Where Does Working Language End and Translation Begin?

Abstract
This paper addresses two main issues: popular misconceptions about translation, primarily the equation of linguistic skills with translation competence, and possible ways of exploiting (foreign) working language competence in the management and execution of translation projects. The first part looks at the various elements which constitute translation competence and examines, from a functionalist point of view, the complex role of translators as cross-cultural communicators. Only with a greater understanding of what translators actually do will work-providers be able to make effective use of their services. The second part considers how systematic linguistic auditing and language management within organisations can increase the efficiency of translation departments and projects by enhancing cooperation between translators and (foreign-)language users and by making proper use of foreign-language competence in the translation workflow.

Scope and Definitions
The title of this paper is intended to suggest two things: that a clear distinction has to be drawn between the ability to use a working language and the skills of the professional translator, and that working language competence can nevertheless form part of the process leading to a translational product. The word "translation" in the title refers exclusively to the professional translation work done by seasoned, trained practitioners. The bulk of what is said can apply equally to professional interpreters, though I have refrained from any specific consideration of their profession.

The "working language" of the title is taken to mean a second language competently used in the pursuit of one's profession. For any meaningful comparison to be made between translation and working language, it goes without saying that the type of working language competence discussed here presupposes the existence of a mother-tongue into or out of which a worker may be required or tempted to translate. In this sense, working language tacitly posits the existence of a language pair, an A and a B language, and thus the corresponding potential for translation into or out of one's mother tongue or the second language.

"Educating the Client"
"In the same way that most of us cannot imagine the complexity involved in making an animated film [...] many clients have misconceptions concerning the work of a translator [...] Some clients may have the impression that translation is a sort of sideline practised by people with spare time [...] Bilingual secretaries are often expected to act as translators [...] Some clients genuinely feel that the translator simply has to press a button on his or her computer before sending off the completed job together with the invoice" (Weschke 1996: 151f).
These words, from a popular practical guide for translators, present an all too familiar picture of the many false impressions that non-translators harbour about what translation involves. A significant body of literature for and about the profession urges translators to "educate the client" (Weschke 1996, Samuelsson-Brown 1998: 26, Risku & Freihoff 2000: 58), and some practitioners take it upon themselves to do so (Fraser 1999a: 14; Wagner). Yet there is still a great deal of work to be done, as is clear from the findings reported by Fraser of surveys she conducted among freelance translators about the information, support and feedback they receive from clients (Fraser 1997, 1999a, 2000). As Weschke suggests in his reference to bilingual secretaries, the most popular misconception is to equate foreign-language competence with translation competence, in other words that "if you speak a foreign language ipso facto you can automatically translate into it" (Samuelsson-Brown 1998: 2). Many people take for granted that any bilingual person can interpret or translate, and think that interlingual communication cannot be very difficult (Nida 2000: 3). Fraser quotes one of her informants being asked "Can't you just translate?" when requesting explanations from clients (Fraser 1999a: 14). Apparently, there is only very limited understanding of the competence that translators must possess to perform their complex role as cross-cultural communicators.

**Translation Competence**

Most practitioners and theorists agree that translation competence – defined by PACTE (2000) as "the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate" – goes beyond the skills normally associated with bilingualism and communication in a foreign language. Translation is a unique mode of language use (Neubert 1997: 23). Superficial observations of the translation process show translators mobilising very diverse, interdisciplinary skills and knowledge to accomplish their tasks: knowledge of languages, subject and real-world knowledge, research skills, cognitive qualities such a creativity, and problem-solving strategies (Presas 2000: 28). More specifically, recent research postulates that translation competence comprises a number of dynamic sub-competences, each with a cluster of sub-components; not all of these are believed to inform bilingual language use or form a part of non-translational communication. The following model is based largely on those proposed by the PACTE Group and Neubert (PACTE 2000, Neubert 1997, Neubert 2000), and serves to illustrate the distinction between translation competence and bilingualism or foreign-language skills. It identifies six major sub-competences:

1. Communicative competence in two languages.
2. Extra-linguistic competence.
3. Psycho-physiological competence.
4. Instrumental-professional competence.
5. Transfer competence.
6. Strategic competence.

