GRADIENCE VERSUS APPROPRIATENESS IN TRANSLATION: IS THE LINK BETWEEN TRANSLATION AND LINGUISTICS STILL STRONG, OR IS IT READY TO EXPAND TO NEW AREAS OF HUMANITIES?

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Abstract: For a long time, translation was perceived as a sub-category of linguistics and it took several centuries and the contribution of many passionate theorists to break away from this lock. Now, new developments in linguistics, among which the concept of Gradience are stepping into the realm of translation by attempting to adopt acceptability and accuracy as its own. At the same time, translation studies continue to expand their interest towards other areas of humanities, such as sociology or cultural diplomacy. Is there a border line between these conjoint domains? Can we predict their development for the future?

Keywords: translation studies, translation competence, gradience, appropriateness

Motto:
"According to a study on the language industry recently presented by us, translation is a job with a future. At the same time, it is a job in constant evolution […]. It has the side effect of stimulating a debate on what it takes to be a first-class professional translator, it will help to orient the research in this field and, in the long run, the quality of translator training."
(Leonard Orban, Commissioner for Multilingualism, 2010)

1. Introductory overview of the topic

For a long time, Linguistics and Translation have developed a complex interrelation which, more often than not, was one of subordination. Indeed, Translation Studies only earned their right to an independent approach in the 20th century, but the conceptual frame and terminology continued to be inspired by Linguistics.

Indeed, the 20th century theorists brought about a boost in the way in which translation was approached and assessed, making the shift from the simple linguistic fidelity to the source text towards a more complex strategy, aimed at a better understanding of the layers of meaning and mental processes resulting in the final structure of a text.

One other important step taken by the 20th century theorists was to include the *translators* themselves in the equation, as important factors in the interpretation of a text, as well as in the appropriate choice of translation strategies, methods and procedures, thereby making a leap forward in the direction of an appropriate, albeit not always acceptable interpretation of the source text. Examples of supporters of the cause of translators are many and displaying a large variety of approaches, from Venuti's opinion regarding the translator's 'invisibility" to Munday's appeal to "creativity". The notion of *cultural fidelity* was also an important addition to previous studies, as were other concepts borrowed from semiotics (thanks to Jakobson or Eco,

among others), philosophy or social-psychology, thus turning it into an *interdiscipline* with valuable academic relevance.

It is indeed this honourable position among academic topics that, in the last decade or so, has determined researchers and theorists to revisit former terms and concepts previously borrowed from linguistics, and to propose new points of view of great value for all areas of study involved (Anthony Pym being among those who are doing a great job by giving a fresh understanding to the long-trodden concept of *equivalence*), as well as to place under focus the more recent linguistic proposals, such as multimodality, optimality and gradience. In our opinion, this is not a simple return "to the roots" but rather a modern re-evaluation of an arguably stormy relationship, with an emphasis on similarities and positive effects for both domains.

In view of this new understanding of translation, how can we define those who are responsible for the correct and pleasant to read renderings of various types of texts into different languages? Indeed, it is quite difficult to give an *all-inclusive definition of translators today*. Should they be highly educated linguists? Or gifted philologists, multi-language speakers with a sweet-tooth for a creative approach? Foreign language teachers with a solid theoretical bias? Translation theorists – or mere 'human robots" using CAT tools at their convenience?

Possibly, the answer could include all of the above – and much more. In spite of various efforts spent for the standardization of this profession – some of which will be presented later – translation remains a creative process of the human mind; rules and regulations are necessary, and so is specialisation in certain cases. Major global organizations now require 'lawyer linguists" instead of "linguists with a specialisation in foreign languages", therefore emphasizing the need for people specialised in law issues who, at the same time, possess a good knowledge of certain languages; "medical linguists" or even "digital linguists" can also be included in the same category. The new reality has forced traditional translator-training structures to adapt quickly to these new requirements, and universities offering basic or Master programs in translation have followed suit.

