Evaluating Female Translators

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to guide the teachers about how the evaluation process should be and it highlights the effectiveness and suitability of adopting Hurtado's method of evaluation on female translators. This method was applied to the correction of female students' translations of the final exam containing different texts to be translated in both directions between English and Arabic. The exam was applied to 43 respondents. The hypothesis regarding the suitability and effectiveness of using Hurtado's method and the possibility to improve the quality of the evaluating the students' translations in future based on this method has been verified. This study concluded that this method was found out to be reasonable to give impartial translation quality evaluation for the students' translations.

Keywords: Students' Translations, Hurtado's Method, Evaluation, Translation Errors

1. Introduction

It is really hard for translation teachers to evaluate their students' performance in the translation exams due to the fact that the types of translation mistakes are manifold and there is not a universal translation method, strategy or approach that can tackle all these mismatches of translation. If using one strategy per se can make the teacher handle some translation mistakes fairly, it might not be applicable for others. There is no way to treat all the semantic, cultural, structural, and stylistic mistakes alike. Each case should be treated and evaluated on its own (See de Beaugrande, 1978: 135, Hatim, 2001: 155). Indeed, translation teachers are believed to have no clear vision about handling their students' translations. There is not always a clear-cut distinction between right and wrong in evaluating translation exams. This makes many of them tend to improvise. On the other hand, a close survey at the related literature on Translation Quality Assessment shows that most of the related studies have been theoretical or descriptive and have focused mainly on: Establishing the relative nature of translation errors (Williams 1989, Pym 1992, Kussmaul 1995); Assessment based on the psycholinguistic theory of "scenes and frames" (Bensoussan & Rosenhouse 1994, Snell-Hornby 1995); Defining the nature of translation errors as opposed to language errors (House 1981, Kussmaul 1995); Basing quality assessment on text linguistic analysis (House 1981); Establishing the criteria for a "good translation" (Newmark 1991); The need to evaluate quality not only at the linguistic but also the pragmatic level (Sager 1989, Williams 1989, Hewson 1995, Kussmaul 1995, Hatim & Mason 1997); among other related things. In addition, the empirical studies concerning Translation Quality Assessment have been relatively few in number (Campbell, 1991; Séguinot, 1989, 1990; Stansfield et al, 1992; Waddington, 2001).

The current paper is different in the following aspects:

(1) It concentrates on translation course at a different setting (i.e., College of Women at Hadhramout University) using the languages of Arabic and English.

(2) The subjects of the study sample are all females ranging from 21-25 years old to eliminate the effect of the factors of gender and age.

(3) To arrive at a suitable correction method, I formulated the final exam of the course of *translation (1)* that considered the level of the respondents as I have been teaching this course for 5 years so far.

(4) The researcher applied only one method which is Hurtado's error analysis method excluding the holistic and other methods in correcting the final exam to see to what extent the former method is applicable.

(5) This study gives consideration to the results obtained through applying this method to the correction process of translations in final test atmosphere.

2. The Study Experiment

2.1. Hurtado's Method of Evaluation

This method considers the negative effect of translation mistakes as well as the positive effect of solutions of translation problems on the overall quality of the translation. Hurtado's (1995) method depends on error analysis. Translation errors are classified in accordance with Table 1 below:

Table 1. A Scale of Hurtado's Evaluation Method

(1) Inappropriate renderings which affect the understanding of the source text		Minor Error	Serious Error
Mistranslation		–1 point	–2 points
Wrong meaning		–1 point	–2 points
Nonsensical		–1 point	–2 points
Addition		–1 point	–2 points
Omission		–1 point	–2 points
Unresolved extralinguistic references		–1 point	–2 points
Loss of meaning		–1 point	–2 points
inappropriate linguistic variation	Register	–1 points	–2 points
	style	–1 points	–2 points
	Dialect	–1 points	–2 points
(2) Inappropriate renderings which affect expression in the target language		Minor Error	Serious Error
Spelling		–1 point	–2 points
Grammar		–1 point	–2 points
lexical items		–1 point	–2 points
Text		–1 point	–2 points
Style		–1 point	–2 points
(3) Inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of the following		Minor Error	Serious Error
The main function of the source text		–1 point	–2 points
Secondary functions of the source text		–1 point	–2 points
(4) The plus points		Good Solutions	Exceptionally Good Solutions
		+1 point	+ 2 points

As for the study in hand, the sum of the negative marks was deducted from a total of 100. The student needs 50 (i.e. 50%) points to reach the lowest pass mark (which is the normal Yemeni system of evaluation).

