

Volumen 7 - Número 1 - Enero / Junio 2021

# 100-Cs

ISSN 0719-5737



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# 100-Cs

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## Indización

Revista 100-Cs, se encuentra indizada en:



## CATÁLOGO



## TRANSLATORS AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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**Fecha de Recepción:** 15 de junio de 2020 – **Fecha Revisión:** 30 de junio de 2020

**Fecha de Aceptación:** 26 de octubre de 2020 – **Fecha de Publicación:** 01 de enero de 2021

### Abstract

The translator plays a very important role within a global society. He/she enables the establishment of relations among people with different backgrounds and languages. When doing so, he/she is taking part in the cycle of communication, where the characters of author, translator and reader are interchangeable. The aim of this article is to discuss the role of the translator in the society as well as to describe and analyse the expert knowledge he has to acquire in order to perform a good job.

### Keywords

Translator – Translation competence – Communication

### Para Citar este Artículo:

De Luxán Hernández, Lía. Translators and intercultural communication. Revista 100-Cs Vol: 6 num 1 (2020): 35-42.

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## Introduction

The translator is the person who enables intercultural communication, who allows horizons to be expanded, who assists those who want to be listened to in other “worlds” through oral, written or sign language and cannot do it by themselves. When transferring messages, the translator should pay attention to the translation brief and therefore be aware of the client’s request, the *skopos* of the Source Text (ST) and Target Text (TT), the reader, the theories of translation, the different strategies to be applied depending on the particular case, the genre, the text type, etc. Hence he/she needs to acquire expert knowledge as a means of translation competence, translation instruction and professional artistry<sup>1</sup>.

## The translator within the communication process

Author, translator and reader are parts of a communication cycle, where reality and perception control the message. The aesthetics of reception puts the emphasis on the fact that each reading produces a new text and this leads us to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a unique way of understanding a message. The author of the ST writes about reality, subjectively selecting those abstract or concrete concepts he/she wants to talk about, putting them into a message where his/her life experience is to be seen, whether he/she wants it or not. When the translator receives the text, he/she proceeds to read it, paying attention to the translation problems he/she can encounter when transferring the ST into the TT. Nord maintains that the translator is a peculiar reader too because she thinks that he/she “does not read the text for his own purpose in order to be informed or amused”<sup>2</sup>. I think that this is not totally right. The translator acts and should act as a simple reader, enjoying and learning what is about to be translated. Furthermore, if he/she wants to accomplish a good translation, he/she should study the topic dealt with in the text and, in my opinion, this implies that he/she, at least, has to play the role of being interested in the ST and should try to look at it as leisure and learning material.

The translator is not just a reader. He/she is a text producer: he/she is the co-author of the TT. The translator has to try to get into the author’s mind in order to interpret the author’s feelings and thoughts. Only this way, he/she would be able to “produce a communicative instrument for the target culture, or a target culture document of a source-culture communication”<sup>3</sup>. He/she has to experience in an encyclopedic manner what to be living is/was like in the author’s socio-cultural context. Depending on the translation brief, he/she would be able to reproduce the author’s message, using an equivalent or heteroalent strategy.

The reader is the addressee of the TT, the pattern of measuring the acceptability of a translated text and the reason for the translation activity to exist: to guarantee the communication of two persons of different language-cultures. His/her reading of the TT and therefore, indirectly, of the ST, is going to be different from that of the translator and the author. His/her encyclopedic knowledge is different. He/she does not look at the text as a translation, unless he/she is a scholar or an academic assessing it.

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<sup>1</sup> DA. Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990) y K. Marais, “The wise translator: reflecting on judgement in translator education”, *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*. Vol: 24(4) (2008): 471-477.

<sup>2</sup> CH. Nord, *Text analysis in Translation. Theory, Methodology, and Didactic application of a Model for Translation- Oriented Text Analysis* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 10.

<sup>3</sup> CH. Nord, *Text analysis in Translation. Theory, Methodology...* 11.

The roles of author, translator and reader can be interchangeable *lato sensu*. The author of a ST is a reader of other texts (translated or not). There are no truly original documents: every text is a product of several intertextual references, either explicit or implicit. Hence it can be said that a text is a fruit of the cognoscible reality of the author through written and oral documents. He/she is a translator as well, in the sense that he is an interpreter of reality with the help of his own feelings and thoughts.

