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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Assessing the Development of Translation Competence Acquisition: A Case Study of MTSL Students at Abdelmalek Essaadi University –Tetouan**

**Soumia Ettaibi**

*EFL Teacher and Ph.D. Candidate, Linguistics, Communication and Translation, University Abdelmalek Essaadi, Tetouan, Morocco*

**Corresponding Author:** Soumia Ettaibi, **E-mail:** [soumiaettaibi@hotmail.com](mailto:soumiaettaibi@hotmail.com)

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**| ABSTRACT**

This study seeks to investigate the evolvement of translation competence acquisition while relating it to the progression in translation training. The assessment of the progress (if any) in translation competence acquisition is conducted through the investigation of the performance and the perception of MA translation students in the Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Tetouan. The study is meant precisely to shed light on trainees' perspectives on translation assessment and to trace the development in acquiring translation competence via identifying indicators of that development in learners' translations at different stages of learning. The aim is to reveal areas of translation sub-competences where learners exhibit more progress and to detect sub-competences that they find more challenging to develop. The descriptive method we implemented draws upon questionnaires that were delivered to MA learners to gather data about their perspectives on the acquisition and development of translation competence, and the observation reports that describe the common teaching practices as well as the assessment tools used to gauge the progress of learners' translation competence. The selection of texts that pose prototypical translation problems allows for the identification of indicators of the trainees' acquisition of the required sub-competences to deal with these translation problems. The findings of the study reveal that even though establishing specific competencies to be acquired by the end of translation training is a prior step in designing programs, there is always room for adjusting these competencies to align them with the trainees' profile, the objectives of the course and the curriculum at large. To this end, assessment of the trainees' proficiency provides useful information, at different stages of learning, on the learners' achievements and on the learning areas that require enhancement.

**| KEYWORDS**

Translation competence, translation assessment, competence acquisition, competence development.

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### **1. Introduction**

Improving the quality of any training program is pertinent to the evaluation of the trainees' learning achievements. Accordingly, assessing learners' proficiency constitutes a priority for trainers and curriculum designers. This study investigates the evolvement of translation competence acquisition while considering both students' perspectives and the quality of their translations.

Contrary to the conventional translation classroom characterized by the dominance of the "read and translate" instruction method, translation training courses have witnessed a shift towards a more learner-centered approach by engaging the trainees actively in the learning process. Likewise, for assessing translation competence, innovative investigable tools have been applied to spot the differences in trainees' performance at different stages of the training process and to identify the indicators of evolvement in translation competence acquisition in learners' translations. For the purpose of this study, learners' translations are assessed by the indicator of "acceptability", as opted for in the PACTE group research to refer to "translation product quality" (Albir, 2017b, p. 119). This explores the progress in acquiring and developing translation competence among learners belonging to an MA

translation training programme in a Moroccan university. The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between the progression in translation training and the evolvement of translation competence and, hence, the development of the quality of the translation product. The hypotheses the research addresses are:

- The products of students who received more translation training exhibit less frequent translation errors, so their translations are more acceptable than the translations of novice translation learners.
- There is a correlation between the acquired competences and the translation quality.

The crossing of the data obtained from students' translations, observation of the participants' performance and students' self-reported information drawn from the questionnaires reveal a correlation between the translation experience, the quality of training and the development of the translation competence. Accordingly, as learning progresses, the translation competence level evolves, and so does the quality of the produced translation.

We presume that the findings of this study may be useful for translation instructors as they may give insights into areas of translation training curriculum in need of revision or improvement to cater for the trainees' needs and enhance their performance for better preparation for the professional world.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Translation assessment**

Despite its growing importance, the term translation quality assessment is still subject to a lack of consistency regarding the measurement of the quality of translations in either situation, i.e., academic training and professional practice. The procedure has varied names following the focus of the assessment procedure: the translator, the translation process, or the translation product.

House (1997) adopts *translation quality assessment*; Nord (1991) uses the term *translation criticism*. *Translation quality assessment* is perceived by some scholars as a more general framework that subsumes translation criticism as its sub-category. Campbell (1998, p. 140) emphasizes that although there does not seem to be an agreed-upon definition of quality and assessment in translation, earlier definitions of quality are criticized for being general and source bound. He adds that the translator's competence can be deduced from the quality of the product itself. "The quality of a translated text as realized in performance is a reflection of the translator's competence" (Campbell, 1998, p. 8). Accordingly, translation competence is measured through performance, and it is judged through criteria of assessment. Product assessment has always been considered as one of the main effective tools in revealing several aspects of competence, which is proved in the empirical studies of PACTE (2005 and 2009). Campbell (1998) also argues that 'the assessment of translation quality is best seen as a matter of profiling the competence of learners, rather than simple measuring of the quality of their output' (p.163).

A basic issue that is addressed in most theoretical writings about translation competence assessment is the subjective nature of translation assessment and the possibility of applying objective, psychometric methods for assessing translation competence. House (1997) admits that the concept of quality in translation is "problematic" and that it is difficult to pass a final judgment that fulfills "the demands of objectivity" as judgments are by nature subjective (p. 119). Martinez Melis & Hurtado Albir (2001) share the view that modern techniques of educational evaluation could be adapted for translation assessment. They go further to judge this step as a prerequisite for translation studies to become an established field of research. Hatim and Mason (1997, p.200) make it clear that one basic challenge in translation performance assessment is to define levels of mastery of criteria in sufficiently objective terms for them to be usable by different testers in different situations. This leads us to refer to two dominant questions in the theoretical writings about translation assessment: Whether translation performance can be evaluated by objective, psychometric methods and whether the formulation of a uniform standard of evaluation is ever attainable.

One way of enhancing the objectivity of assessment is by developing tools and suggesting a set of agreed-upon criteria for conducting assessment in a systematic method that can reduce the subjectivity of assessment and guarantee a higher level of acceptability.