3. The Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that the suitability and effectiveness of using Hurtado's method of evaluation is high and that it is possible to improve the quality of the evaluating the students' translations in future based on this method.

4. The Study Sample

This study is set to explore and describe issues related to translation evaluation. This study focused on the sample of translation students. The study was applied to female translators with almost similar age using a purposeful non-random sampling. They should not be discriminated by factors like gender and age as the focus of this study is not on these factors. Students are in the third year of their undergraduate study at the university. The justification for selecting these students is that third year students can put these respondents in a better situation to work more confidently in the exam when compared to students of lower levels. They are supposed to have a relatively good command of English general language skills besides their Arabic (mother tongue). They have already attended a translation course (i.e., translation 1) and the study has been applied to the final exam of this course, which is usually given in the first semester of the academic year.

5. The Final Translation Exam

The exam paper (See appendix) was quite similar to other final exams of the same course adopted in last 5 years. It consisted of written texts in both translation directions (i.e., from English into Arabic and vice versa) so as to make a balance or moderation in the degree of the exam difficulty assuming that translation into one's mother tongue is always easier. The exam included four sentences that contained modals and passive voice, plus two general passages. The English passage discussed a story of a naive Japanese boy who was killed in USA because of his poor English while the Arabic one spoke about Zidane as the best football player in the world. Using dictionaries is allowed in this final exam. The total number of the English texts was 165 words long while the Arabic text was only 85 words. The duration of this translation exam was 3 hours. Since the English text was a bit longer, it was given 55 marks out of 100 while the remaining 45 marks go for the Arabic text.

6. How the Method Was Carried out

To verify the hypothesis, this method was applied to 43 English department female students at the College of Women in Hadhramout University, Yemen. This evaluation method was applied by a professional corrector whose major is Arabic-English translation, considering the lessons of the translation syllabus that the students have taken in the translation course of that semester. Applying the correction process was straightforward and systematic in the light of Hurtado's (1995) method. One red line is drawn under the minor error which does not really affect the sentence general intended meaning. Two red lines are drawn under the serious error that can affect the general intended meaning. After completing the correction, the more lines are found on the answer sheet, the less level the student will get in accordance with Hurtado's correction method. Answer sheets of the final exam are given to the corrector after hiding the names of the students. This procedure is usually done for final exam of all courses by a control committee in the college to avoid bias. This is the way evaluation is carried out to get the result of each student.

7. The Study Results

In order to get high degree of objectivity in the research, the students' translation answer sheets have been corrected horizontally. That is to say, the teacher has corrected the answer of the first question for all the students at first. He then corrected the answer of the second question. Having used Hurtado (1995) correction method stated above, Table 2 below shows the general detailed result of the students.

Table 2. The General Detailed Results

Student No.	Marks out of 100	Result	Student No.	Marks out of 100	Result
Student 1	48	Fail	Student 23	87	Pass
Student 2	88	Pass	Student 24	90	Pass
Student 3	100	Pass	Student 25	59	Pass
Student 4	97	Pass	Student 26	92	Pass
Student 5	97	Pass	Student 27	96	Pass
Student 6	33	Fail	Student 28	32	Fail
Student 7	59	Pass	Student 29	25	Fail
Student 8	65	Pass	Student 30	97	Pass
Student 9	66	Pass	Student 31	87	Pass
Student 10	76	Pass	Student 32	81	Pass
Student 11	78	Pass	Student 33	95	Pass
Student 12	64	Pass	Student 34	69	Pass
Student 13	59	Pass	Student 35	92	Pass
Student 14	48	Fail	Student 36	90	Pass
Student 15	38	Fail	Student 37	29	Fail
Student 16	29	Fail	Student 38	88	Pass
Student 17	69	Pass	Student 39	82	Pass
Student 18	81	Pass	Student 40	85	Pass
Student 19	81	Pass	Student 41	94	Pass
Student 20	52	Pass	Student 42	97	Pass
Student 21	70	Pass	Student 43	37	Fail
Student 22	96	Pass			

The first look at Table 2 above indicates that applying this correction method resulted in few failure cases. The student needs 50 marks (50%) to reach the lowest pass mark. This goes in harmony with the normal system of evaluation at Yemeni Universities. In order to precisely calculate the number of those who failed in the exam, we can take a look at Table 3 below.

