

The Analysis of the Relationship between the Theoretical Knowledge of Translators and Their Practical Translation Skills: An Evaluation of Graduate Translation Courses

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Abstract

The present study, in the first place, attempted to examine the relationship between the theoretical knowledge of translation and practical translation skills in Iranian translators. For this purpose, 35 M.A students both males and females studying English translation were selected in Mashhad Ferdowsi University in Iran. In order to collect data two tests were applied: one made up of questions selected from the Ph.D and M.A entrance exams together with a test of actual translation from Persian to English and the reverse. Data analysis and statistical calculations through T-TEST, one way ANOVA and Pearson Correlation revealed that participants' theoretical knowledge does not display a significant correlation with their scores in the English to Persian practical exams, while there is a positive relationship between participants' scores in the theoretical exams and their Persian to English translation. Also it was found that participants' experimental experiences in translation have a significant effect on their English to Persian translation.

Keywords: Translation, theory, theoretical knowledge, translation Studies

1. Introduction

Science and technology are developing rapidly and cultural, economic and political growths make some difficulties for human adjustment on information. The language barriers and assimilation of terms in different languages are some of these difficulties we can mention to. Overcoming these barriers is vital and translation can play this role. Entering globalization in modern world we can say that translation is a fundamental issue. In the process of exchange and cross communication translators are central. As Levy (1963) said translation studies have emerged as a new international and academic field. In the fifties and the seventies centuries translation studies shaped the basic part of applied and general linguistics which were seen as the only source of translation studies. Holmes (1988) was the first to offer a framework for this regulation. He divided translation into two principle area: translation theory and applied translation studies dealing with activities such as the training of translators and the condition of translation aids for translators as well as translation policy. The need for systematic study of translation comes directly from the problems happening during the actual translation process and it is essential for those working in the field to bring their practical experience to theoretical discussion.

Many scholars attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Today, the dominating view is that theory and practice should be integrated (Leinhardt et al, 1995). According to Hill (2000) several models of professional education on the continuing cycle of interaction between theory,

practice and reflection as the way to create changes in students' thoughts and practices. Another effective new model of professional education is the 'realistic approach' that directs the theory towards the largest challenges of practice (Korthagen&Kessel ,1999; Korthagen 2001). The increasing awareness of the new approaches in translation education has made us interested in the notion of relationship between theory and practice in translation.

This study will investigate on one hand, how academic theories and beliefs are reflected in the work place and in a translated texts, on the other hand, it investigates the effect of theoretical knowledge on translation from English to Persian and Persian to English and the effect of experimental experiences on translation skills. This study will help the students of translation to get familiar with the possible challenges like including theory into practice and the effect of theoretical knowledge on translation. The study is useful for the students majoring in English translation and those who are interested in translation studies. This study tries to help translators and students of translation to include theory and practice in their translations and show some ways to fill the gap between theory and practice. It also aims at outlining new, realistic ways for the courses of translation at Universities and exploring the current relevance of the theory to the practice of translation, therefore following research questions are posed for the purpose of this study:

1. Is there any relationship between the translators' theoretical knowledge and their practical skills when translating from their mother tongue (Persian) to English?
2. Is there any relationship between the translators' theoretical knowledge and their practical skills when translating from English into their mother tongue (Persian)?

2. Review of Literature

Translation is a complex activity which requires both great patience and impeccable mastery. Wilss (1982, p.215) came up with the expression the 'science of translation. Some scholars called it 'translatology.' "Invisibility" is the term Venuti (1995, p.1) used to describe the translation and translator's situation. According to him a translated text, whether prose or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic specialty makes it seems obvious giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the text (Venuti 1995, p. 1).

