

## Teaching Translation in Iraqi Undergraduate Translation Programs

Sirvan Aminzadeh<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Translation, Cihan University, Erbil, Iraq

Correspondence: Sirvan Aminzadeh, Cihan University-Erbil, Erbil, Iraq.

Email: sirvan.aminzadeh@cihanuniversity.edu.iq

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**Abstract:** The ultimate goal of an undergraduate translation program is to educate competent translators for the local and global translation markets. The present study concentrates on the translation programs at Iraqi universities while adopting a descriptive framework to show what translation students need to acquire through a 4-year study program. For this purpose, the researcher has reflected upon the application of the Social Constructivist Approach to teaching translation and the Translation Competence Development Model proposed by the PACTE research group (2003) according to which translation students need to develop linguistic as well as non-linguistic translation sub-competencies to become competent translators. In other words, students need to improve their bilingual, extra-linguistic, theoretical, instrumental, strategic, and psycho-physiological sub-competencies through completing their undergraduate studies. The curriculum assessment of some Iraqi universities' undergraduate translation programs has revealed that the development of non-linguistic translation competence is mostly missing in those programs. They generally emphasized the development of students' linguistic and bilingual abilities. In sum, these study programs, to provide their students with appropriate translation skills, knowledge, and abilities, need to be extended beyond the concerns of foreign language teaching.

**Keywords:** Teaching Translation, Translation Competence, Undergraduate Translation Programs

### 1. Introduction

Undergraduate translation programs usually aim to educate competent translators being able to meet the demands of the translation market. Kiraly (2000) elaborated on the accessibility of translation students' professionalization. According to him, undergraduate translation programs which exclusively focus on language teaching and enhancing students' linguistic competence are not completely successful to gain this end. As translation is generally regarded as a textual-linguistic product within a specific cultural context, the acquisition of languages (i.e., source and target languages) is considered as the minimum requirement for becoming a translator. Although translators should be bilingual and bicultural as much as possible, source and target language acquisition are not enough for becoming professional. The translation process entails something more than a linguistic transaction.

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A Spanish research group named PACTE<sup>1</sup> (1997-2015), after conducting an extensive study on translation competence development in students, determined which translation sub-competencies are needed by translation students to become educated competent translators. In this paper, the group's findings are adopted as the theoretical framework according to which a university translation program should pave the way for developing the suggested translation sub-competencies in translation students.

In this paper, some Iraqi universities' undergraduate translation programs are assessed to find the gaps and deficiencies they have in this regard. These universities are the University of Mosul (1976), the University of Mustansiriyah (1978), Cihan University-Erbil (2013), and the University of Dohuk (2014). The curricula of the translation departments of these universities are examined to recognize the courses being included and to determine the component(s) of translation competence they support through their four-year study program. It is also clarified that the development of which translation sub-competencies is missing in these programs.

Before presenting the above-mentioned parts, it is needed to have a summary of the history of translator education in Iraq, and a review of PACTE's extensive study and its list of translation sub-competencies.

## **2. Translator Education in Iraq**

In the Islamic Golden Age (in the 9th century), about two centuries after the establishment of the Academy of Gondishapur- in the 6th century by the Sassanid emperor Khosrau I- where texts on medicine, astronomy, philosophy were translated from Greek and Syriac into Pahlavi, the "House of Wisdom" was established by the Abbasid Caliph Al-Mamun in Baghdad to collect books and translate them from Greek, Chinese, Sanskrit, Persian, and Syriac into Arabic. This endeavor is generally known as the Graeco-Arabic translation movement as the majority of texts was translated from Greek into Arabic. Through this movement, translation classes were held to facilitate translation in different fields into Arabic. This translation movement lasted till the mid-13th century due to which valuable ancient works were translated into Arabic by educated translators.

In the late 11th century, a group of scholars who knew languages like mid-Persian, Arabic, Latin, and Spanish (Castilian) founded the "Toledo School of Translators" in Spain and translated the classic Arabic texts- including Arabic translations of ancient philosophers and scientists- into Latin and Spanish languages. These translations sparked the European Renaissance in the upcoming centuries. As Kelly stated, "Western Europe owes its civilization to translators. Likewise, the Arabs owe their civilization to the voluminous works of Greeks they had translated" (1979, p. 1).

