translation evaluations have not spelled out the ability, knowledge, behaviors and skills that all associated with the construct in question, namely translation competence (Angelelli, 2009). In particular, the reliability of translation quality assessment (TQA) has been questioned arguing that evaluators are often not consistent in clarifying what is considered as a major or minor translation error. Sometimes, translation teachers' preconceptions of their students influence their assessment reducing the objectivity of their assessment something that is called as the halo effect. Furthermore, there are many administrative variations set for measuring translation by different institutions (Williams, 2013).

Thus, to fill in this gap, the present paper aims at providing translation teachers with procedures for developing a handy rubric for measuring their students' translation performance based on the model proposed by Hughes (2013). In other words, the paper aims at addressing the following research question:

How can Hughes's Language Testing Model be implemented in assessing EFL students' translation performance?

A model for writing test specifications

Identifying the kinds of test to be given (achievement, proficiency, diagnostic, or placement), Hughes (2013) proposed a detailed model for writing test specifications, namely content, structure and timing, criterial levels of performance and scoring procedures as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1.
Test specifications (adapted from the model proposed by Hughes (2013:59-62))

Content	Structure	Critical levels of performance	Scoring procedures
Operations	Test structure		
Type of text	Number of items		
Addressees of text(s)	Number of passages		
Length of text(s)	Medium/channel		
Topics	Timing		
Readability	Techniques		
Structural range			
Vocabulary range			
Dialect, accent, style			
Speed of processing			

The **content** includes all the possible elements that have a potential contribution to the skill which is being tested. *Operations* are the specific tasks that test takers are supposed to have. *Type of the text* refers to genre that a text belongs to.

Addresses of the texts is dealing with the kind of people that a candidate is expected to speak write to or translate to. Depending on the skill being tested, *Length of text* refers to the length of translation text, reading test and etc. *Topics* refer to the fields that are considered suitable for test takers. *Readability* is dealing with the extent a certain passage is perceived by the test takers as easy or difficult. *Structural range* covers the structures that should be included or excluded in the texts. *Vocabulary range* refers to the list of the lexical items. *Dialect, accent, style* are the elements that the test takers are supposed to understand, write, translate and etc. *Speed of processing* in testing certain skills like Reading and speaking might refer to the number of the words expressed per minute.

The second main specification (**STRUCTURE, TIMING, MEDIUM / CHANNEL AND TECHNIQUES**) refers to identifying the sections a certain test would include, termed as *Test structure*, and *number* of the items and passages in a test. It also includes *Medium/channel* which refers to the medium of the test such as paper and pencil, computer, or face- to- face. *Timing*, the allocated time for different sections of a test, and *Techniques*, mechanism for measuring the skills and sub-skills, are also included in this section.

The third main section in the proposed model for test specifications includes the **CRITERIA LEVELS OF PERFORMANCE**. This can be either a simple statement announcing the pass/fail borderline or a description of the general skills such as accuracy, appropriacy, range, flexibility and size.

SCORING PROCEDURES is the last important section in the model. To avoid a subjective scoring of students' performance, the test developers should determine in advance the rating scale, the number of the raters, validity and reliability of the scoring system.

It should be noted that the presented model by Hughes (2013) has been exclusively intended for testing language skills excluding translation skill of the students. However, adapting the model, the present paper aims at, as mentioned before, working

out a rubric based on the skills that EFL students are expected to perform in the process of translation.

A suggested model for writing translation test specifications

The first step to work out a rubric for translation assessment is defining the related construct, namely TC followed by describing the elements that represent the competence. (Orozco and Albir 2002). However, TC is not so easy to be defined in a straightforward way due to the fact that testing translation cannot be separated from testing reading skill. In fact, the two skills are typically exercised together in the process of translation.