Although translation scholars' engagement with translation quality does not always aim at developing models for translation assessment, they still provide interesting views on the issue. Traditionally, translation assessment has been characterized by relying on simple value judgments issued by an expert (assessor), based more on his/her intuition and experience than on empirically justifiable data. Testing and assessment of translation have long been faced with the dilemma of how to measure quality effectively and accurately, how to define the "function" of a translation in measurable terms, and how to determine the variables that demonstrate the acceptability of translation in the target language. Responses to such inquiries demand the establishment of a solid assessment model that could be applicable to pedagogical assessment. In this connection, there seems to be relative agreement on the need to establish optimal measures to be taken when building a successful assessment model. The strategies

of a translation assessment model and the types of criteria that are used in the assessment vary following the purpose of the assessment as well as the general guidelines of the curriculum itself. Many criteria for translation assessment have been suggested for translation training. These criteria come directly and indirectly from Translation Studies.

Initially, for a model to work as a guide for the evaluation of students' translation, it needs to be both practical and objective:

\_ Practical: a model that is complex due to the numerous parameters considered in the analysis may prove to be valid and objective but time consuming and rarely manageable for a real-life summative evaluation of student translations. Nevertheless, the proposed model might not depend only on one master criterion (e.g., *skopos* or equivalent response) or a binary criterion (e.g., free/ literal or overt/ covert) to evaluate a relatively complex phenomenon. A balance needs to be stricken between these two extremes; an ideal model would be practical but not reductionist.

\_ Objective: This is partially possible in models that do not draw on purely subjective methods of translation evaluation because relying on the impressionistic intention of the evaluator will not allow for empirical investigation nor for automatic measurement of the translation, let alone for objective judgment.

Bachman (1990, p. 40) suggests taking three steps before embarking on the translation assessment process: Firstly, quality must be defined. (i.e., deciding exactly *what* is to be tested). Secondly, the methodology must be set. (i.e., deciding *how* it is to be tested). Thirdly, the assessment should be carried out in accordance with the definition of quality as applied to the assessment methodology chosen. In the same vein, Melis (1997, p. 156) outlines various objects, types, functions, aims and means of student translation evaluation:

- Objects: student translator competence, study plans, programs
- Types: product assessment, process assessment, qualitative assessment
- Functions: diagnostic, summative, formative
- Aims: academic, pedagogical, speculative
- Means translations, evaluation criteria, correcting criteria, grading scales, tests, exercises, questionnaires, etc.

To this effect, texts to be translated must be pedagogically useful; in other words, they must contain various prototypical translation problems or the specific problems students are expected to work on. It is important that texts be authentic, although they may sometimes be adapted for teaching purposes (summarized, modified in terms of wording or cultural references, etc.).

Given that different types of translation assignments, as well as different translation situations, require different assessment criteria, it seems evident that formulating one uniform translation quality assessment model is challenging, not to say unachievable. Ideally, rather than using merely one translation assessment type, a combination of different assessment types might provide insightful methodological and pedagogical means for the instructor to lead to more effectiveness.

The contribution proposed by Mehrach Mohamed (1997) is a good illustration of the studies that tackle translation assessment in an educational context based on the premise that different text types require different translations and, consequently, different assessment measures. Having observed a disregard for textual errors and a relatively dominant grammar-oriented approach adopted by university teachers to assess students' translations, the researcher conducted a study that sought to develop a model for the evaluation of students' products. The model is based on a comparative analysis of ST and TT, bearing in mind differences in the text types and the textual aspects. The significance of the suggested text-based model cannot be overlooked, given that it is both comprehensive and eclectic in nature. Thus, it filled the gap in the previous text-based models while taking advantage of their strengths and possible applicability for the Arabic English combination. The models that inspired the study included De Beaugrande (1980b), Halliday & Hasan (1989) and Hatim & Mason (1990, 1997), to cite but a few. Moreover, Mehrach's model systematically investigates pitfalls in students' translations within an educational training context. The concern with global errors (textual errors) and the validation of the model by experienced evaluators offer a solid ground for the application of the model for university trainees in order for trainees to consider the text's textual features while translating but most importantly, "to enhance the students' ability to correct major errors (textual errors)" (Mehrach, 1997, p.8).

In this section, we drew attention to the lack of consistency regarding the term assessment; the names given to the procedure vary according to the focus of the assessment procedure. Likewise, there is seemingly no consensus on the criteria to be used in translation assessment as described above. Therefore, a given translation assessment model cannot possibly measure all aspects of a translation. From the issues raised in this section, it seems that translation is notoriously problematic and, at the same time, a needful field that is still in the process of taking shape. We believe that problems related to translation assessment can be reduced

by researching evaluation processes and by developing assessment procedures appropriate for specific situations and purposes of evaluation.

The term competence was introduced by Chomsky (1968) to refer to the unconscious knowledge “that underlies behavior, but that is not realized in any direct or simple way in behavior” (p. 4) as opposed to “the actual observed use of language – actual performance” (p.102). The term translation competence started to be widely used by researchers in translation studies as a crucial element for translation training. Indeed, there seems to be a consensus among researchers that, when it comes to defining translation competence, language ability, although essential, is not in itself sufficient (Schaffner & Adab, 2000). As a result,

## **2.2 Translation competence**

Scholars in the field have started researching and defining the notion of “translation competence” from different perspectives.

Bell (1991) defines translation competence as the combination of knowledge and skills common to all communicators (except that for the translator, it *must* be in the two languages), plus the decoding skills of reading and the encoding skills of writing. He summarizes that translation competence is “the knowledge and skills the translator must possess in order to carry out translation” (p.43). According to Bell (1991, pp. 45-46), knowledge areas specifically for translators include:

1. Source language knowledge: syntactic, lexicon, and semantics systems plus text creating systems.
2. Target language knowledge: same as for the source language.
3. Text-type knowledge.
4. Subject area knowledge.
5. Contrastive knowledge and study of two languages in contrast.