The first efforts at theory can be traced back over 2000 years to Cicero and Horace. With the key question being whether a translator should be truthful to the original text by adopting a literal approach or whether a free approach should be taken (Hodge 2009). To the second half of the 20th century this discussion continued when more systematic analyses were undertaken by western European theoreticians. These systematic analyses, which raised translation studies from its role of being a language learning activity, centered on theories of translation in new linguistic, literally, cultural and philosophical contexts (Munday 2001, p.162). In the 1970s, changes took place that translation theory and translation science transformed into "Translation Studies". This term was coined by Holmes in 1972, the use of a label that had proved productive in the field of humanities (Holmes,1988, p.70).Some scholars, (Hermans 1999, preface), for the first time looked at translation in a descriptive term, so translated texts were noticed as texts in their own right (Even-Zohar 1978). There are various explanations of pragmatics (Levinson 1983, p. 1-32) but all of them engage the insertion of context into linguistic examination. According to Benjamin (2008) there are many reasons to say that developing the pragmatic aspects of a linguistic theory of translation is important. First, pragmatic had been ignored by the linguistics who tried to create a general theory in the 1950s and the 1960s. Second,

A pragmatic theory can be used more than any other theories like semantic, syntactic or phonetic, because they are considered as a micro-linguistic theory and a micro-linguistic theory of translation is impossible, while micro-linguistic practice is best left to itself or to translator trainers and teachers. A pragmatic theory of translation must be illustrated, and illustration involves the micro-linguistic aspect. The terms of theory and practice are used frequently by scholars and translators. Some translation scholars maintain that they are working together while in the sight of some others there is a difference between theory and practice. Many studies suggest that there is a gap between what is taught by university and the action of translation.. Today, scholars believe that theory and practice should be integrated (Leinhardt et al. 1995). Reflection is often viewed as the proper way to achieve this integration. Several models of professional education focus on the continuing cycle of interaction between theory, practice and reflection as the way to create changes in students' attitudes and practices (Hill, 2000, p. 54). Another effective model of professional education is the 'realistic approach' which guides the theory towards the challenges of professional practice (Korthagen&Kessel, 1999, Korthagen, 2001). Theory and practice are two aspects of knowledge and useful factors. Recent research has noticed the interdependence of theory and practice. The main goal of educational studies and learning theories is that the students apply them when they graduate later. Studies show that there is a gap between theories and real instructional action.

According to Vreugdenhil (2000) the theory-practice problem is a 'theory-student' 'teacher-practice' problem. To deal with it he developed a schedule, including three components:

- The objective theories or, more in general, the information available;
- The subjective theories of student teachers;
- The everyday practice as experienced in schools.

According to his assumption, two inter-linked process of adaptation between the three components will bridge the gap between theory and practice. The first process consists of student teachers restructuring the theories that are instructed to them. Consequently, student teachers have to formulate for themselves meaningful knowledge they can apply in the classroom. They have to be trained to act in the class in accordance with their renewed knowledge. They can develop their subjective theories about teaching. The second process is matching their subjective theories to the particular situation. After investigating they can formulate a set of rules to act adequately. To bridge the gap between theory and practice we have to take into account what is already in the mind of the student teachers about the teaching (Vreugdenhil 2000, p.3).

Wallace (1991, p. 4-15) mentions that received knowledge should both inform and be informed by experiential knowledge. Over the last decade, a considerable amount of time and attention has been spent on translation training. Snell-Hornby (1988) discussed the need for the concept of translation as an interdiscipline and reflected them in many translators' training programs. A large number of books are published today on the subject of translation, but there are big gaps between the needs of translation training and that which is offered by theory. From one aspect, students get disappointed at being troubled with theoretical reflections (translation theory and general linguistics) which they feel have nothing to do with the activity of translating, and from another aspect, scholars talk irreverently of translators who are unwilling to investigate the theoretical basis of their work, therefore reducing it to a simple practical skill' (Snell-Hornby, 1988, p. 105).

Kiraly (2000, 2003), points out there is sufficient room for the more consistent accomplishment of social practical approaches in translator training, with large parts of the program still conquered by teacher-centered methods. He calls for a 'much-needed' shift in translator education (2003, p.27). According to him the goal of translator education must be to help students develop their own self-concept and to help 'in the mutual production of individually adapted tools that will

allow every student to role within the language negotiation community leading graduation' (Kirlay, 2000, p.49).