Table 3. The General Accumulative Results

Type	Pass	Fail	Total
Frequency	34	9	43
Percentage	79.07 %	20.93 %	100 %

Table 3 reveals that 9 cases which is equal to 20.93 % of the whole number of the study respondents did not manage to get even the lowest pass mark. To go further in the analysis, other calculation has been made on the factor of the translation direction to see whether this factor has any impact. Table 4 below shows a detailed outcome of Q1 which contained texts to be translated into Arabic and Q2 which contained a text to be translated into English.

Table 4. The Impact of the Translation Direction on Failure Rate

Student No.	Direction to Arabic (55 marks)	Direction to English (45 marks)	Student No.	Direction to Arabic (55 marks)	Direction to English (45 marks)
Student 1	31	17	Student 23	52	35
Student 2	49`	39	Student 24	49	41
Student 3	55	45	Student 25	38	21
Student 4	53	44	Student 26	51	41
Student 5	52	45	Student 27	54	42
Student 6	27	6	Student 28	32	0
Student 7	43	16	Student 29	19	6
Student 8	41	24	Student 30	52	45
Student 9	42	24	Student 31	47	40
Student 10	50	26	Student 32	49	32
Student 11	46	32	Student 33	50	45
Student 12	31	33	Student 34	39	30
Student 13	38	21	Student 35	48	44
Student 14	44	4	Student 36	51	39
Student 15	36	2	Student 37	29	0
Student 16	29	0	Student 38	52	36
Student 17	45	24	Student 39	51	31
Student 18	43	38	Student 40	49	36
Student 19	49	32	Student 41	52	42
Student 20	38	14	Student 42	52	45
Student 21	37	33	Student 43	34	3
Student 22	52	44			

* The dark boxes indicate failure while the bright boxes indicate success.

The table above gives an indication that the factor of translation direction has a significant impact on the students' failure rate. In order to calculate the number of those who failed in each direction, we can take a look at Table 5 below.

Table 5. Total of the Impact of the Translation Direction on Failure Rate

	Direction to Arabic (55 marks)	Direction to English (45 marks)
Total of Failure	2	13
percentage	4.65 %	30.23 %

Table 5 displayed the students' result on each question with different translation direction. It has been found out that there is a profound impact of the translation direction on failure rate. Most failure cases happened in the Q2 which requires translation to go from Arabic into English. 13 students (30.23 %) were unsuccessful and got below 50 % of the marks allotted for this question despite the fact that Q2 was only given 45 when compared to Q1 which was given 55 by the translation exam designer to lessen the impact of this factor. Therefore, this is a strong indication that students' competence of the English language, especially in English writing skill, is remarkably poor.

8. Discussion

Critics may say that the Hurtado's method of evaluation is reasonable, but it does not have enough degree of precision and objectivity because of its partial reliance on the corrector's personal anticipation and appreciation. For example, the corrector can subtract 1 or 2 marks for each mistake according to his own ability to behave in a sensible way and make personal decision. There is no definite criterion to choose either one as exactly as it can be seen in applying the other error analysis method (Cf. Kussmaul 1995:129) in which correction process can result in objectively calculated marks

without the corrector's emotional interference. However, this method is believed to have minimized the subjectivity in the correction process and increased the objectivity in return. This can be seen in the restriction imposed on the corrector that makes him/her move only within the range of 1-2 marks for a mistake. It doesn't give freedom more than that.

In addition, Hurtado's method proponents defend it by saying that it is logically fine due to the fact that the corrector would usually be a reliable professional teacher who can fairly take the right decision with this regard. Moreover, all students were evaluated without bias and whatever decision was taken for a student will be applied to all others simply because answer sheets of the final exam are given to the corrector without the students' names.

On the other hand, taking a close look at the students' general accumulative result (Table 3) has given a general impression that this method is sensible. This can be manifested in the number of the failure cases which reached 9 students (20.93 %). The local policy of the college considers this to be reasonable percentage of failure rate which normally happens in most subjects taught in this particular English department. This denotes that Hurtado's method could constitute an acceptable option to evaluate translations when compared to the other holistic evaluation method (Waddington, 2001) which is accused of being too lenient and allows many students to be part of the highest level according to the method scale.

On the other hand, Hurtado's method is thought to have pushed the corrector to be rather lenient and it confines him/her to subtract 2 marks maximum for an error even though some lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors were too serious and deserve more marks to be subtracted because such mistakes can completely distort the translation. These mistakes are considered serious, but they are penalized with -2 only. However, one should bear in mind that students are beginners and they have studied translation for the first time in their life. Translation 1 in which they were examined is the first course that they study about translation. Probably, they might be treated with more strictness for evaluating exams of translation 2 and other advanced courses. More precisely, Hurtado's method has proved to be valid for this particular sample of translation beginners. It might not be valid for experienced translators. This assumption needs further study to support or refute it.