Schaffner & Adab (2000) perceive the term ‘competence’ as a comprehensive concept for the overall performance ability that appears to be difficult to define. They relate translation competence to other concepts and qualities that function based on declarative and operative knowledge and that are required for the translation task, namely, knowledge, skills, awareness, and expertise. The capacity to use this knowledge and to apply it is related to “awareness” and is called “transfer competence”. According to Schaffner & Adab (2000), translation competence should be the backbone of any translation training program, and that competence can be developed through it. However, this learning process cannot be easily quantified, leading researchers to investigate not only “when” but also “how” translation competence develops.

From the definitions cited above, we can conclude that some models of translation competence have a methodological deficiency that results in the inability to link between translation competence and the translation process and, consequently, fail to provide explanatory evidence of translation competence development in the translation training process. Other models have expanded translation competence to include a set of factors and variables that affect the translation act. A case in point is the model of PACTE (2000), which conceptualizes translation competence as a combination of several components, with its scope constantly expanded.

The PACTE Group (Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation), a group led by Hurtado Albir, has carried out extensive research on the notion of translation competence with an aim to establish different performance levels for direct and inverse translation in the acquisition of translation competence, has defined translation competence as “the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate” (PACTE, 2000, p.100). In this definition, translation competence is viewed as a factor that enables translation performance. PACTE (2000) perceives translation competence as expert knowledge that is not shared by all bilinguals and that knowledge is mainly procedural knowledge. According to PACTE (2000), competence is divided into several interrelated sub-competences, among which the strategic component is highly significant.

### **2.2.1 PACTE’s model of translation competence**

The PACTE research presents the first large scale effort to develop, validate, and empirically test the notion of translation competence. The group was formed at the University of Barcelona in 1997 with the explicit aim of systematically investigating issues in translation competence and the process of its acquisition. According to Albir (2007), there are very few studies in literature that have analyzed the acquisition of translation competence. She goes on to argue that there are no empirical studies of the translation competence acquisition process in its entirety, except for the PACTE dynamic model, which was intended as a contribution to fulfill the gap. Consequently, PACTE has come up with the most sophisticated competence model in translation studies that is firmly based on empirical-experimental research. The PACTE Group’s research has unfolded over two phases, including studies on professional translators (compared with foreign language teachers) in the first phase and translation

competence acquisition in translator trainees in the second. The group employs several methods and technologies, including questionnaires and retrospective interviews related to direct and inverse translation tasks, keystroke logging, and screen recording.

The research focuses on the structure and the nature of translation competence and on processes and characteristics of competence acquisition. PACTE's holistic, dynamic models of TC and ATC are based on the following initial hypotheses:

1. TC is qualitatively different from bilingual competence.
2. TC is expert knowledge and comprises declarative and procedural knowledge, although it is predominantly procedural knowledge.
4. TC is the underlying system of knowledge, abilities and attitudes required to be able to translate.
5. TC is an interactive, hierarchical system consisting of sub-competences which intervene in each translation act.
6. TC is subject to variation depending on whether the translation is direct or inverse; the language combination in use; the specialist field involved (technical, legal, and literary); the translator's experience; and the translation-specific context (translation brief, time scale, etc.)

PACTE's holistic, dynamic TC model has evolved over time. First presented in 1998, it was subsequently revised and refined thanks to exploratory studies carried out in 2001, 2002, and 2003 (PACTE 2003). The latest model encompasses the following sub-competences:

- 1. Bilingual sub-competence:** Procedural knowledge that comprises pragmatic, socio-linguistic, textual, and lexical-grammatical knowledge in the two languages.
- 2. Extra-linguistic sub-competence:** Declarative knowledge that includes (1) bicultural knowledge (about the source and target cultures); (2) encyclopedic knowledge (about the world in general); (3) subject knowledge (field-specific).
- 3. Knowledge about translation sub-competence:** It contains both declarative and procedural knowledge about translation as an activity and as a profession (methods and procedures, types of problems, types of translation briefs, the work market, needs of clients, etc.)
- 4. Instrumental sub-competence:** It is composed of procedural knowledge related to the tools of the profession (documentation sources and information communication technologies applied to translation: dictionaries of all kinds, encyclopedias, grammars, style books, parallel texts, electronic corpora, search engines, etc.).
- 5. Strategic sub-competence:** It has a central position in the model. It is a sort of *meta competence* responsible for monitoring and coordinating the whole translation process to guarantee its efficiency and solve problems encountered. Therefore, it plays a role in planning the translation process, identifying problems, solving problems as efficiently as possible (selecting and activating appropriate strategies), compensating for deficiencies, evaluating the product and the process, etc. The strategic sub-competence had an important role already in the early model, but it became clearly dominant in the late model.
- 6. Psycho-Physiological Component:** It is the ability to use all kinds of psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources (e.g. memory, attention span or perseverance, creativity, motivation, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis).