**Communicative competence** can be defined as the knowledge system and skills needed for linguistic communication. This competence should obviously be separated into comprehension in the source language (SL) and production in the target language (TL), and comprises the following sub-components:
1. Language competence, including the grammatical and lexical systems of both languages and knowledge of their repertoires and special registers, such as terminologies, jargon and preferred syntactic and morphological conventions.

2. Textual competence, or familiarity with the patterns of text types, forms and genres in both languages.

3. Intertextual competence, which is the ability to identify the position of a text within the intertextual system of the source culture (SC) and find an appropriate place for the target text (TT) in the target culture (TC). Neubert points out that processing source text (ST) intertextuality to produce TT intertextuality is as important a competence as target language system competence (Neubert 1997: 16-17).

**Extra-linguistic competence** can be divided up into:

1. General world knowledge.
2. Specific subject knowledge.
3. Cultural knowledge in the SC and TC.

Many course books and guides for translators are particularly keen to stress the importance of cultural knowledge and competence (e.g. Katan 1999, Robinson 1997: 222ff).

**Psycho-physiological competence** is defined by PACTE as "the ability to use all kinds of psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources", including psychomotor skills for reading and writing, cognitive skills such as creativity and logical reasoning, and psychological attitudes such as intellectual curiosity, self-confidence or perseverance (PACTE 2000: 102).

**Instrumental-professional competence** is composed of knowledge and skills related to the tools of the translator's trade – where to find and how to use various reference resources and translation aids, for example – and to the translation profession as a whole – professional ethics, knowledge of the work market, and so on. It is perilous to underestimate the value of this sub-competence, especially when it comes to the proper use of reference tools: empirical studies show distinct differences between professional translators and non-professionals in appropriate resource-use strategies (Fraser 1999b).

**Transfer competence** is recognised by both PACTE and Neubert as the central competence that integrates all the others and the key distinguishing province of the translator (PACTE 2000: 102, Neubert 2000: 6). It refers to the ability to bring about an adequate transfer from the ST to the TT, and includes:

1. Comprehension competence, which covers the ability to analyse, synthesise and activate linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge so as to capture the sense of the ST.
2. Contextual competence, a term used by Neubert to describe the ability to deal with the displacement of the original function and context of the ST to the function and context with which the TT operates (Neubert 1997: 13).
3. Deverbalising competence, which is defined as the ability to control interlingual interference.
4. Re-expression competence in the TL.
5. Methodological competence in executing the translation project. 
In essence, transfer competence established bridges or linking mechanisms between the 
translator’s working languages (Presas 2000: 27).

Finally, strategic competence encompasses all procedures used to solve problems during the 
translation process, and can thus be seen as the ability to control the interaction between all 
the other sub-competences to accomplish translational objectives and to effect transfer.