Basically, the process of translation starts from reading a source text and ends in the creation of a final text in the target language. This suggests the importance of the initial comprehension of the original text. In fact, any attempt to define the construct, translation competence, without any reference to its subsumed construct, reading comprehension, would not capture the construct as a whole. That is, testing of translation parallels in most ways the testing of reading. In fact, comprehension of the source language text has been identified as one of the major problems of EFL students majoring in translation studies Farahzad (2012). Thus, for evaluation of any translated text we have to refer to skills of both reading and translation that translators perform when they are engaged in the process of translation

In line with the original model for test writing described above, we have to set the specifications for translation tests, that is, identifying what skills translation students are performing in the process of translation. It should be noted that out of the different types of tests, EFL teachers prefer to opt for *Final achievement tests* that are usually based on books or booklets they have used throughout the semester. This kind of test is supposed to be a fair test in that it usually contains skills and points the students have already encountered while taking the course (Hughes, 2013).

Content*Operations*

Handling Translation of certain lexical items (word choice)

- Pronominal references
- Specific/generic lexical items (convergence/split)
- Culturally/socially lexical items words (e.g. D-Day)
- Coined lexical items (e.g. Brexit)
- Context-based lexical items (e.g. Sweet)
- Discourse markers

Handling translation of certain literary devices

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Euphemism
- Dysphemism

Handling translation of collocations

- Translation of collocations
- Translations of idioms

Handling identification and translation of Noun phrases and verbs

- Translation of Heads
- Translations of Pre-modifiers
- Translations of post-modifiers

Handling and translation of sentence verb/tense

- Identification of the main verb in SL
- Verb tense in TL

Texts

To secure the content validity of a translation test, a representative sample translation text(s) should be selected based on the above-mentioned specifications.

Text types

As the curriculum for Translation studies includes different courses, namely Translation of

Literary texts, Translation of scientific texts, Translation of political texts and etc., the type of the translation text should be consistent with the specific translation course taken.

Topics

As in an EFL contexts, the students are not expected to have the needed background knowledge of the authentic texts, the selected topics for translation should not be highly technical or specialist. It is suggested to select topics that students have already focused in their courses.

Length

Four or five passages each containing 100 words is advised for a translation test to be taken in an hour. It should be noted that length of a translation test depends on the proficiency of the students.

Level of text difficulty

The level of the text difficulty should be very similar to the texts that students have encountered in their classrooms. However, if a text is perceived as of higher difficulty, the students can be provided with the general meaning of some numbered selected lexical items as footnote.

Criteria level of performance

The traditional pass mark in Iranian context is at least 10 out of 20. (Convertible to per cent 50 out of 100)

Scoring procedures

Scoring method should be consistent with test specifications. Thus, analytic scoring is advised to be taken as it requires separate scores for each number of the aspects of a skill mentioned in the test specification.

Table 2.
EFL students' translation rubric

Weighted value: 20		EFL students' translation rubric
SCORING RANGE	TASK DESCRIPTION	
19-20	<p>A translation at this level accomplishes all the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation needs no improvement and editing from grammatical and stylistic points. • Complete transfer of ST information • Lexical items in SL have been rendered into TL taking into account the contextual, cultural and linguistic aspects of the discourse. • Literary devices, if any, and collocations (both idiomatic and non-idiomatic) in SL have been skillfully rendered into TL equivalents. • Noun phrases in SL have been skillfully rendered into TL. • Translation reflects correct identification of the main verbs of the sentences in SL. • Verb tenses in SL have been rendered skillfully into their equivalents in TL. 	
15-18	<p>A translation at this level accomplishes all the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation needs minor improvement and editing from grammatical and stylistic points. • Complete transfer of ST information • Some of the Lexical items in SL have been rendered into TL WITHOUT taking into account the contextual, cultural and linguistic aspects of the discourse. • There is occasional noticeable PROBLEMS in rendering literary devices and collocations (both idiomatic and non-idiomatic) in TL. • Noun phrases in SL have been skillfully rendered into TL. • Translation reflects correct identification of the main verbs of the sentences in SL. • NOT all verb tenses in SL have been rendered into their accepted equivalents in TL. 	
10-14	<p>A translation at this level is marked by the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation still needs minor improvement and editing from grammatical and stylistic points. • Translation occasionally has failed correct identification of the main verbs of the sentences in SL. • fair transfer of ST information • NOT all noun phrases in SL have been rendered into TL • NOT all verb tenses in SL have been rendered into their accepted equivalents in TL. • A fair translation lexical items and collocations but failing to treat literary devices. 	
1-9	<p>A translation at this level is marked by one or more of the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation needs major improvement and editing from grammatical, stylistic and lexical points. • Translation does NOT transfer most of the SL information • Translation in most cases does NOT make sense 	