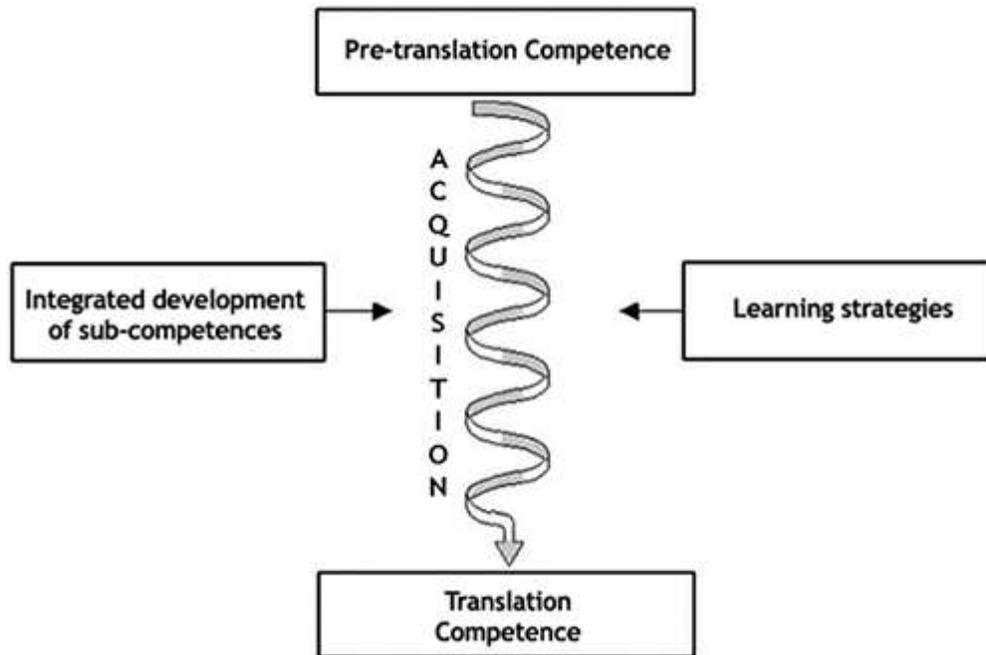
Three sub-competences are considered common to all multilingual producers of texts: the bilingual and extralinguistic sub-competences and the psycho-physiological components (e.g., attention). However, the other three (the translation-knowledge, instrumental, and strategic sub-competences) are assumed to be specific to translation. The translation-knowledge sub-competence involves knowledge of translation principles and the profession, which can be assessed in interviews and questionnaires. The instrumental sub-competence includes research, information literacy, and IT skills, which can be observed as translators perform the translation tasks. The strategic sub-competence is assumed to control the entire translation process and can only be accessed indirectly, potentially when translators reflect on their actions and decisions.

As the model uses concepts that are accepted in psychology and education, it could prove useful for other psychological or educational research, and the research findings related to the model can be easily compared to or associated with the results of research in educational contexts.

### **2.2.2 PACTE's model of translation competence acquisition**

PACTE (2017, p. 304) defines the process of translation competence acquisition (see Figure 1) as a dynamic, spiral process that evolves in a cyclical fashion rather than in a linear way from novice knowledge (pre-translation competence) to expert knowledge (translation competence) while enabling the translator to build new knowledge based on the already existing one. This process requires learning strategies (i.e., the operations used by the learner to obtain, store, recover and use information) and, during the process, declarative knowledge, which consists of *knowing what* and procedural knowledge or *knowing how* are integrated, developed, and restructured. The PACTE group claims that certain factors, like the direction of translation, language combinations

or (specialization, e.g., legal, scientific, medical) and the translator's practical experience, may have an impact on the route and rate of learning.



**Figure 1: PACTE Translation Competence Acquisition Model (Albir, 2017, p. 304)**

PACTE researchers distinguish between four different types of translation competence acquisition evolution:

- *Non-evolution*: no difference in the values between successive groups between the first year and the end of training.
- *Rising evolution*: values rise between the first year and the end of training, with each value between successive groups being higher than or equal to the previous one.
- *Falling evolution*: values fall between the first year and the end of training, with each value between successive groups being lower than or equal to the previous one.
- *Mixed evolution*: a combination of rising and falling evolution between the first year and the end of training.

Results from PACTE's model on acquisition of translation competence (hereinafter ATC) also corroborate that in ATC, not all sub-competences develop in parallel, i.e., at the same time and at the same rate and that ATC is dependent not only upon directionality (direct/inverse translation) but upon the learning environment as well. Furthermore, in ATC, the development of the strategic, instrumental, and knowledge of translation sub-competences is particularly important.

### **2.2.3 Assessment of Translation Competence**

According to Hurtado Albir (2015), competence assessment in translator training should seek to:

- *Assess the product and the process*. Both the result of performing tasks (a translation, a revision, a report, etc.) and the process followed in doing so should be assessed. To that end, it is necessary to work with assessment tasks and instruments that provide information on problems and identify approaches to solving them.
- *Assess knowledge, abilities and attitudes*. For that purpose, a variety of assessment tasks and instruments which provide information of different kinds must be used. Different assessment strategies with a dynamic, multidimensional approach are thus required.
- *Apply assessment criteria*, which act as a grading guide for lecturers and make students aware of what is expected of them. Assessment *rubrics* are important in that regard, as their descriptions of criteria and quality levels make it possible to appraise assessment task performance, simplify providing students with feedback, and allow for self-assessment and peer assessment.

– *Attribute great importance to formative assessment.* Such assessment is aimed at obtaining information on a learning process so as to make students aware of their progress and enable lecturers to evaluate their teaching activity. Tasks involving the appraisal of what students have learned must, therefore, feature constantly.

– *Promote student self-assessment.* In other words, encourage students to reflect and appraise their own learning process. As future professionals, they must be capable of such appraisal for process enhancement purposes. Student self-assessment is also important from a lecturer's perspective, as it provides information on a student's perception of their own learning process, as well as on possible flaws in teaching activity. Every unit thus ought to include self-assessment tasks (which also help students learn to perform such assessments), such as activities involving reports, worksheets, or questionnaires.

– *Promote assessment from different perspectives.* In addition to lecturers assessing students and students assessing themselves, it is necessary, in the interests of cooperative learning, to foster peer assessment, involving students appraising one another's work so as to learn from their classmates' correct solutions and errors. This is conducive to more feedback (pp. 16-17).

The assessment carried out for all translations produced for PACTE's experiment is based on Rich Points. These are defined as specific source-text segments that contain prototypical translation problems. This method not only guarantees a variety of representative prototypical translation problems but also the use of the same procedure in both direct and inverse translation and in all the language combinations used in the experiment (Albir, 2017, p. 109). The prototypical translation problems depicted for the assessment procedure are spread over the following five categories: linguistic, textual, extralinguistic, intentionality and problems related to the brief and/or the target audience. The table below presents an overview with a brief description of each.