Translation Studies have travelled a long way since Benjamin's early 20th century warning[i] against giving readers the meaning on a plate, in spite of offering the source text a "continued life"; gone are also text excerpts translated in foreign language learning classes. The development of languages and their expanded new millennium terminologies now completely reject Ortega y Gasset's opinion[ii] that translation is "impossible", and even place Bassnett's "functionalist" theory[iii] (largely influenced by ideologies) under doubt.

More recent contributions to this field have shown that the road is far from coming to an end; moreover, the attempts at renewing the links with linguistics can prove their utility both ways, and possibly result in new schools of thought, more appropriate for 21st century translation interests and responsibilities.

2. Linguistics vs. Translation Studies – Twin Concepts and their Development

As mentioned above, an emerging area of Translation Studies and Theory started by borrowing certain concepts from Linguistics. We owe the name of this new field of study to James S. Holmes, author[iv] of a "map" of this discipline, in which he tried to outline and define specific topics prone to independent development. The *three*

categories he proposed for the taxonomy of Translation Studies (theoretical, descriptive and applied areas of study) were also inspired by Linguistics, but with specific characteristics for the new domain. For instance, while *theoretical* Linguistics focuses on concepts, sounds or the structure of the language (in cognitive research, phonology and morphology respectively), along with syntax, semantics or pragmatics, Translation Studies in Holmes' approach propose both a general approach to theory and a partial one, in which various "restrictions" based on the time factor, cultural relevance or text type are emphasized.

Secondly, to linguistic *descriptive* areas of research, such as phonetics, etymology or comparative linguistics, Holmes added alternative areas for translation, mainly focusing on the translator's approach to the source text and on his/her preference for the final product (and target culture), the translation process itself or the function of the translation. Finally, certain similarities can be found in the last sub-category proposed by Holmes, that of *applied* Translation Studies: while applied Linguistics focused on language acquisition, teaching and assessment – and for a while also included translation itself – the proposed applied area of research in translation was aimed at discussing translation training (including different methodologies and specific aids, as well as the curriculum design) and, as a novelty, the critical approach from readers and critics of translated texts.

Further on, other significant concepts were borrowed or adapted from Linguistics, before passing on to coining new terms and concepts for this new domain.

For instance, structuralists' early 20th century distinction between *form* and *structure* (whereby form was seen as a language universal, while substance focused on the particulars of a specific language structure, as well as on the meaning) met its replica in Toury's distinction between *formal* and *dynamic* equivalence; translators were also advised to choose between a target text rendering that followed the *surface* layer of information (as in the case of word-for-word translation) and going deeper into the content, in search of the actual function of the information, or of its *meaning*.

The focus on *context* and *register* in translation is also due to their relevance from a linguistic point of view. In the first case, while applying the appropriate structural elements (syntax, lexis, etc.) of the target language, the translator must bear in mind the relevance of the source text viewed globally, from a *cognitive* perspective and, at the same time, focus on the *pragmatic* context relevant for the source text author to convey the actual message. As for the register – in other words, the personalized use of words in conjunction with the requirements of any social situation, the contemporary development of languages now requires a more complex assessment of sub-categories beyond the former formal-informal dichotomy, and which, in translation, require a good knowledge of the changes underwent by various languages, expressed in the way in which they are used by different groups of people.

More examples can follow: the synchrony vs. diachrony relationship in Linguistics found its replica in Holmes' focus on time-based restrictions; the concept of linguistic fidelity is mirrored, in Translation Theory, by that of *adequacy* (Nida, 1975; Torop, 1995, 2000) according to which translation is a result of a thorough analysis of the source text, without involving a deep change of the content. Toury completed the equation by explaining the difference between *accuracy* and *acceptability*, thus shifting the focus towards the need to adapt translation to the cultural requirements of the locale. A more recent example of the way in which Linguistics has served as example for Translation Studies is offered by Else Oksaar's *kulturems* theory[v] (reminding us of

the atomic units called morphemes and phonemes in Linguistics), whereby the kulturem is perceived as the ultimate communicative unit which must be taken into consideration when approaching a source text.