Fig. 1: The Sub-Competences of Translation Competence

What this model demonstrates is that the development of overall translation competence 
cannot possibly be reduced to the simple formula of possessing, acquiring or improving 
bilingual or foreign language competence (Presas 2000: 30). The ability to transfer texts 
implies knowledge structures that are not usually considered part of bilingualism, and though 
the cognitive basis of professional translation may derive from cognitive skills shared with 
bilinguals and foreign-language users, other cognitive structures are clearly added (Shreve 
1997: 121ff). Returning to the original comparison with working language, we can say that 
only communicative, extra-linguistic and psycho-physiological competence are to some 
extent shared with other communicators, and that even here special training and experience 
will be necessary for the bilingual or foreign-language user to master significant sub-
components such as textual, intertextual or cultural competence. For instance, empirical 
research involving think-aloud protocols (TAPs) shows that, when checking their translations,
language learners and novice translators tend to concentrate on lexical and syntactic solutions to perceived problems and ignore – or are ignorant of – pragmatic considerations, whereas professional translators check for stylistic and text-type adequacy and advanced trainees reflect on their audience (Kussmaul 1995: 82f, Fraser 2000: 59, Shreve 1997: 135). Some of Kussmaul's own empirical data suggest that novices are apt to misuse world knowledge and lack the cultural knowledge and textual awareness to prevent this from happening (Kussmaul 1995: 25-28). While these shortcomings of the non-professional can be in part attributed to a lack of transfer competence, it is safe to say that underdeveloped communicative and extra-linguistic competence are also significant factors. The obvious implications for translator training have long been recognised and serve to justify the weight given to SL and TL text analysis and cultural studies in the standard curriculum.

It is important to repeat that translation competence is dynamic and open-ended, a process of building and rebuilding knowledge. It evolves through a combination of training and continuous practical experience. Indeed, "professional translation [...] can be acquired by only undergoing certain kinds of deliberately sought out communicative experiences" (Shreve 1997: 125). Shreve argues that translators' exposure to an increasing variety of translation situations leads to changes in the way they conceive of translation, with knowledge structures not only becoming richer but being organised differently. As they develop into fully-fledged professionals, translators both pick up sub-competences they never had before and actually restructure their sub-competences in a way that best serves transfer competence, thereby demonstrating the acquisition and application of strategic competence (PACTE 2000: 103, Presas 2000: 29). They are only able to do this by taking part in, and learning from, an ever-increasing range of what Holz-Mänttäri calls "translatorisches Handeln" (Holz-Mänttäri 1984), translational action.

**Translational Action**

Professional translation never takes place in a vacuum. Professional translators are commissioned by clients to translate texts for particular purposes and readerships within the target culture. But other agents will also be involved: the producers of the source texts, for example, who may or may not be the same as the clients. In her influential work *Translatorisches Handeln: Theorie und Methode*, Holz-Mänttäri presents a comprehensive model (Holz-Mänttäri 1984: 106ff) of the functional network of roles in the overall translation process. As will become apparent, it is quite possible for individual persons or bodies to perform multiple roles in this model and for roles to be shared.

Holz-Mänttäri identifies six principal agent roles. Only one of these is assigned to the translator, who cooperates with other experts, as they themselves do with one another, to produce a TT. The *initiator* ("Initiator" / "Bedarfsträger") sets the translation process in motion because she requires a TT for a particular purpose. The *commissioner* ("Besteller") asks the translator to produce a TT that can be used for the purpose envisaged by the initiator. The *ST producer* ("Ausgangstext-Texter" / "AT-Gestalter") produces or has produced the text that serves as the source for a translational action. The *translator* ("Translator") has the
crucial role in the translation process. She is the expert in translational action and as such is ethically obliged (Vermeer 1989: 77) to produce a TT that functions within the TC fully in accordance with the initiator's purpose. The TT receiver ("Zieltext-Rezipient") is the addressee of the TT. Finally, the role of the TT user ("Zieltext-Applikator") is that of actually putting the TT to use. Figure 2, adapted from Risku and Freihoff (Risku & Freihoff 2000: 53), shows the agent roles and they way they link up.

The following examples serve as practical illustrations of the roles involved in translational action:

The asset management department of a German bank needs an English version of an asset management contract for a major English-speaking client. The bank's legal department has draughted the original German contract, but the bank's translation department has no time to handle the translation assignment and farms it out to a freelance translator. The translation department intends to use the TT as the basis for future translations of similar contracts.

The initiator and is the asset management department, the commissioner is the translation department, the ST producer is the legal department, the TT receiver is the bank's English-speaking client, the TT users are the asset management department, the English-speaking client, the translation department, the legal department and, potentially, the courts at the place of jurisdiction.
A German professor will give a talk in German at an international conference, but is required to submit an abstract in English of between 125 and 150 words which the organisers will send out in advance to the conference participants. He therefore writes an abstract in German and commissions a translation.