The translator plays both the role of the author and reader as well. He/she is first a reader when dealing with the ST, but as mentioned above, he scrutinizes the text regarding his/her translation purpose, looking for translation difficulties. He/she is the writer of the TT, yet the voice of the author, who remains the owner of his/her thoughts and piece of writing. The reader translates the TT according to his/her personal world view and “translation” here does not refer to the translator’s task, but as suggested above, regarding the author’s translation task, to a philosophical way of understanding and comprehending the TT. It can also be said that he/she assumes the author’s role because every author is, above all, a reader.

### Translation competence and communicative competence

It is not an easy task to provide an accurate definition of “translation competence”. Abstract concepts are the most difficult to define. Moreover, academics have referred to this notion using different terms (e.g. “transfer competence”<sup>4</sup> “translational competence”<sup>5</sup>; “translation skill”<sup>6</sup>, etc.). Discussions about “translation competence” are normally introduced bringing Chomsky’s distinction between linguistic competence (knowledge of the language of an ideal speaker-listener in a homogenous speech community) and linguistic performance (use of language of the ideal speaker-listener in concrete situations not affected by grammatical errors, memory limitations, distractions, etc.) to the table<sup>7</sup>. But researchers could locate the origin of the term in Saussure, because as Hymes<sup>8</sup>, Beaugrande<sup>9</sup> and many general and applied linguists have pointed out, Chomsky bases his distinction on the “langue-parole” division established by Saussure.

Thanks to sociolinguistics, the term “competence” started to be seen as a more comprehensive, realistic and/or wider concept where the issue of appropriacy was taken into consideration. Hymes<sup>10</sup> considers that sociocultural factors affect both linguistic and performance competence and criticizes Chomsky’s paradise of language competence and use for not being in consonance with the real world. Chomsky studies the mental architecture that sustains language. He pays attention to what is behind language: it is the rules, principles, parameters, etc. that govern it.

<sup>4</sup> CH. Nord, Text analysis in Translation. Theory, Methodology... 161.

<sup>5</sup> G. Toury, Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond (Ámsterdam: John Benjamins, 1995), 250-251 y A. Chesterman (ed.), Memes of Translation: The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theories (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 1997), 147.

<sup>6</sup> P. Lowe, “Revising the ACTFL/ETS Scales for a New Purpose: Rating Skill in Translating,” in M.G. Rose (ed.) Translation Excellence: Assessment, Achievement, Maintenance. American Translators Association Series, vol. 1 (New York: SUNY Binghamton Press, 1997), 57.

<sup>7</sup> N. Chomsky, Aspects of the Theory of Syntax (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1965).

<sup>8</sup> D. H. Hymes, “On communicative Competence”. In Pride, J.B. and Holmes, J. (eds), Sociolinguistics. Selected Readings (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 269-293.

<sup>9</sup> R. de Beaugrande, Linguistic Theory. The discourse of fundamental works (Nueva York: Longman, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> D. H. Hymes, “On communicative Competence...”



While Hymes is interested in how language is used. He focuses on the knowing how, on the real manifestations of the language<sup>11</sup>. Hymes is for a linguistic theory which is embraced by a theory of communication and culture and so he talks about “communicative competence”. Circumstances and social factors play a relevant role when communicating and knowing how to use the tools the language provides upon every occasion means having communicative competence. It is not just grammar, but the ability of knowing how to make use of it depending on the circumstances.

Hymes disagrees with Chomsky<sup>12</sup> and Bloomfield<sup>13</sup> in terms of the association of language and speech community. He does not picture the ideal speaker-listener of Chomsky in a homogenous speech community, but in a heterogeneous society. Savignon emphasizes that communicative competence has to be considered as an ability. Thus, she describes it as a relative, intrapersonal and dynamic concept<sup>14</sup>. Widdowson does not embrace the idea of conceiving communicative competence as an ability. He reserves this concept to what he calls capacity. He is considered the first theorist to have paid more attention to what performance implies rather than to what competence is about<sup>15</sup>. “Capacity”, on the contrary, makes allusion to the procedural or communicative ability, to the skills that enable the creation of meaning in language.