<b>Linguistic problems</b>	Lexis (non-specialized) and morphosyntax. Problems of both comprehension and re-expression may be involved.
<b>Textual problems</b>	Coherence, cohesion, text type, genre, and style. Problems of Comprehension or re-expression may be involved and are associated with differences in the way texts function in each language.
<b>Extralinguistic problems</b>	Cultural, encyclopedic and subject-domain knowledge. Problems that also derive from cultural differences.
<b>Problems of intentionality</b>	Difficulty in understanding information in the source text (intertextuality, speech acts, presuppositions, implicatures). Problems of comprehension.
<b>Problems relating to the translation brief and/or the target-text reader</b>	Difficulties (affecting reformulation), which, from a functionalist point of view, would affect all Rich Points.

**Table 1: Categories of translation problems (PACTE, 2011b)**

The assessment of target-text acceptability follows PACTE's criteria that tackle three levels:

- Meaning (i.e. the extent to which source-text meaning is reproduced).
- Function (i.e. how adequately the function of the translation and translation brief are achieved).
- Language (i.e. how appropriate the use of the target language is).

Each solution is finally considered acceptable (A), semi-acceptable (SA) or non-acceptable (NA). Participants receive a score of 1 if the translation solution chosen is deemed acceptable, 0.5 if the translation solution chosen is deemed semi acceptable, or 0 if the translation solution chosen is assessed as non-acceptable. The final overall quality assessment of the target text is obtained by adding all the numerical values awarded to each Rich Point and dividing this result by the total number of Rich Points. Assessment tasks must vary depending on the competences and competence indicators to be appraised. The table below contains examples of such tasks, organized according to the specific competences that can be assessed.

It is important to ensure diversity where assessment tasks are concerned s to appraise the various components of students' TC, as well as to allow for their different learning styles. Diversity is also linked to progression; assessment tasks should differ according to the stage of the learning process.

### 3. Methodology

Bearing in mind the objectives and the descriptive features of this research, specific methodological considerations are taken into account. Accordingly, this research is mid-way between quantitative and qualitative research due to the nature of the data.

This dual approach allows for an effective benefit from the advantages of both approaches while probing the translation performance of the participants in-depth. Thus, the analysis embraced the following issues:

- Students' performance (descriptive analysis)
- The relationship between performance and some background factors (interpretative analysis)
- Students' perception of their own translation performance (based on descriptive statistics and qualitative analysis)

The method of analysis to be followed can be termed as mixed or dual: It is interpretative because of the interpretation and subjectivity of some outcomes and statistical to support the objectivity of some other merely systematic outcomes. The collected data will provide descriptive information that allows for comparative observation and analysis of the phenomenon under scrutiny.

To minimize the complexity of the research tasks and to narrow the scope of the study for better analysis of the data collected, I will delimit the translation sub-competences to be scrutinized into Bilingual sub-competence, extra linguistic sub-competence, and knowledge about translation sub-competence.

The sample population consists of students of the Master of translation sciences and Linguistics at the Faculty of Letters & Humanities at Abdelmalek Essaadi University in Tetouan.

### **3.1 Research instruments**

Following the characteristics of this research, which has the objective of gaining an in-depth understanding of the development of translation competence, I have considered that the most effective tool to gather information is by using multiple sources, including observations, students' written translations and questionnaires designed specifically for this study to explore perceptions of translation competence acquisition amongst the participants. The intention of deploying the questionnaire as a complementary instrument was to obtain more data on the learning of translation skills by the participants in the sample. This means that the findings are not only limited to the assessment of the translation products of the participants but also complemented by the results of the additional questionnaire on learners' perception since it provides data on the participants' recognition of their progress in providing acceptable translation solutions.

#### **3.1.1 The observation**

Observation is defined as "the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study" (Marshall and Rossman, 1989, p.79). It provides researchers with ways to check for nonverbal expressions for feelings, determine who interacts with whom, grasp how participants communicate with each other and check how much time is spent on various activities. Nevertheless, the evident weakness of observation in general resides in the fact that not everything is recordable; mental processes and cause/effect links, for example, are not accessible. However, in conjunction with other techniques, observation can still provide additional data for the purpose of analysis and for the aim of increasing the validity of the study.

The aim of the classroom observation I conducted was to explore students' performance in translation competence development with the aim to identify methods of feedback and the most prevalent modes of interaction and to observe indicators of the improvement students made, along with some focus on areas that need further growth. To make use of the observation technique at its best, I clarified the purpose of the observation to the host teachers, who gave me permission to attend ten sessions from different modules: legal translation, contrastive text analysis, audiovisual translation, translation and communication, and practical processes of translation. The variety of the classes observed offered an opportunity to capture a comprehensive picture of the participants' translation performance.

I conducted these observation sessions over a period of four weeks at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities at Abdelmalek Essaadi University with the first-year master of translation sciences and linguistics learners.

The observations carried out throughout the semester, though not thorough or systematic, remain insightful. Non-participant observation was utilized to allow the researcher to immerse herself in the natural learning setting in order to have a close-up view of the conditions of translation training in real time. Observing without being involved in classroom activities helped the researcher gain a focused, comprehensive picture of the assessment practices and the nature of interaction between learners. The observations focused on the following aspects of each session:

1. The types of feedback used in response to student translation answers.

2. The ways in which learners opted for peer and self-assessment.
3. The interaction between the participants while fulfilling translation activities and tasks.
4. The classroom atmosphere and its effect on learners' motivation.

It is worth noting, at this juncture, that the presence of an observer, often seen as an intruder, in the classroom always creates a certain level of disturbance; still, focus on the observer tends to fade with time and the familiarity with the situation and with the observer's presence minimizes this state of discomfort on the part of the observed learners.

### **3.1.2 The questionnaire**

Performance indicators alone cannot provide sufficient information on how students' translation competence develops. Likewise, the quality of the translated text alone says little about the other factors that may affect students' quality of translation. Such factors account for the level of students' motivation and, therefore, for the quality of their performance. For this reason, I decided to devise a questionnaire that tapped these factors. The questionnaire that was administered to the participants is divided into three parts of unequal length:

-The shortest is part one, and it is about participants' background information, such as age, gender, and language combinations, as well as translation learning and translation working experience, which might help in interpreting the results with regard to competence acquisition.