The examples presented above – just few of a wide range of possible examples – prove that, while structuring the basics of a new discipline, choosing the right terms for future development is indeed very difficult. Nevertheless, Translation Studies managed to find its independent way in this intricate realm of words, albeit still preserving its connections with Linguistics or Semiotics.

Indeed, creating a terminological corpus is only the first step into becoming an independent area of study; but the specific characteristic of Translation Studies is that it uses theory as a tool for explaining the complex practical difficulties of real-life translation.

So, the question arises: is it possible to perform quality translation in the absence of good theoretical knowledge?

There is a fine line separating translation theory from practice. In fact, most contemporary theorists are also translators and even translation trainers. But the debate has gone on for more than a decade now, and the author of this study has also joined the debate in a previous book[vi]. Fact is, there are many translators of fiction books who argue that an innate gift and creativeness are the only ingredients needed for a perfect translation, and that 'theory' is useless in practice; most of them will also reject 'specialized' translation, for being based merely on dictionary terminology adaptation, and devoid of any space for expressing one's creativity.

While fiction books remain an important part of a culture, written information today covers a much wider range of domains and even fiction books often include specialized information. The development of new areas of knowledge has increased the need for spreading out information in various forms and using different registers, including a literary or communicative style, in search of public acceptance and success. Text typology is often blurred, and non-fiction books propose data from economy, finance, politics, IT and social media in a perfectly literary language. As such, they require both a high level of specialized knowledge and the creativity of a 'literary' mind and, in this case, theory stands out as a unique asset for the translator. To paraphrase T.S. Eliot[vii], a worthy translation – regardless of the topic – which is "altogether alive" requires, from the reader, something that the usual novel reader is not prepared to offer – but which the more tolerant non-fiction reader will bear in mind and take advantage of, as an expanded knowledge.

In a nutshell, this is the essence of all efforts made by translation theorists and practitioners alike: to use previous knowledge in their favour and help readers, followers and trainees to gain expanded knowledge. And, in this ongoing process, Linguistics continues to have a special place, as a source of inspiration.

3. The path to competence

One of the most relevant areas in which the domain of Translation Studies has known a significant development over the decades is that of *competence*. In Linguistics, competence is closely related to the level of knowledge of any language, assessed by the level of performance of its native users. In the field of translation, linguistic competence is only one of several sub-categories defining the quality of information transfer; moreover, it refers to *pairs of languages*, since translators must

prove their ability to make the appropriate transfer thanks to a good knowledge of *two* languages, rather than one.

In recent years, competence has come a long way from Chomsky's generative linguistics approach, whereby *competence* is understood as the "speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language", in a clear distinction from *performance*, defined as "the actual use of the language in concrete situations" (Chomsky 1965: 4; later reviewed in Chomsky 1995: 14–18).

In the pursuit of an all-inclusive understanding of the way on which competence can be defined and used in the field of translation, separate groups of researchers, academics and practitioners contributed to the way in which we perceive it today. The concept itself had already gone through a series of definitions and models, such as Lowe's *translation skill* (1985), later changed to *ability* (Lowe, 1987, a term also adopted by Pym, 1993), translation *performance* (Wilss, 1989) and, finally, *translation(al) competence* (Nord, 1991). An important breakthrough came from the PACTE international group based in Barcelona, which first published its research results in the late 1990s, whereby its members pointed out that, in translation, several *extra*-linguistic competences are also required. Certain important factors – such as the competence of devising and following a *strategy* in translation, along with a *communicative competence* in the language pair each translator uses – finally found their official place in the all-rounder requirements involved in translation.

It must be emphasized, nevertheless, that the term *strategy* has had a difficult – and sometimes confusing – history. "Strategy" and "method" were often viewed as interchangeable, and even the translation "procedures" were viewed as acceptable synonyms. The distinction was finally made clear in recent studies which pointed out the fact that a *strategy* must be understood as the individually specific set of actions used by translators in approaching the information transfer; *methods* generally apply to the approach chosen for an entire text or a large part of it (focusing, for instance, on the decision to use word-for-word or free translation), while *procedures* refer to smaller units of language and the way in which they are to be translated into the target language.