By the mid-14th century, present-day Iraq (known as Mesopotamia) was mostly ruled by the Ottoman Empire. According to Baker, "under this new political power, Arabic continued to be the language of learning and law. Arabic continued to play a major role in the translation movement, though now it had to share this role with Turkish" (1998, p. 322). Mohammad Ali, an Ottoman governor in Egypt, Syria, and Sudan (1805) established professional schools and instructed students to translate texts required for modernizing his army and administration from French into Arabic.

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<sup>1</sup> Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation

Gradually, approaching the 20th century, Iraq was under foreign occupation, and modern translation programs were developed in the academic institutions. Some of the existing departments of translation are at the University of Mosul (1976), the University of Mustansiriyah (1978), Cihan University-Erbil (2013), and the University of Dohuk (2014). Like the traditional translation classes, teaching translation in these modern institutions are mostly teacher-centered and prescriptive; that is, students view their teacher's translation as model translations. The more they lexico-grammatically imitate the teacher's translation in their draft, the higher mark they get. Therefore, their translations are positively evaluated only when they meet the teachers' expectations. As a result, students will learn the teacher's preferred translation methods, techniques, and skills.

Nowadays, Translation Studies- a field of knowledge since the 1980s- denotes two major trends in the academic arena: 1) studies that can make students better translators, 2) academic research on translation. Both areas now deal with linguistic as well as socio-cultural, cognitive, and technological concerns. After the cultural Turn in Translation Studies (the 1990s), translator education has globally moved away from language teaching programs towards cultural studies and the consideration of culture as an important factor affecting the translation process and product. However, it seems that the mentioned Iraqi universities have not updated their programs and teaching orientations accordingly.

Now, as translation is counted as an interface between cultures and communication between cultures, it entails something beyond textual-linguistic operation in moving from source language and culture to target language and culture. This modern definition of translation also entails a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Due to that shift, in addition to the linguistic process of translation, the student's decision-making process and their communication in the semi-authentic- cultural context are emphasized. Here, the view towards "meaning" is changed too. Likewise, the notion of Meaning was subject to a critical change. As in the past, it was customarily viewed as a set of concepts fixed within the texts, now this view was tackled due to the feature of negotiability, and it is thought it streams between text producer (writer, speaker, or translator) and receivers (i.e., readers, or listeners) in the sociocultural context in which communication is made.

Kiraly (2000) distinguished between the "Transmissionism" and "Social Constructivism" approaches. According to him, in the former approach, students are passive receivers of knowledge from the authority of a teacher; he decides what should be learned, what should be translated, and how a translation should be evaluated. On the other, in the latter approach, students construct knowledge interactively with each other, and the teacher facilitates the learning process. He is doing that by opening spaces where students themselves can pursue their learning processes, collectively deciding on their learning objectives and which texts to translate, and participating in the final evaluation of their activities.

As it was mentioned above, the translation departments in Iraq have generally adopted the traditional (or transmissionism, in Kiraly's words) method of teaching, mainly focusing on the linguistic aspect of translation and underestimating or disregarding other aspects- i.e., encyclopedic, instrumental, technical and theoretical, strategic, and physio-psychologic. Iraqi translation students need to acquire non-linguistic translation sub-competencies to master these nonlinguistic aspects of translation. In the following part, one of the most comprehensive lists of translation sub-competencies is presented, which have been proposed by the PACTE research group.

### 3. The PACTE Model of Translation Competence

Everyone may see some professional translators or interpreters who have not obtained any formal education in translation, and they are yet successful in their career. On the other hand, many translation graduates are not qualified to enter the professional translation market. At the same time, professional translators do not usually acknowledge formal education, and they do not recognize translation theories with which novice translation students are fed. Krings (1986), by conducting TAP<sup>2</sup> studies on professionals and translation students, realized that the former group usually applies holistic strategies due to which translators view and translate sentences and larger textual units at once, while the latter group follows linear strategies which involve translating smaller units such as words and phrases. Moreover, professionals activate their encyclopaedic knowledge and experience and focus on the sense of the text, whereas learners concentrate on words and the form of text.

The existence of these differences between professionals and educated translation students proves that the former group possesses some translation-related skills and competencies which may not be developed in students. The inclusion and development of translation competence in translator education programs will improve students' translation performance. According to Shreve, the "translation competence has come to represent a motley set of academic understandings about what one has to know to become a translator" (2002, p. 154).