- The second part of the questionnaire aimed at gathering information on factors that could possibly influence students' performance. This part comprised statements on students' perception of assessment (appropriateness of content, clarity of instructions, effectiveness of feedback and self or peer assessment and any perceived difficulties in acquiring translation competence).

-The third part is formulated to describe participants' self-reported information on the progress they believe they have made, if any, in their translation performance as a result of the training they had received throughout the two semesters.

The combined use of the three instruments illustrated above is justified by the need to expand understanding of the research problem given that the representative sample under study is not that large. Thus, by integrating more than one instrument concurrently, I can ensure that the limitation of one type of data is balanced by the strengths of another.

### **3.1.3 Students' translations**

The translation segments selected for analysis are taken from tests that are conducted under controlled traditional test conditions; namely, students are allowed to use bilingual printed dictionaries to answer a series of translation questions and conduct different tasks, including the translation of texts from English into Arabic or from Arabic into English. The fore-mentioned texts contain pre-established prototypical translation problems, otherwise known as Rich Points. It is worth noting that the tests we worked on are part of the formal assessment requirements of the course; they are administered before the testees started the MA training programme, at the end of the first semester and at the end of the second semester of the first year of the translation training course.

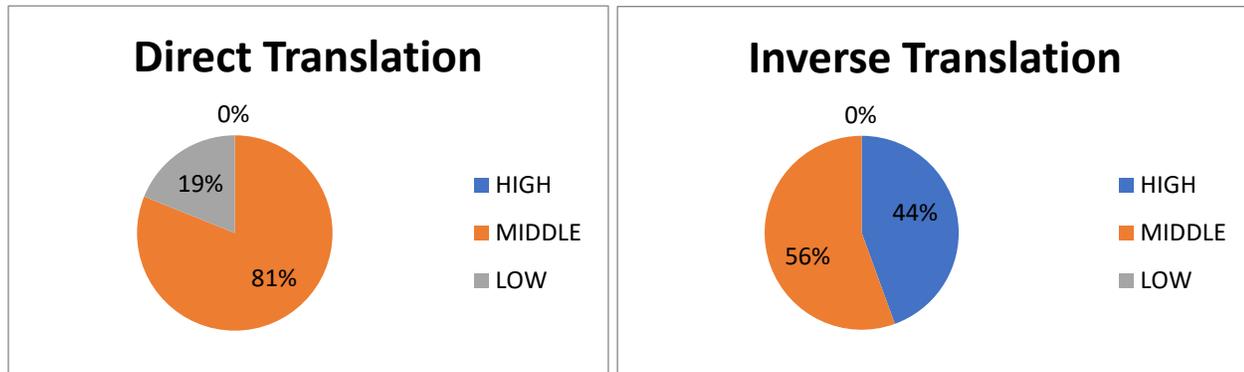
## **4. Results and Discussion**

Several conclusions are drawn about the development of translation competence acquisition as a result of the crossing of the data obtained from students' translations, observation of the participants' performance and students' self-reported information drawn from the questionnaires:

1. Both the variable of years of translation study and the variable of experience in translation had an impact on the participants' performance. Participants who had some translation experience exhibited more awareness of how to deal with translation problems than participants who had no or little previous experience in the field of translation working experience. Consequently, the development of translation competence is pertinent not only to the training that learners receive but also to the amount of translation activities they conduct.

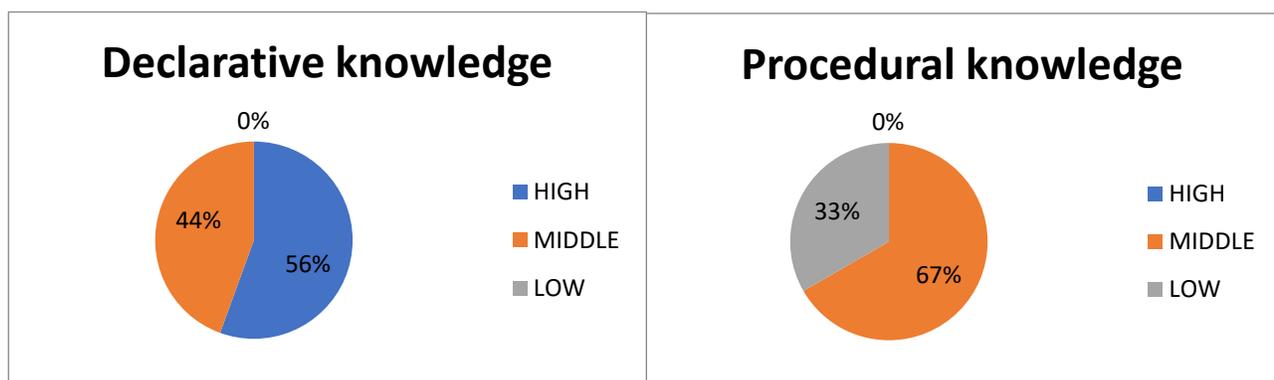
2. Participants' competence varies according to directionality, as demonstrated in Figure 2. Most students exhibited a middle level of performance in both direct and inverse translation. Besides, while no participant showed high performance in direct translation, four students managed to reach high performance levels in inverse translation. Surprisingly enough, the same participants whose direct translation was of low quality provided high quality responses in inverse translation. There is a plausible explanation for this result: It is possible that the text in direct translation was not easy enough to understand, and this lack of understanding of the ST is reflected in the poor performance exhibited in the TT, while the text for inverse translation was at the right level of challenge which contributed to a well-formed TT. To sum up, the fact that a translator trainee obtains acceptable results in direct translation does not necessarily mean that s/he will obtain acceptable results in inverse translation.