Canale and Swain<sup>16</sup> draw a distinction between communicative competence and actual communication. The former is the underlying systems of knowledge and abilities that are necessary to communicate, while the latter refers to the real knowledge and skills that someone makes use of under psychological and environmental conditions such as fatigue, memory, nervousness, background noises, distractions in general, etc. In my opinion “actual communication” is what others call “performance” but I think that it is a good strategy to employ the notion “communication” here, because translation is seen in present times as an art of communication, as a communicative act. There is a tacit agreement on understanding translation competence as a part of communicative competence.

Hence translation competence can be seen as a specialized form of communicative competence<sup>17</sup>, which explains the significance of having introduced the subject commencing

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<sup>11</sup> H. Widdowson, “Knowledge of language and ability for use”, *Applied Linguistics*, Vol: 10 (2) (1989): 128-137.

<sup>12</sup> N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax...*

<sup>13</sup> L. Bloomfield, *Language* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1933).

<sup>14</sup> S. J. Savignon, *Communicative Competence: An Experiment in Foreign Language Teaching* (Philadelphia: The Centre for Curriculum Development, Inc. 1972).

<sup>15</sup> V. Bagarić and J. Mihaljević Djigunović, “Defining communicative competence”, *Metodika*. Vol: 8 br. 1 (2007): 94-103.

<sup>16</sup> M. Canale y M. Swain, “A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence. In Palmer, A.; Groot, P. y Trosper, G. (eds.). *The construct validation of test of communicative competence*. 1981. 31-36.

<sup>17</sup> G. Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond...*; G. Shreve, “Cognition and the evolution of translation competence”, In Danks, J. et al. (eds.). *Cognitive Processes in Translation and Interpreting* (Thousand Oaks y Londres: Sage, 1997), 120-136; Pacte, “Investigating Translation Competence: Conceptual and Methodological Issues”. In *Meta*. Vol: 50 (2) (2005): 609-619; Pacte, “Building a Translation Competence Model”. In ALVES, F. (ed.), *Triangulating Translation: Perspectives in Process Oriented Research* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2003); Pacte, “First Results of a Translation Competence Experiment: Knowledge of Translation and Efficacy of the Translation Process”. In Kearns, J. (ed.). *Translator and Interpreter Training. Issues, Methods and Debates* (London: Continuum, 2008), 104-126 y Pacte, “Results of the Validation of the PACTE



with the definition of Chomsky<sup>18</sup> about “competence” and later with its evolution as “communicative competence”, starting with Hymes<sup>19</sup>. Translation competence is thus one of the examples of the new expansion the concept has experienced, according to today’s society, where specialization rules both the academic and the professional world. This is in line with Chesterman<sup>20</sup> and Pacte<sup>21</sup> who consider translation as a kind of expertise.

The ideal general translator has translation competence. The real translator who confronts the translation of a text has translation competence too, yet adjusted to the translation task (particular translation competence). The production of a translation can be called translation performance, considering Canale and Swain’s<sup>22</sup> distinction between communicative competence and actual communication. The actual translation competence should have to be seen in the target text. Is translation competence an innate ability or a skill that can be acquired with instruction and experience? Do bilinguals have a better predisposition to translate? Lörscher<sup>23</sup> points out that translation competence is an innate predisposition every human being has and that this is not controversial. Yet Shreve<sup>24</sup> considers that only communicative competence is universally possessed. Toury<sup>25</sup> defends that bilinguals have an innate ability to translate. And Harris and Sherwood<sup>26</sup> call them “natural translators”. Lörscher<sup>27</sup> prefers to talk about rudimentary translations when referring to the translations executed by bilinguals, because he sees them as sense oriented. Harris and Sherwood<sup>28</sup> are of the opinion that translation abilities derive from bilingualism. Unlike them, Toury<sup>29</sup> thinks that “the intersection of dual competences does not necessarily create translation competence”, whilst for Shreve, transfer competence, “implies knowledge structures that are not usually considered part of bilingualism”<sup>30</sup>.

### How to acquire translation competence

Translation competence is described by Lörscher as “a developmental process that is never final”<sup>31</sup>. The learning process can be defined as cyclical. Dreyfus and Dreyfus<sup>32</sup>

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Translation Competence Model: Translation Project and Dynamic Translation Index”. In O’Brien, S. (ed.). IATIS Yearbook 2010 (Londres: Continuum, 2010).