A rubric on a translation test should be based on the course content and objectives. In line with this statement, the presented rubric requires the rater to consider different skills as specified in the test specifications and shown in Table 5. As for scoring, there are two possible marks providing the rater with a choice either assigning full credit for translations that meet the specified

points or the lower score for those that are perceived to fall in between the two scores. A passing score should be also set for the test indicating the mastery of the course content (McDonald, 2017).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Testing translations can be carried out for

different purposes. In educational contexts, EFL students' translation performances are usually measured to either provide the students with the needed feedback or test their translation skills at the end of their translation courses (Angelelli and Jacobson, 2009). An authentic translation assessment should be based on eliciting the kind of knowledge required by translation student in the process of translation (Biggs and Tang, 2007).

From this perspective, the present paper sought to develop a rubric for translation assessment. The suggested model secures the validity of the assessment as it has been based on the skills that EFL students are expected to perform in the process of translation. On the other hand, task description along with given scoring range are expected to reduce the grading and scoring inconsistencies enhancing the reliability of the assessment.

This also implies that the presented model suggests a criterion-referenced testing of translation requiring the test takers to meet pre-specified criteria of translation practice. However, a note of caution should be given here. As Sainz (1992) has argued there is no absolute translation; students' translations in fact should be used as kinds of feedback to be focused on later in translation classes. So, if a candidate's translation performance was assigned 6, it does not mean that he would fail the test. Rather, through considering the completion of candidates' classroom assignments and also their classroom participation,

translation teachers can award 4 extra credit for the candidate helping him pass the course. However, the candidates who have neither done their classroom assignments nor had they a satisfactory record of classroom participation would need understandably to take the course again.

It is hoped that the presented model would help translation instructors in objective assessing of their students' translation. On the other hand, having being informed that their translation would be scored based on certain limited number of sub-skills, students of translation are supposed to proceed with their translation assignments more attentively contributing to the validity of the assessment as well. In other words, students would "glean a deeper understanding of what needs to be accomplished to perform a task well" (Quinlan, 2012).

As a further research, comparative studies can be conducted to see the back-wash effect of employing this type of assessment on both students' translation activities and teachers' teaching methods. An attitudinal research eliciting input from colleagues and students would further clarify the potential merits and demerits of the proposed model.

It is worth mentioning that the issue of coming up with a translation rubric is still "a work in progress in the hope of contributing to relevant international discussions on valid and meaningful translation assessment" (Angelelli and Jacobson, 2009, p. 14).

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Biodata

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Appendix ONE
Criteria for controlling the quality of translation. (Aubakirova,2016)

Level	Accuracy of translating original text content	quality of expression In translation	A number of mistakes	Negative influence of mistakes on rendering original sense	The mark given for translation	Total Score
High	The complete translation of original content	Translation mostly gives an impression of original.	Minor and rare Lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On a shorter than 10 words segment or no influence.	Successful	9-10
Above average	The practically complete translation with minor (1-2) inaccuracies.	The majority of text fragments gives an impression of original.	There is a number of Lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the segment of 10 to 30 words.	Almost completely successful	7-8
Average	The general sense of the text is translated with a significant amount of inaccuracies.	Some text fragments give an impression of original, while all the rest is perceived as a translation.	There is a significant number of Lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the segment of 30 to 50 words.	Adequate	5-6
Below average	The content is distorted due to a great number of inaccuracies,	The text is majorly perceived as a translation.	There are continually repeated Lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On a segment of 50 to 50 words.	inadequate	3-4
Low	The original is rendered completely inadequately.	A complete Lack of skills In translating into foreign language.	There Is a vast number of Lexical-grammatical and/or orthographical mistakes.	On the text as a whole.	Wholly Inadequate	1-2

Appendix TWO
Scale for holistic Method for translation assessment based on Waddington (2001)

Level	Accuracy of transfer of ST content	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of task completion	Mark
Level 5	Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.	Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in English. There may be minor lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Successful	9, 10
Level 4	Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach professional standard.	Large sections read like a piece originally written in English. There are a number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Almost completely successful	7, 8
Level 3	Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard.	Certain parts read like a piece originally written in English, but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Adequate	5, 6
Level 2	Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies; thorough revision required to reach professional standard.	Almost the entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Inadequate	3, 4
Level 1	Totally inadequate transfer of ST content; the translation is not worth revising.	The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in English.	Totally inadequate	1, 2