**Figure 2: Level of translation competence in direct and inverse translation.**



3- The crossing of the data related to translation acceptability and students' self-perception of their level of translation competence has given the following results:

-Students' reported information on their performance in written translation did not always match with the results they obtained for both declarative and procedural knowledge. There is some discrepancy between the learners' actual performance and their perceptions. This is deduced from the comparison of students' correct responses in the exams and the responses provided in the questionnaire. It is noticeable that though some students expressed confidence in their own productions and confirmed their capacity to deal with translation problems and to recognize acceptable translations, the rate of acceptability in the translations they produced reveals the deficiency in the acquisition of some competences.



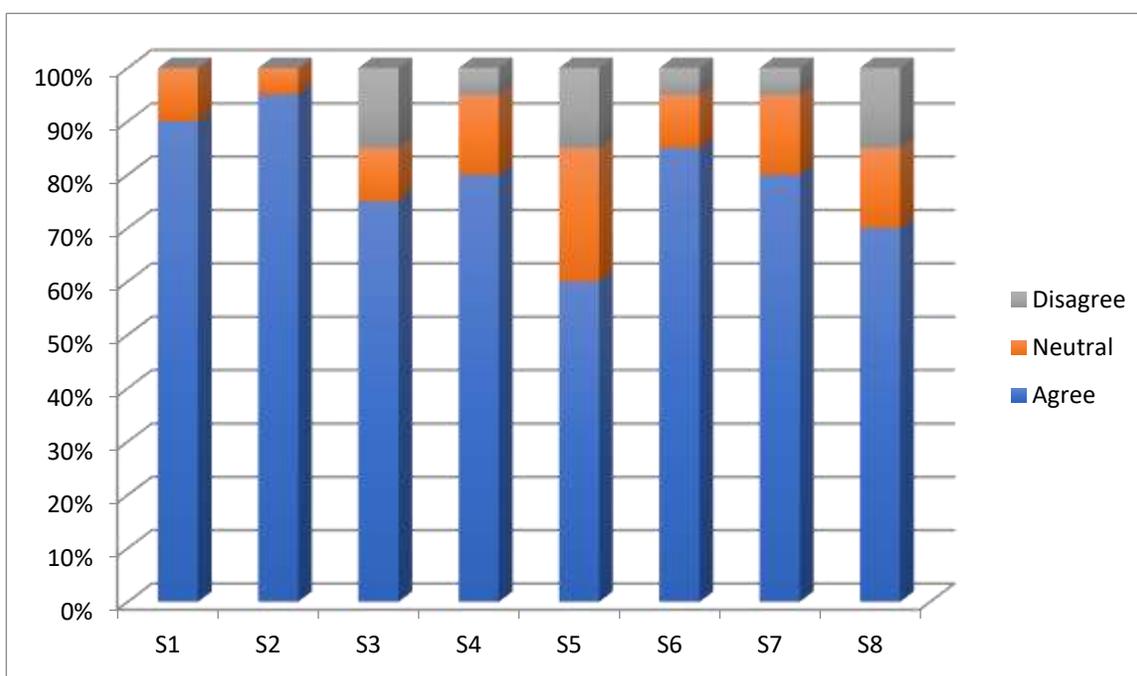
**Figure 3: Level of translation competence in declarative and procedural knowledge.**

- As for students' perception of translation competence acquisition, a shared agreement among the majority of participants is that they had witnessed progress in the acquisition of translation competence during the translator training programme, though with relatively different degrees of satisfaction. The responses to the statements in the questionnaire, as demonstrated in Table 2 and Figure 4, show that the majority of the participants (60% to 90%) have developed some awareness of the cultural differences, sentence structure, linguistic, as well as cultural and technical constraints of subtitling and dubbing. 75% of the participants

developed an ability to identify translation problems and difficulties at the lexical, structural and textual level. A majority -90%- of participants stated that before translating, they start by understanding the text in its entirety, and while translating, they consider the text type characteristics. According to the participants' reported information, it seems that learners have been exposed to intensive translation exercises, each finely tuned to highlight the major linguistic difficulties and conceptual problems that may arise in translating. To further maximize their acquisition of extra-linguistic translation competence, learners are called to learn more about different fields of specialization and the cultures of the source language and the target language.

Statement 1 :	Before translating, understanding the text in its entirety is a prerequisite.
Statement 2 :	I can identify text type characteristics and consider them while translating.
Statement 3 :	I can identify translation problems and difficulties at the lexical, structural, and textual level.
Statement 4 :	I can consider cultural references in the source text and their equivalents in the target language.
Statement 5 :	I developed the ability to implement appropriate strategies to solve translation problems.
Statement 6 :	I am aware of sentence structure and word order of source text and can modify them to target language.
Statement 7 :	If I retranslate a text that I translated at the beginning of my training, I will do it with fewer errors
Statement 8 :	I am familiar with the linguistic, cultural, and technical constraints of subtitling and dubbing.