Competence continues to be a critical concept for present-day language providers, companies and international organizations. Starting with 2009, under the auspices of the European Commission, the Directorate General for Translation (DGT) has provided a general framework for translating competences, through a project entitled *Competences for Professional Translators, Experts in Multilingual and Multimedia Communication*, whose aim is "to help raise the standard of translator training in the EU and foster cooperation and exchanges between higher-education institutions offering translation courses."[viii] The importance of this project lies mainly in its emphasis on the three-fold relationship between translators, academic translator training and the beneficiaries of translators' proficiency and competence – institutions, organizations and companies. As such, the project includes a long-term strategy for the training in European Master in Translation programmes, whereby universities from all the Member States are aiming to implement high standards in translator teaching and training. With a growing demand for quality translations and "multilingual concordance" in all the official languages of the EU, *competence* stands out as an important element, both in theory and in practice, as shown in the four-year strategic plan published in 2016[ix].

In the Commission's and DGT's view, translators must comply with five sub-fields of competence, as follows:

Language (linguistic) competence	*Acquired skill*; provides vocabulary knowledge in pairs of languages. Based on memory and logic training but also on individual *innate gift* for learning languages
Info-mining competence	*Acquired skill*; trained capacity of using translation management tools and other aids (dictionaries, glossaries of terms, etc.) in order to search for and choose the appropriate variant for each section of a text
Thematic competence	*Acquired skill*; learning specialized terminology and applying general translation rules to present it in a coherent, logical, correct structure in the target language; lifelong training using modern methodologies; importance of *trainers'* level of academic and specialized knowledge
Intercultural competence	*Innate* and *acquired skill*, if viewed from a sociolinguistic and textual perspective. Background knowledge must be extended through trained skills; importance of individual understanding of cultural specificity of target locale
Technological competence	*Acquired skill*; special training is required for the mastering of CAT tools, localisation software; ability to adapt translation to different formats and to use mixed media fluently

Table 1. Areas of competence according to the European Commission's EMT project requirements

The above table clearly shows the importance given to acquired (trained) skills and the way in which a major interstate organization (the European Union) aims to solve two issues at the same time – a relatively standardized translator training, attained along with a strong focus on fulfilling beneficiaries'/stakeholders' expectations. Indeed, acquired skills seem to take precedence over innate abilities that have been widely appreciated throughout the use of translation for foreign cultural awareness purposes. It seems unfair, since in our opinion individual creativity plays a major role even in the way in which specific rules and norms are applied for each type of project taken separately. The future will probably tell if the filter of the human mind can negotiate correctly and maintain the balance between norms and creativity.

4. New developments

In the 1990s and in the first decade of the third millennium Linguistics and Translation Studies seemed to have finally decided to move on their separate ways: the former found a source of renewal in the Optimality theory and Gradience, while the latter focused on *Multimodal Translation*, *Localisation* through GILT and *Transcreation*.

In 1993, Prince and Smolensky first spoke about an "optimality theory" based on the fundamentals of generative grammar, in a report that was finally published in 2002[x]. In short, they pointed out that, linguistically speaking, language is a form of interaction governed by specific constraints, and that the specific sentence structure as related to meaning, as well as the role of each unit is decided through choice, or *prioritisation*. For all purposes, they follow in the steps of Chomsky (1964: 385) who made the distinction between "utterances that need no analogic or imposed

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interpretation and others that can receive an interpretation" according to the specific relationship between units of speech.

In Prince and Smolensy's view, in order to become grammatically "consistent", grammar constraints must be viewed as "universal"; they need to be classified "hierarchically" and overstepped. As a result, if units are organised correctly, they ensure the logic of any grammatical structure.

The essence of the Optimality theory can be resumed as:

CONSTRAINTS → INTERACTION → CHOICE → CONSISTENCY

in other words, in a coherent relationship which can also be applied in the practice of translation.

On the other hand, Gradience also focuses on linguistic judgements and constraints. In a new approach to discourse analysis, it deals with the way in which the reader of a text finds various linguistic structures as either *acceptable* or *unacceptable*. Although the authors had in mind specific linguistic elements (such as syntax, context or coherence, to mention just a few) the idea that a specific utterance can be deemed "acceptable" or "unacceptable" is an important link that takes us back to Translation Theory.