The initiators are the conference organisers, the commissioner is the professor, the ST producer is the professor, the TT receivers are the conference participants, the TT users are the conference organisers and participants.

Now, in both examples the translator relies heavily on the cooperation of other agents in order to accomplish her own task properly. Especially important is the brief she receives from the initiator via the commissioner: she must be told, for instance, of the word limit in the case of the abstract, and of the fact that it will be read by academic receivers; or of what dialect (American or British) the bank's client speaks. It is only then that she can make informed decisions about the assignment, including, of course, whether she should take it on in the first place. The translator is also dependent on the ST producers drafting a text adequate to its SC function so that she can employ all her textual and intertextual competence to effect as smooth as possible a transfer into the TC. To facilitate the translational action, the initiators, commissioners and ST producers should put their terminological and subject-specific expertise, and the resources they control, at the translator's disposal. Finally, the translator must receive feedback from TT receivers and users if she is to improve on her performance and develop further translation competence.

No, a professional translator cannot "just translate", simply because the translation process is necessarily a highly collaborative one. It is naive to believe that a translator transfers the meaning of the source text to the TT receivers. The translator needs a detailed "product specification" (Holz-Mänttäri 1984: 114ff) above and beyond the ST itself, because the linguistic signs of a text alone are not sufficient to express its meaning or its function. A text is a verbal manifestation of an act of communication, and as such is only made meaningful by its receivers and for its receivers (Nord 1997: 31). With this in mind, Reiss and Vermeer go so far as to describe any text as an offer of information ("Informationsangebot"), and therefore any translation as an offer of information about an offer of information ("Informationsangebot über ein Informationsangebot") (Reiss & Vermeer 1984: 67). The role of the translator is thus to select certain items from the SL offer of information in order to form a new offer of information in the TL, from which the TC audience in turn selects what they consider to be meaningful to their situation (Nord 1997: 32).

The overriding principle which guides the translator in her work is the purpose of the overall translational action. That principle has been referred to as the "skopos rule" (using the Greek word for 'purpose'), which Vermeer (Vermeer 1989: 20) formulates as follows:
"Rede / schreib / übersetz / dolmetsch so, dass dein Text / deine Übersetzung / Verdolmetschung da funktioniert, wo sie eingesetzt werden soll, und bei denen, für die sie engesetzt werden soll, und so, wie sie es tun soll."

("Speak / write / translate / interpret in a way that enables your text / translation to function in the situation in which it is to be used and with the people for and by whom it is to be used, and in the way it is intended to function.")

The receiver is the main factor in determining the TT skopos. In an ideal world, the initiator and/or commissioner of the translation would give the translator as many details as possible about its purpose, identifying the receivers and explaining the time, place, occasion and medium of the act of communication as well as the intended function of the TT (Nord 1997: 30). It is then the translator's responsibility to get the job done by bringing her specific competences to bear. But if the translator does not receive an adequate brief, she will be forced to rely on her experience to infer the skopos both from the context in which the translational action is embedded and from the ST text type itself, which unnecessarily increases the potential for misunderstandings and error – especially where the ST is badly written. The translational action will have been seriously compromised by the failure of agents to do what is expected of them.

Unfortunately, such breakdowns in the network of cooperation seem to be the rule rather than the exception. The surveys of freelance ITI translators reported by Fraser (Fraser 1997, 1999a, 2000) indicate significant shortcomings in the provision of briefs, client-controlled resources and evaluative feedback. Similar problems exist for translators at the EU Commission, who have the added complications of poorly drafted STs and an unrealistic workload (Wagner 2000). These examples are far from isolated and reflect the experiences of professional translators everywhere. It is now time to consider how the situation may be rectified.