Appendix THREE
The translation assessment rubric (Khanmohammad & Osanloo,2009)

Score range	Description
Accuracy (30%)	
25-30	No identifiable problems of comprehension; original message has been conveyed completely to TL readers; no omissions or additions to information
21-24	Virtually no problems of comprehension except with the most highly specialized vocabulary with no influence on TL readers' understanding; some partial omissions and additions
16-20	Information is conveyed to TL readers with some difficulty due to translator misunderstanding of some parts of original message; apparent omissions and additions
Finding equivalent (25%)	
11-15	Poor expression of ideas; numerous serious problems in understanding ST interfere with communication of original message; difficult to understand TT
1-10	Severe problems interfere greatly with communication of original message; TL reader can't understand what original writer was trying to say
Register, TL culture (20%)	
20-25	All lexical and syntactic elements have been understood; precise vocabulary usage; words have been chosen so skillfully that the work reads like a good publishable version
15-19	Full comprehension and good usage of a wide range of vocabulary and structures; specialized vocabulary presents some problems with unsuitable equivalents
10-14	General comprehension of a fair range of vocabulary although some gaps observed; some vocabulary misused; some evidence of plausible attempts to work around difficulties of finding equivalents, perception, wordplay and other linguistic features
5-9	Comprehension of vocabulary and structures show quite noticeable gaps which obscure sense; problems in finding correct vocabularies; unable to cope with specialized vocabulary
1-4	Inappropriate use of vocabularies; comprehension of original seriously impeded even with fairly everyday vocabulary and structures; translation as a whole makes little sense
Register, TL culture (20%)	
17-20	Good sensitivity to nuances of meaning, register are precisely and sensitively captured; there is a sophisticated awareness of the cultural context; translation shows a sophisticated command of TL lexis, syntax, and register
13-16	There is a fair degree of sensitivity to nuances of meaning, register, and cultural context
9-12	There is a lack of sustained attention to nuances of meaning, register, and cultural context; no awareness of register; TL lexis, syntax, and register are not always appropriate
4-8	There is scant attention to nuances of meaning, register, and cultural context; there are serious to severe shortcomings in the use of appropriate lexis, syntax, and register
1-3	There is no appreciable understanding of nuances of meaning, register, and cultural context; no concept of register or sentence variety

Grammar and ST style (15%)	
13-15	Gives the feeling that the translation needs no improvement from grammatical and stylistic points though one or two natural failings might be observed; native-like fluency in grammar
10-12	Shows flair for stylistic manipulation of TL items as if text were written in TL originally except where the language is placed under severe pressure of comprehension; maintains advanced proficiency in grammar; some grammatical problems but with no influence on message
7-9	Tends to have awkward grammatical usage in TL and literality of rendering though but not impeding sense in a significant manner; some attempts to reflect stylistic features of the original; some grammatical problems are apparent and have negative effects on communication
4-6	Clumsy TL; often nonsensical grammatical usages in TL; unnatural sounding; little attempt to reflect stylistic features of the original; there is evidence of clear difficulties in following style; grammatical review of some areas is clearly needed
1-3	Little sense of style which often makes poor sense in TL; knowledge of grammar is inadequate; use of TL grammar is inadequate; severe grammatical problems interfere greatly with message
Shifts, omissions, additions and inventing equivalents (10%)	
9-10	Correct use of relative clauses, verb forms; use of parallel structure; creative inventions and skillful solutions to equivalents; no fragment or run-on sentence
7-8	Almost all shifts appear with partial trespass, attempts variety; some inventions for not available equivalents in TL; no fragment or run-on sentence
5-6	Some shifts but not consistency; awkward and odd structure; only few run-on sentences or fragments present
3-4	Lacks variety of structure due to not preserving necessary shifts except for few cases; little or no evidence of invention in equivalents
1-2	Unintelligible sentence structure due to completely ignoring necessary shifts; no skillful handling of equivalents; no trace of invention