One of the most comprehensive models of translation competence is offered by the PACTE research group that has conducted an extensive study on the categorization and development of translation sub-competencies from 1997 to 2015. The group consisted of translators and translation teachers educating professional translators in the faculty of translation and Interpreting of UAB, Barcelona, Spain. The language directions they worked on were English, French, and German into Spanish and Catalan, and vice versa. According to them,

Translation competence is the underlying system of knowledge needed to translate. It includes declarative and procedural knowledge, but procedural knowledge is predominant. It consists of the ability to carry out the transfer process from the comprehension of the source text to the re-expression of the target text, taking into account the purpose of the translation and the characteristics of the target text readers. (PACTE, 2003, p.15)

Through the experimental study, PACTE aimed to build a model of translation competence and a model of translation competence acquisition that could be empirically validated. To the group, translation competence, being qualitatively different from bilingual competence, is the underlying system of expert knowledge needed to translate, and it is made up of a system of sub-competencies being inter-related and hierarchical. According to the PACTE model (2003, pp. 15-16), translation competence includes five main sub-competencies, as well as translation capacity, which are explained below.

- Bilingual sub-competence: it is the knowledge about source and target languages (at lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive levels), which is needed to communicate in the two

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<sup>2</sup> Think Aloud Protocol

languages. This sub-competence lets translators realize the differences and similarities between SL and TL, and it prevents them from committing interference from SL to TL through the translation process.

- Extra-linguistic sub-competence: This sub-competence includes mastering bicultural knowledge (i.e., of SL and TL cultures) and the encyclopaedic knowledge (or real-world about subject matters being communicated via translation).
- Knowledge about translation: it refers to knowledge about translation units, types, procedures, methods, and process; translation techniques used for solving translation problems; how translation functions in the receiving sociocultural context; and professional translation practice and the market (i.e., briefs, clients and audiences, etc.).
- Instrumental sub-competence: it is the knowledge of using documentation sources, and information and communication technologies applied to translation (e.g., dictionaries, encyclopaedias, grammars, style books, parallel texts, electronic corpora, translation memories, CAT tools, etc.).
- Strategic sub-competence: It is the knowledge to guarantee the efficiency of the translation process and problem-solving techniques, which includes planning the process and carrying out the translation project; evaluating the process and product; activating other sub-competencies; and identifying translation problems as well as appropriate procedures to solve them.

In addition to the above-mentioned sub-competencies, there is a transfer capacity that is overemphasized by expert translators, due to which all of the cited sub-competencies are combined to carry out the transfer process from ST to TT (PACTE, 2003, p.15). In other words, the combination of all sub-competencies forms transfer capacity which makes successful movement from ST to TT possible. Moreover, psycho-physiological components are at work for this purpose. These components are cognitive (i.e., memory, perception, attention, and emotion), attitudinal (intellectual curiosity, rigor, critical spirit, confidence in one's abilities, the ability to measure one's abilities, and motivation), and abilities such as creativity, and logical reasoning, analysis, and synthesis (PACTE, 2003, p.17).

As previously emphasized, in this study, the inclusion and development of translation sub-competencies and abilities are scrutinized in the forerunning Iraqi universities' undergraduate translation programs to determine the shortcomings these programs have in this regard. In doing so, in the succeeding part, these programs and their included modules and translation sub-competencies are presented and examined.

#### **4. Translation Programs at Iraqi Universities**

Here, the study programs of four Iraqi universities' translation departments are presented. These universities are the University of Mosul, the University of Mustansiriyah, Cihan University-Erbil, and the University of Dohuk. The curricula and the corresponding translation sub-competencies are present in Table 1.

Table 1: Iraqi Universities` Undergraduate Translation Programs

Stage	University of Mosul	University of Mustansiriyah	Cihan University- Erbil	University of Dohuk	Translation Competence
FIRST	English Grammar	Grammar	Grammar I/II	English Grammar 1/2	<i>Bilingual</i>
	Conversation	Conversation	Listening and Speaking I/II	Listening and Speaking 1/2, Listening and Speaking	
	Composition	Composition	Composition	Reading and Writing 1/2	
	Comprehension	Comprehension	Comprehension		
	Pronunciation	Pronunciation	Phonetics I/II	-	
	Introduction to English Literature	Literary Texts	Introduction to English Literature	-	
	Arabic Grammar	Arabic Language	Kurdish/Arabic Syntax	Kurdish	
	-	-	Kurdistani Studies	Kurdistani Studies	<i>Extra Linguistic</i>
	-	-	Academic Debate	Academic Debate/ Critical Thinking	<i>General</i>
	Human Rights and Democracy	Human Rights	-	Human Rights	
Computer Skills	Computer Skills	Computer Skills/ Academic Computing	Computer Skills		
Principles of Arabic/English Translation	Principles of Translation	Principles & Methods of Translation I/II	Principles of Translation 1/2	<i>Knowledge about translation</i>	
SECOND	Translation into Arabic	Translation into Arabic	Translation from English I/II	Translation into Kurdish or Arabic	<i>Knowledge about translation</i>
	Translation into English	Translation into English	Translation into English I/II	Translation into English	