But the real innovation here is the fact that the authors propose approaching utterances in "degrees" of acceptability or unacceptability; a linguistic structure can be partially acceptable/unacceptable and intermediate levels of acceptance should be set up for a better insight into the meaning. At the same time, linguists should approach cross-linguistic differences more carefully, taking into account various "extra-linguistic" factors based on the type of text at hand, its register, level of specialisation or the effect it triggers from the target readers/users.

Can these constraints be applied in translation as well? Indeed, they can. Experienced translators know that it is very difficult to make the shift into a target language with what would ideally be perfect equivalents. In translators' case the higher their level of competence, knowledge of cross-linguistic differences and specialization in a specific area, the higher the probability of proposing a better translation variant for any given text; nevertheless, the final product may be met with different degrees of acceptability by readers whose own competence – or even level of specialized literacy – is less than unitary. In other words, different individuals appropriate a text in different ways, thus creating a scale of acceptability which may eventually influence the text's effect on the whole. The translator's judgement regarding a text's degree of (un)acceptability is, however, different from the reader's: the former focuses on the quality of the completed task, while the latter assesses a number of factors, among which the topic, the grammatical consistency and logic, the ease of apprehending the message and the way in which it "tunes up" with his/her personal feelings. Let us not forget that Chomsky himself proved that specific utterances can be grammatically correct, while devoid of any logic[xi]. In Chomskian terms[xii], a translated text *can* be made to "belong" to a target culture as long as the translator is aware of the fact that it will have graded effects on its individual readers from any target culture.

Grammar constraints and psychological limitations are also applicable in translation, as they are bound to influence, in a positive or negative way, the way in which a translated text or parts of it are received and accepted by the target readers.

Moreover, Toury (1980) points out that it is the duty of the translator to find a balance between the *adequacy* of a text (whether or not, and to what degree the metatext complies with the prototext) and its conformity to target culture specificity – which is *acceptability* with a different definition.

5. What we should consider in translation

It is useful enough to view terms and concepts as dichotomies, such as the ones discussed herein – acceptable vs. unacceptable, logical vs. illogical or correct vs. incorrect – but do we focus enough on this issue in the practice of translation?

If it is true that the degrees of acceptability of a text "depend less on grammaticality and more on extra-linguistic factors (psychological, cultural or related to the field-dependent knowledge)"[xiii] this takes us back to linguistic competence and to the translator's ability to re-create a source text in such a way as to respond to target culture readers' expectations in every possible way. Translation theorists teach us that we should be both result-oriented, with a constant focus on the quality of the final product (Klingberg, 1986; Torop 1995), to the text type (Hatim & Munday 2004), cultural specificity (Baker 1992, Lungu-Badea 2004; Vîlceanu 2008 etc.) and, at the same time, be compliant with the text's intended message (Newmark 1988; Bassnett 2014).

Gradience is, indeed, a useful concept but, in practice, translation is an individual approach; theories can be group-delivered / adopted, but the final decision depends on each individual's personal approach. Moreover, we can safely state that translation is less "technical" than linguistics and, as such, it uses more flexible concepts, as well as a wider range of choice variants. Any inconsistencies in practice result from translators' lack of experience, but they can be solved in time, depending on the amount of work in a certain specialised area and the repeated use of specific terms.

Unfortunately, so far there is no relevant literature focusing on the limitations involved by the potential application of Gradience in Translation Studies, and even less in the practice of translation. It is a new territory which needs more research and testing. The following is an initial attempt, by the author of this study, to test young translation trainees' receptivity to the concept of Gradience and its effects on their work – individually and as a group.

6. Testing Gradience in Class – Methodology and Results

6.1. Empirical data

The target groups for this test were 2nd year students in Translation and Interpreting, from the Technical University of Civil Engineering, enrolled in the specialisation of Translating and Conference Interpreting. The text (so far) covered two academic years (2015/2016 and 2016/2017) and involved a number of 35-40 students per year group. The test, followed by the teacher's assessment and a discussion of the results covered three 2-hour periods.