**Table 2: learners' acquired competences after starting translation learning.**



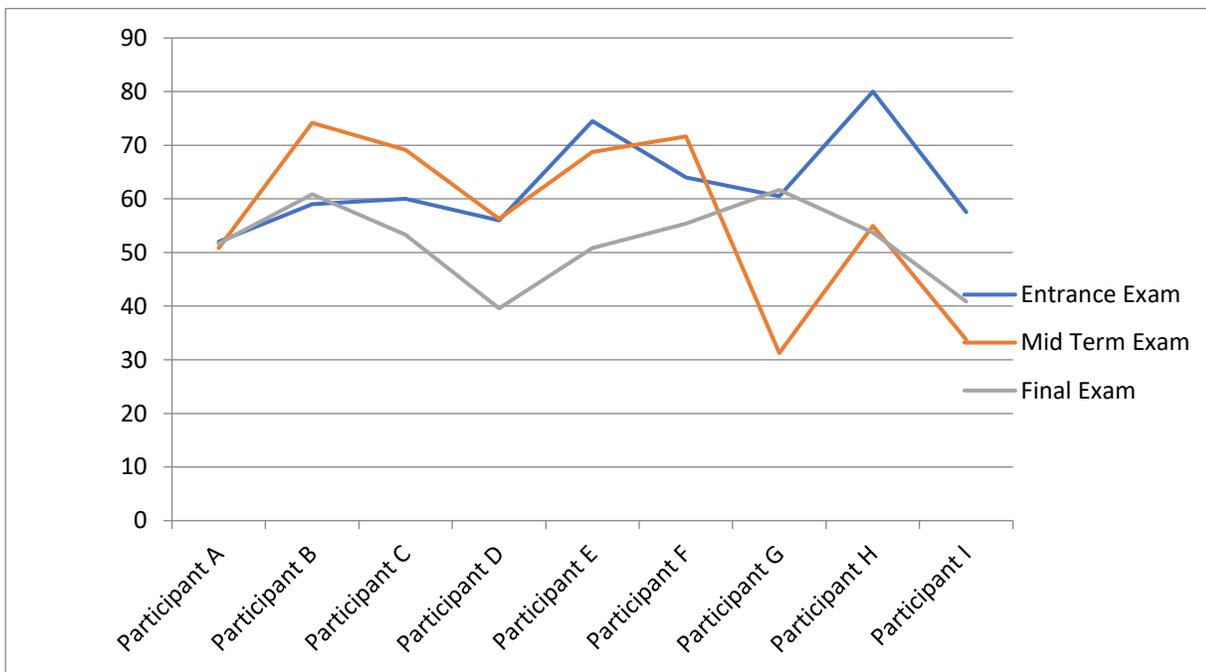
- Translation trainees are challenged with translation problems that cannot be solved only by using linguistic competence. Consequently, strategic competence and knowledge about translation are two translation competences that students need to address more frequently. The acquisition of these competences is a gateway for translation students to gain mastery over a plethora of problem-solving skills that will allow them to enhance their translation competence while dealing with both the declarative and the procedural knowledge about translation. It is the predominance of strategic sub-competence and knowledge about translation competence that may compensate for apparent shortcomings in other sub-competences, such as linguistic and extralinguistic competence.

4- In order to dig even deeper into the development of translation competence acquisition, the information displayed in Table 3 and Figure 5 presents the results that some students achieved in the three exams throughout the whole academic year. It is noticeable that there is evidence of overall progress, though with relative differences between the participants, especially towards the end of the semester. This confirms my initial hypothesis that translation competence affects the final product, that is, the quality of translation. Furthermore, I can conclude that the scores of the entrance examination are not predictive of the final

examination performance; there are participants who did not perform well in the entrance exam but scored much better in the final exam and vice versa.

Exams	Entrance exam	Mid-term exam	Final exam
Participant A	52	50.75	51.50
Participant B	59	74.25	60
Participant C	60	69	53
Participant D	56	56	39
Participant E	74.5	68	50.50
Participant F	64	71	55
Participant G	60.5	31	61
Participant H	80	55	53.75
Participant I	57.5	33.50	40.75

**Table 3: Students’ performance in the entrance exam, the mid-term test and the final test**



**Figure 5: Students’ performance in the entrance exam, the mid-term test and the final test**

5- Based on the observation reports, lessons were structured based on both a learner-centered approach and task-based learning. A shift away from the traditional ‘transmissionist’ approach, in which instructors are the sole source of knowledge, is a common feature that I noticed during all the observation sessions I attended. Most of the time, teachers acted as facilitators who guide students through the learning process. For this purpose, they implement methods that help develop students’ skills and competences. Learners, in turn, though in relatively different degrees, seem to carry the responsibility of being active enhancers of their learning via an engagement in presenting learning material and sharing viewpoints while defending their translation choices. The learner-centered approach the instructors adopted is a factor that influenced students’ engagement and positively affected their performance.

6- The fact that not all students reached the translation competence level expected from the course objective at the end of the semester may be attributed to subjective factors such as students’ (at least partial) lack of commitment and motivation. In the translation classroom, opportunities to engage in a variety of translation activities are created to amplify learners’ motivation. The latter is further enhanced by instructive feedback. Learners felt that they received frequent feedback while their translations were being discussed in class, at which time they also could ask any questions that remained unanswered to get ample clarification from the instructors. In short, a positive learning environment makes a remarkable difference in students’ translation learning

results, and the findings on individual differences call for more academic attention to the subjective factors influencing individual translation competence development.

7 - The main finding of the study is that there is a lot of room for the improvement of learners' translation competence. However, this may not be achieved only through academic translation training but mainly via learners' motivation and a self-taught learning process that optimizes their performance in translation practice.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has tried and hopefully succeeded in conceptualizing the development of translation competence for MA translation trainees. The aim of this study was to assess the progress (if any) in translation competence acquisition based on both the performance and the perception of MA students.

It is worth noting at this point that the translator trainee's competence is not a skill that can be directly observed. Campbell (1998) advocates that the quality of a translated text is realized in performance, and performance is a reflection of the translator's competence. For that reason, I needed actions or measures to interpret the product of students. In my study, the indicator of 'acceptability' was selected to evaluate the translation performance of learners.

With the theoretical framework proposed, this study has designed three research instruments for gathering data on the development of learners' translation competence: The observation of translation classes, student's questionnaires, and the descriptive analysis of students' written performance. The subsequent data analysis revealed that the initial hypothesis: "There is a correlation between the acquired competences and the translation quality", cannot be rejected. The conclusions indicated a common tendency among the participants towards improving their performance, especially in the final test; students managed to produce a better-quality translation thanks to the training in translation theories, techniques and problem-solving strategies practiced in the academic environment. Furthermore, the individual based analysis found that individual differences in translation competence development paths were non-negligible. The participants demonstrated different development paths in different translation directions, different competences and at different stages of learning. Finally, the development in learners' translation outcomes within a semester is already visible. The progress in translation competence acquisition within a whole year will probably be more prominent.

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