**Practical Implications**

The above model of translational action assigns a crucial but by no means exclusive role to the translator. She is only able to make the best use of her translation competence if all agents in the process fulfil their roles. But this presupposes that the agents are aware of those roles and capable of meeting their responsibilities. There are major implications here for the way translation projects and general language issues are handled by translators, by translation departments, agencies and companies, and by clients and their organisations.

The first concerns the ethical responsibility of translators – and of the translation departments, agencies and companies for which they work – to increase client awareness of the various roles in the translation process. Above all, they should ensure that briefs, client-controlled resources and informed feedback are all made available. One easy way would to supply clients with detailed briefing and evaluation forms, which would have the benefit of encouraging clients to reflect on the purpose of a translation they require, to martial the appropriate resources and to apply just criteria when assessing the result. The advantages for the translator have already been mentioned and need not be repeated.
The second implication is that client organisations which regularly invest considerable time and money in translation projects should become proactive in the adequate management of projects and of the resources at their disposal. Instead of relying on the translators to request necessary input, client organisations should introduce a systematic language and translation management policy which not only institutionalises detailed briefs, structured support and usable feedback, but also fully exploits the language potential and skills of non-translating staff in order to facilitate the translation process.

There are obvious advantages to any organisation involved in foreign markets knowing its own specific language needs and taking stock of its language resources. A complete linguistic audit along the lines suggested by Reeves and Wright (Reeves & Wright 1996) would enable a company to ascertain which knowledge workers have particular working language skills, and to design an appropriate language training plan where needs are not being met. Workers with sufficient language knowledge could then be assigned key supporting roles in translation projects. For example, ST producers and other specialists with the requisite working language skills could be used to provide known terminology in the form of glossaries. It is often my experience as an English translator that authors of specialist texts and their departmental colleagues will know at least some of the target terminology. By including it at source, they can make a considerable contribution to the efficiency of a translation project. To achieve the greatest possible efficiency, such work really must take place early in the translation workflow: leaving it to the proof-reading stage, a practice that is still common, unnecessarily complicates and lengthens the translation process.

In order to familiarise ST producers fully with their role in that process and to avoid potential problems at the authoring stage, a language and translation management policy should also train writers of texts intended for translation in controlled authoring techniques, akin to those employed for machine-translation (MT) input. Indeed, since the translators are themselves ST receivers and users, organisations with their own translation departments should be prepared to consult their translating staff at the drafting stage. Such a service is in fact offered at the EU Commission (Wagner 2000).

Finally, a comprehensive language and translation management policy should also be in a position to identify the skopoi of translation assignments which do not require the full range of sub-competences that distinguish the professional translator – and which could therefore be handled by foreign-language users. This would obviously yield savings of both time and money, and allow the professional translators to concentrate on what they do best. For instance, a number of translations intended for internal company use will not reach a wider audience. It is tempting to think that they actually represent a special form of intracultural translation, anchored as they are within a unified corporate culture encompassing all agents in the translation process, including TT receivers and users. The translator herself should, of course, be versed in the same culture, be familiar with the specific text types used for such communication, and possess certain instrumental skills. But she would not necessarily need
the broader textual, intertextual and extra-linguistic competences that are the hallmark of the professional, which would, in turn, considerably simplify the strategic and transfer requirements of the assignment. To refer back to the quotation at the beginning of this paper, there could, after all, be a translational role for the bilingual secretary.

**Conclusion**

Despite the growing importance of translation in an increasingly globalised world, serious misconceptions about the profession persist. In particular, there is an erroneous tendency to equate linguistic skills with translation competence and either assign working language users to roles they are unable to fulfil or misuse the services of professional translators. Only by understanding the complex nature of translation competence and becoming aware of cooperative translational action will client organisations be able to make effective use of professional translators and workers with foreign-language skills. A comprehensive language and translation management policy based on this knowledge will increase the efficiency of translation projects by enhancing cooperation among participants and putting foreign-language competence to proper use.

**References**