Translation students must be taught to translate more skillfully. The university translation programs should be different from a translation program in a training school or translation course for a non-translation major program at university. In other words, just as a basic, difference should be based on training and education (Widdowso, 1984, pp. 201-202), an obvious difference must be drawn between translation teaching as training and translation teaching as education (Bernadini, 2004). This difference, according to Widdoson is very important and can help us to explain the superiority of translation teaching. (Bernadini, 2004, p. 20) .Training and education are used for different purpose in teachings. Just as Bernadini has explained (2004, pp. 19-20), training accumulative knowledge, acquires process when the short term aim and the long term aim overlap to a great extent, while education seeks the growth of individuals and their long-term empowerment with generative problem-solving abilities

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants

Participants selected for this study were chosen from M.A students of Ferdowsi University of Mashhad. A total of 35 students including: 7 males and 28 females. The students who participated in this study were enrolled in the third semester so they had already passed two courses on translation. All the participants were Iranian and factors such as age and sex were assumed to be randomly distributed. Both males and females were given the same questions. Nearly 30 minutes was given for theoretical test.. The questioner at the end included some questions showed participant's interest in translation, their experience on translating and the years they have been translating. Participants were in different ages from 23 to 40.

3.2. Instruments

The results of this study have been drawn from two tests, theoretical and practical. The theoretical test, a collocation composed of 30 multiple-choice items adopted from M.A and PhD entrance exam, held in the years 2011,2012, public and Azad University courses. This test was chosen from M.A and PhD entrance exams, because they are made by the most qualified test makers and scholars of the country and altogether the test could be considered as valid. Selected questions were those only concerning translation theories and not linguistic or general proficiency. Students answered 30 questions related to theories of translation. The time given was 30 minutes for 30 questions. With this sample test just their knowledge on translation theories was examined.

Variety of texts on the scope of human science selected to check their translation proficiency. Selected texts were about 40 lines including two parts, English to Persian and Persian to English translation. This practical exam was their term paper, so they answered carefully. Some parts of these texts were unseen and some others were seen because their proficiency on vocabulary was not important for this test and just the students' proficiency in practical translation was the main point. They were free to use dictionary. Translation test was administered to all subjects at the end of the term. Their practical exam was written and scored by their professor considering the meaning and grammatical rules and instructions.

3.3. Procedure

In this study, the performance of students in university course on theoretical and practical aspects were compared to assess the correlation between their theoretical knowledge and their practical skill. Prior to the practical experiment on translation, the subjects were given a theoretical test as it was mentioned, a multiple choice test with 30 questions related to translation theories to evaluate

students proficiency on theories, then at translation second stage at the end of the term they passed a practical exam to compare their dexterity on practice and theory.

A Practical test including Persian to English and English to Persian was employed to check their proficiency on both kind of translation. It consisted of 40 lines of a human science text to check just their ability on techniques of translation, not their vocabulary. The practical test was assigned by their professor considering grammatical points and meaning.

Before the treatment of the participants (students), their professor and the researcher held a meeting and researcher gave an overview of whatever needed to be done in the study helping them understand its core principle. The data were collected through these two tests. The purpose of this study was to help translators and students in translating field, using theory and practice at the same time specially theories which are more practical and functional. Munday (2001, p. 79) mentions that Skopos theory focuses on the purpose of the translation which establish the translation methods and strategies that are to be employed to produce a functionally adequate result. Therefore, in this theory we should know why a source text should be translated and why the function of the target text will be important for the translators. Munday writes that an important advantage of skopos theory is that it makes possible for a translator to translate the same text in different ways according to the purpose of the target text (ibid, p. 80). Functional approaches in translation studies can help translators to view the text as a kind of communicative unit and awareness of functional theories of translation make better the quality of students' translation.

4. Results

To verify the scores of theoretical test and practical translation from English to Persian, a one-way ANOVA test was calculated.

Table 1. Distribution of the means of main variables' mean

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Error
Theory	35	6.60	40.00	20.02	1.34
Eng. to Per.	35	1.65	90.00	50.49	3.91
Per. to Eng.	35	.75	86.11	50.13	4.01

The mean difference between translation of English to Persian and Persian to English was 0.36 ± 4.05 and according to t-test results, it is not significant ($p=0.930$).

Comparison to the subjects' scores in translation from English to Persian and their theoretical scores, their scores in English to Persian translation around 30.47 ± 3.80 , is more than their scores on their theoretical exam's scores.