<sup>18</sup> N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax...*

<sup>19</sup> D. H. Hymes, “On communicative Competence...”

<sup>20</sup> A. Chesterman (ed.), *Memes of Translation: The Spread...*

<sup>21</sup> Pacte, “Investigating Translation Competence: Conceptual and Methodological...”; Pacte, “First Results of a Translation Competence Experiment...”; Pacte. “Building a Translation Competence Model... y Pacte, “Results of the Validation of the...”

<sup>22</sup> M. Canale y M. Swain, “A Theoretical Framework for Communicative Competence...”

<sup>23</sup> W. Lörscher, *Translation Performance, Translation Process and Translation Strategies: A Psycholinguistic Investigation*. Col. *Language in Performance*. Vol. 4. Tübingen, Narr. 1991.

<sup>24</sup> G. Shreve, “Cognition and the evolution of translation competence...”

<sup>25</sup> G. Toury, “Natural Translation and the Making of a Native Translator”, *TextconText*. Num 1 (1986): 11-29.

<sup>26</sup> B. Harris y B. Sherwood, “Translation as an innate skill”. In Gerver, D., Sinaiko, W.H. (eds.). *Language Interpretation and Communication* (Nueva York: Plenum Press, 1978), 155-170.

<sup>27</sup> W. Lörscher, “A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Translation Processes”, *Meta*. Vol: 41 num 1 (1996): 26-32.

<sup>28</sup> B. Harris y B. Sherwood, “Translation as an innate skill...”

<sup>29</sup> G. Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond...*

<sup>30</sup> G. Shreve, “Cognition and the evolution of translation competence... 121-122.

<sup>31</sup> W. Lörscher, *Translation Performance, Translation Process and Translation...* 41.

<sup>32</sup> H. Dreyfus y S. Dreyfus, *Mind over machine: the power of human intuitive expertise in the era of the computer* (New York: Free Press, 1986).

structure the acquisition of any knowledge or skill into five steps and Chesterman<sup>33</sup> apparently adapts it to translation but does not give any examples as regards the acquisition of translation expertise and, imitating them, illustrates the process explaining how to become an expert driver. Chesterman's five stages are novice translator, advanced-beginner translator, competent translator, proficient translator and expert translator.

PACTE<sup>34</sup> and Orozco<sup>35</sup>, based on Anderson<sup>36</sup> and Ryle<sup>37</sup>, explain the distinction between declarative (knowing what) and procedural knowledge (knowing how) which are conceived to walk together and to be part of the development of the acquisition of expert knowledge, which in our particular case, is referred to as "translation competence." Declarative knowledge comes first: the further the apprentice goes into the process of learning how to become a good translator, the more unconscious he is of the steps to bear in mind when translating. He/she operates taking them into consideration but not wasting time thinking about things that become automatic. In this line, Toury<sup>38</sup> observes that each stage is a mixture of innate, individual and social knowledge.

### Final remarks

It can be concluded that the translator (who is a reader and a writer at the same time) plays a significance role in our society. He/she enables the intercultural communication thanks to his/her expert knowledge (the underlying systems of knowledge and abilities that are necessary to communicate), his/her translation instruction (innate skills do not exclude the education within this field), which can be defined as cyclical, as a never-ended learning process and as a combination of declarative (knowing what) and procedural knowledge (knowing how). The translator has to experience in an encyclopedic manner what to be living is/was like in the author's socio-cultural context, taking always into consideration the fact that every text is a product of several intertextual references. Depending on the translation brief, he/she would be able to reproduce the author's message, using an equivalent or heteroalent strategy.

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<sup>33</sup> A. Chesterman (ed.), Memes of Translation: The Spread...

<sup>34</sup> Pacte. "Building a Translation Competence Model..."

<sup>35</sup> M. Orozco Jutorán, Instrumentos de medición de la adquisición de la competencia traductora: construcción y validación. PhD Thesis: Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. 2000.

<sup>36</sup> J. R. Anderson, The architecture of cognition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Ryle, G. The Concept of Mind (New York: Penguin Books, 1949).

<sup>38</sup> G. Toury, Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond...

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