	Sight Translation	Sight Translation	Sight Translation I/II	Sight Translation	
	English Syntax	English Syntax	English Syntax	English Grammar	<i>Bilingual</i>
	Narrative	Narrative	English Narrative	English Literature	
	Rhetoric(Arabic)	Rhetoric			
	Vocabulary (Ar./En.)	Vocabulary	Morphology	-	
	-	-	Academic Writing, Advanced Writing	Reading and Writing	
	-	-	French I/II	French	
THIRD	Administrative and Commercial Translation	Administrative Translation	Translation Practice I	Translation into English	<i>Knowledge about translation</i>
	Medical /Tourist Translation	Translation from/into English	Medical and Technological Translation		
	Consecutive Interpreting	Consecutive Interpreting	Consecutive Interpreting I/II		
	Linguistics, Semantics, Discourse Analysis	Linguistics, Semantics	Linguistics I/II	Linguistics	<i>Knowledge about translation/ and Bilingual</i>
	-	-	Machine Translation	-	<i>Instrumental/ and Knowledge about translation</i>
	-	-	Audiovisual Translation	-	
	Drama	Drama	English Drama	-	<i>Bilingual</i>
	Arabic Grammar, Semantics (Arabic)	Arabic Grammar, Semantics (Arabic)	-	-	
	Contrastive Grammar	Contrastive Grammar, Contrastive Syntax	Contrastive Grammar	Contrastive Grammar	
			French III/IV	French	

	Research Methods	Research Methods	Research Methods	-	-
FOURTH	Literary Translation	Literary Translation	Literary Translation I/II	Literary Translation	<i>Knowledge about translation</i>
	Theories of Translation	Theories of Translation	Translation and Interpreting Theories/ Translation Criticism	Theories of Translation	
	Legal Translation	Legal Translation	Legal Translation I/II	Legal Translation	
	Scientific Translation	Scientific Translation	Scientific Translation	-	
	Simultaneous Interpreting	Simultaneous Interpreting	Simultaneous Interpreting I/II	Simultaneous Interpreting	<i>Knowledge about translation/ and Instrumental</i>
	Media Translation	Media Translation	Media Translation I/II	-	
	Graduation Research	Research Project	Graduation Project	Translation Project	<i>Miscellaneous</i>

In the above table, the modules of stages, one to four, of the mentioned programs are presented and they are classified according to the translation sub-competence they support. Here, what matters is to realize which sub-competencies are covered in these programs.

In doing so, a few subjects (e.g., “Principles and Methods of Translation” in Cihan University’s program) are moved from one stage to another. These misplaced subjects are highlighted in grey. At the same time, some subjects are missing in one or two programs as these programs are not completely similar in terms of the materials they cover. Yet, they are considered analogous. This comparability between the programs paves the way for making sensible deductions concerning the programs’ holistic orientation towards translation competence development. Another point that is worth noticing is that there are some subjects in the programs that support more than one translation sub-competencies. For example, ‘Machine translation’ covers knowledge about translation and the instrumental sub-competencies. Therefore, both aspects of translation competence are mentioned for that subject.

In the following part, the rate and frequency of each translation sub-competencies are explained to find the gaps in the translation programs that have been implemented for about two or more decades in the Iraqi universities.

## 5. Discussion

By looking at Table 1, it is perceived that the majority of subjects in these programs address the development of bilingual translation competence as it is predominantly believed that a competent

translator must be bilingual. In other words, a translator should have the knowledge about source and target languages at lexical, syntactic, semantic, stylistic, pragmatic, and discursive levels, and realize the differences and similarities between SL and TL to prevent interferences from SL to TL through the translation process.

Here, the significant impact of language pedagogy on teaching translation is recognized. These supporting subjects are mainly common among language programs (e.g., ELT, English literature, and Linguistics). However, two important questions emerge in this regard. First, with the consideration of the limitations imposed on a translation program in terms of its semesters and credit units, to what extent should the linguistic courses be included in a translation program (the same for literature, ELT)? Second, by noticing the fact that the language-related courses are mostly in common between translation programs and other language programs, how should they be designed for educating competent translators (as compared to teachers, authors, linguists, etc.)? Answering these two questions will lead to considerable modifications in the rate and the way of inserting bilingual supporting subjects in the cited translation programs.