Moreover, it was observed that the direction of the translation was a remarkable factor and had a clear connection with the degree of difficulty of the exam questions. In accordance with result shown in Table 5 above, it was quite clear that most mistakes were committed in the question in which students were supposed to translate a text from Arabic into English. This supported the assumption that translating into one's mother tongue is easier.

9. Conclusion

The conclusions of the study can be summed up in the fact that if Hurtado's correction method is accused of being not strict enough, it remains valid for translation beginners. It is a dependable method because it can be justly applied to all students without distinction.

The other accusation of Hurtado's method is that it allows some room of evaluation to depend on the corrector's subjective intuition which might be rather imprecise and hard to measure. However, this intuition is sensible and trustworthy since the subjective range is limited and the correction process is always carried out by professional translation teachers.

On the other hand, an advantage of this method is that it can easily distinguish the studious top respondents and it can give good chance to see the individual differences among students. It also keeps failure rate to be within the normal range. This would make us say that the hypothesis regarding the suitability of using this evaluation analysis method has been verified. This gives a positive impression that this method is not too lenient. This method is manifested, according to the results, in the fact that students are accountable for the lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.

However, it might be generally felt that the penalty is smaller than the mistake committed bearing in mind that when the penalty is small, the students do not ask about it or try to correct themselves. They may carelessly repeat committing the same mistake many times. On the contrary, if the evaluation scale is strict and penalty is tough, this encourages the students to try understanding their mistakes and they would become keen to correct themselves and avoid doing the same mistake in future. Therefore, there is a kind of worry that students will not improve in translation if they were given easy success like that. Therefore, other advanced translation courses should not be evaluated using this method.

Finally, it is concluded that the exam questions were sensible and rather easy. This has been shown in the result in which (79.07 %) of the students has scored pass mark. Despite the relative simplicity of the exam, possibility of using dictionaries, and the long time allowed, the total failure cases (20.93 %) are not too little though. This failure rate in this simple exam is a clear indication that the translation competence of a considerable number of students is rather poor and a recommendation is, therefore, worth mentioning here. It is that there should be an entrance (written and oral) exam for the new comers who want to join the English department in this particular college so that only those with highest potentials who should not exceed 35 students per year are to be accepted.

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APPENDIX

FINAL EXAM IN THE SUBJECT OF TRANSLATION (1)

Hadhramaut University

College of Women – Seiyun

جامعة حضرموت

كلية البنات . سيئون

Final Exam of the First Semester 2013-2014

Class: Third Year   Date: Thursday 23/1/2014

Department: English   Time Allowed: 3 hours

Course: Translation (1)

Answer ALL the following questions:

1) Translate the following texts into Arabic:

a) Boys should clean their room twice a week.   (5 marks)
b) My leg was hurt yesterday, so I must not play basketball.   (5 marks)
c) This big house was built by Ali before 8 years.   (5 marks)
d) Many students lose marks simply because they do not read the questions properly. (5 marks)

e)   **The Japanese Boy**

A Japanese boy went to USA to study English. One day, he went to a birthday party. This party was organized by other Japanese students. But the boy got the wrong address. He got lost in the town. When he saw a nice building of the international bank, he stopped and knocked the door. He thought that it was the house of his friend. The policeman thought that this boy might be a thief. The policeman asked the boy to raise his hands up and stop moving. The Japanese boy did not understand because his English was poor. He continued moving and tried to enter the bank. The policeman shot him. The boy died immediately. (35 marks)

2) Translate the following text into English:

a) (45 marks)

زيدان أفضل لاعب

كان زيدان لاعب مشهور في كرة قدم. وُلد في فرنسا في <u>1972</u>. أصله من الجزائر. يُعتبر زيدان معجزة في تاريخ كرة القدم. أصبح الشعب الفرنسي فخور به. وكل الناس أحبته. حصل فريق بلاده على كأس العالم في كرة القدم. يستطيع زيدان أن يلعب جيداً. ويستطيع ان يعطي الكرة في الوقت المناسب لتسجيل الهدف. حصل زيدان على جائزة أفضل لاعب في العالم 3 مرات. شعر الناس بالمفاجأة عندما أختير كأفضل لاعب في أوروبا. لعب كثير من المباريات الدولية. وقد أحرز كثيراً من الاهداف.