The results in table 1 prove that comparison to the scores of the subjects in translation from Persian to English and their theoretical scores, their scores in Persian to English translation is nearly 30.11 ± 3.40 more than their obtained scores in theoretical test and this difference is significant ($p<0.001$)

4.1. Achieved scores in translation categorized in four groups

As it is clear in Table 2 percentage of scores in each category, from English to Persian and from Persian to English are the same.

Table 2. Distribution of frequency and percentage of the sample scores according to translation from English to Persian and Persian to English

Translation scores	Eng. to Per.	Per. to Eng
0 - 24.9	5(14.3%)*	5(14.3%)
25 - 49.9	9(25.7%)	10(28.6%)
50 - 74.9	13(37.1%)	12(34.3%)
75 - 100	8(22.9%)	8(22.9%)
Total	35(100%)	35(100%)

The score is expressed in percentage to make all scores comparable. So the raw score is not important, only the percentage.

4.2. Measurement of Agreement Kappa in translation scores from English to Persian and Persian to English

If there is a complete agreement between two variables (Persian to English and English to Persian translation), it is expected to observe that participants who rank in the first group of translation scores from English to Persian, also rank first in translation from Persian to English. Highlighted parts in the table show agreement between variables. It means that subjects' English to Persian and Persian to English translation scores are the same. It is obvious from the table that other squares represent subjects who are not at the same rate scores.

Table 3. English to Persian and Persian to English Cross tabulation

			Per. to Eng.				Total
			25	- 50	- 75	-	
			0 - 24.9	49.9	74.9	100	
Eng. to Per.	0 - 24.9	Count	2	2	1	0	5
		Percent	5.7%	5.7%	2.9%	0%	14.3%
	25 - 49.9	Count	3	3	1	2	9
		Percent	8.6%	8.6%	2.9%	5.7%	25.7%
	50 - 74.9	Count	0	2	6	5	13
		Percent	0%	5.7%	17.1%	14.3%	37.1%
	75 - 100	Count	0	3	4	1	8
		Percent	0%	8.6%	11.4%	2.9%	22.9%
Total	Count	5	10	12	8	35	
	Percent	14.3%	28.6%	34.3%	22.9%	100%	

Table 4. Kappa Coefficient agreement and statistical result

	Kappa coefficient	P-value
Measure of Agreement	.096	.343

As it is clear from the above table, the amount of Kappa is 0.096. In other words, the agreement between two variables is low so it is not significant.

Table 5. Correlation coefficients between the main variables in this study

		GPA	Theory	Exp.	Eng. to Per.	Per. to Eng.
Theory	Pearson Correlation	-.210				
	P value	.225				
Eng. to Per.	Pearson Correlation	-.307	.254	.588		
	P value	.073	.142	.000		
Per. to Eng.	Pearson Correlation	-.204	.589	.291	.477	
	P value	.239	.000	.107	.004	
Translate Mean	Pearson Correlation	-.296	.493	.521	.856	.863
	P value	.084	.003	.002	.000	.000

Correlation coefficient between theoretical scores and translation from Persian to English is: r=0.589. This score is significant statistically, p<0.001 but correlation coefficient between translation scores from English to Persian and theoretical scores is r=0.254, it is not significant statistically (p=0.142). As it is evident from the above table, the relationship between theoretical scores and translation from Persian to English is stronger than the relationship between theoretical scores and translation from English to Persian.

5. Discussion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between theoretical knowledge of translators and their practical translation skills from English to Persian and Persian to English. Consequently, a group of M.A students majoring in translation were selected. The finding of this study shows that students' practical skill in translation was better than their theoretical knowledge. The result of students' scores in practical translation was compared to their scores in theoretical exam in order to investigate, whether theoretical knowledge had any significant effect on students' translation from English to Persian and Persian to English. This study shows that there was a direct relationship between students' theoretical knowledge and their Persian to English translation, but there was not any relationship between their theoretical knowledge and English to Persian trans-

lation. The result of the study reflected that in translating of Persian to English (mother tongue to English), translators' domination on the language help them to analyze the theories and use them well on translation to the target language.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the present study, we can conclude, there is no relationship between translators' theoretical knowledge and English to Persian translation. There was a direct relationship between students' theoretical knowledge and their Persian to English translation.

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