The second translation competence that is covered in these programs is “Knowledge about Translation”. Students need to internalize a wide range of textual-linguistic, sociocultural, and cognitive knowledge about translation to master problem-solving techniques and methods, the social functions of translation, and the routines and norms of translation markets. According to James Holmes` Map of Translation Studies (1972), when we talk about translation we mean the cognitive process, the textual product, or the social function of translation. Therefore, knowledge about translation- which is to be internalized by students- should cover all these three aspects of translation in a program. Now, the question is, do the relevant subjects in each program include knowledge about all three aspects of translation? In other words, which aspect of translation is much more (or less) emphasized in these programs? This importance should be made here that this question may not necessarily provoke changes in inclusion or exclusion of this or that subject, but it urges the program developers to take a comprehensive view about the nature of translation- not only as a textual product that is predominantly adopted by teachers and examiners- when they upgrade their programs to make students familiar with textual, social, and cognitive aspects of translation.

In this regard, the development of PACTE`s psycho-physiological components in students can increase their awareness and knowledge about the cognitive process of translation that occurs in their minds. As mentioned before, these components are memory, perception, attention and emotion, motivation, confidence, logical reasoning, etc. the cited programs generally lack appropriate courses and exercises that aim to boost the students` cognitive ability and attitudes.

Another aspect of translation competence is “The Extra-linguistic” sub-competence that includes the non-translation, encyclopedic knowledge about the subject matters, and the history and cultures of source and target languages. The only module that partially covers it is Kurdistan Studies although it is regarded as a basic module for students of all majors. Despite its importance, this aspect of TC is not systematically included in any one of the mentioned programs. Its development is left to students- and to some extent to the teachers` qualification- to expand their bicultural knowledge through passing other courses.

Another less notified but crucial aspect of TC is “Instrumental” sub-competence that is the knowledge of using technologies to translation and translation aids (e.g., dictionaries, encyclopaedias, grammars, parallel texts, electronic corpora, TM, CAT tools, and MT as a whole). The only department of the mentioned universities that included the study of translation-related technologies and tools application is Cihan University`s which has included two subjects of “Machine Translation” and “Audio-Visual Translation”. Nowadays, professional translators rely on recently developed translation memories and CAT tools in addition to paperback and electronic dictionaries to save time and energy in translating enormous volumes of texts in the shortest possible time with an acceptable level of quality. Therefore, translation students need to develop these instrumental abilities to become professionals.

Last but not the least aspect of TC is the “Strategic” sub-competence. As it is previously stated, this sub-competence refers to the knowledge of efficient activation and application of other sub-competencies to solve translation problems, to plan and carry out translation projects, and to assess the translation process and product. This ability makes the translation process conscious in students` minds. Unfortunately, none of the above-mentioned programs considered the development of the strategic TC. Like, the theoretical, encyclopaedic, and instrumental sub-competencies, the development of strategic competence depends upon the teacher`s qualification and ability to improves students` consciousness about the translation process and product, and its evaluation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper strongly maintains that the goal of any translator education program should be the development of students` transfer capacity- which is sub-categorized as the mentioned components of translation competence. In this regard, the mentioned Iraqi universities` translation programs need to undertake some fundamental modifications to achieve this goal. These modifications include- but not limited to appropriating subjects accurately and economically; giving equal weight to all components of TC via giving appropriate credit units to their relevant subjects; adopting Social Constructivist Approach to teaching translation; designing courses that contain modern translation activities, tools, and skills; consulting with professional translators and inviting them to deliver seminars to students; and providing students with an internship in translation or translation practicum. These amendments will bring students closer to the real-world sense of becoming a cross-cultural communicator (i.e., a translator), instead of sinking into the abstract realm of language learning where the optimal goal is necessary to become a good communicator in the English language. More importantly, these programs will let translation students develop different components of TC by appropriate materials, course designs, and teaching methods.

Furthermore, the adoption of the social constructivist approach facilitates the acquisition of translation competence for students. There, due to the interactive nature of the translation classroom, translation students can learn different translation skills from each other and construct translation knowledge in collaboration with other classmates. In such interactive classes, students actively participate in drafting target text and defending the translation techniques, methods, and strategies they apply.

In sum, considering the components of translation competence, and adopting the Social Constructivist approach in updating the mentioned translation programs will provide students with a productive learning atmosphere where they can move towards professionalism and meeting the translation market needs.

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