Characteristics of the target group(s):
- A reasonably good knowledge of the conceptual frame (initially explained by the teacher);

- Limited experience in the practice of translation, but a reasonable degree of awareness and theoretical knowledge, based on courses of Theory and Practice of Translation;
- An unequal level of independence in using concepts;
- Higher flexibility in practice (translation tasks)

It must also be said that, at the moment of testing, students were relying more on perceived personal skills than on translation management tools.

6.2. Overview of the applied methodology and results

The participants were divided into four sub-groups, each having to translate texts from different fields (e.g. Civil Engineering, Economics, Medicine, Architecture). One student was elected as *project manager* and his responsibility was to distribute tasks, according to the teacher's indications.

Each group elected a *spokesperson*, responsible for presenting the final results (emphasizing difficulties, choices made, differences of opinion within each group etc.).

Prior to the task, both the project manager and the spokesperson in each sub-group were informed that they must pay attention to, and make notes of the choices made by their teams WITHOUT influencing the level of grammaticality / appropriateness of the translated texts.

The final assessment was made using the peer-review method, in alternate groups – in other words, students were asked to state their opinion on the *degree of appropriateness* in multiple-choice situations.

The results of the test emphasised both the students' psychological approach to the task and their willingness to adapt to new working habits. Here are some of the main conclusions reached in the follow-up stage:

1. Working habits within teams (choice made by students):
   a. Dividing text between participants, after careful complete reading by all
   b. Main focus on specific terminology, NOT grammar
   c. Difficulty in choosing one of several term translations (in cases of multiple choice)
   d. only the project manager(s) read the translation as a whole

2. *Assessment*
   a. Grammar constraints were pointed out clearly by 3 out of 4 teams;
   b. A tendency to apply excessive correction was perceived in all the teams;
   c. The mother-tongue interference was present in both phases;
   d. Students showed some difficulty in establishing a hierarchy for the degrees of appropriateness of the translated text in its final form, agreed by all members of the team.

3. *Post-task effects*
   For the teacher, it was important to assess the way in which students responded to this new type of task, as well as to set up a strategy for future activities on the same coordinates.

One of the most important conclusions reached in the post-testing stage was related to students' increased awareness regarding the validity of different choices (change of meaning / emphasis with different degrees).

As for Gradience in translation, it proved to be more relevant in the case of idioms or culturally-specific structures, than in the case of specialised term or concepts, partially due to students' trust in specialised dictionaries and translation databases which, in their opinion, result from specialists' experience and, therefore, must be taken (and used) as such.

Finally, all students agreed on the importance of applying grammar accurately, and context creatively. They could not agree, however, on the matter of end-readers' response, pointing out that readers' different level of experience, source language knowledge and proficiency in each field may influence the way in which they embrace a translation.

7. Conclusions

Apart from theoretical debates, whose relevance is essential for theorists and academics alike, Gradience *can* be applied in translation (both at theory and practice level) by adapting its main concepts to a more flexible frame.

This area of research is largely in need of contributions from academia and translators.

At the same time, translator training should adapt curricula to include topics such as Gradience (from both viewpoints) and/or Digital Linguistics.

The results of the test presented in class need to be extended to larger numbers of participants, while the texts proposed to the tested groups should cover a wider range of topics, with different degrees of complexity, in order to test students first-hand attitude and their response to them, both from a linguistic and extra-linguistic point of view.

Being a translator and a translator-trainer is no easy task. But nothing is easy in the world of mind-training. After all, we are multilingual, multicultural, multiple-task performing, soft-skills enhancing, liberal arts specialists… and more…

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vi See Ardelean, C. (2016). *Translating for the Future: What, How, Why Do We Translate?* Tritonic Editions, Bucharest. Chapter III – "Literary vs. Specialized Translation", pp. 53-66

vii Paraphrase to Eliot's comment in the Preface to Djuna Barnes' novel *Nightwood* (1950), Faber & Faber, p.2: "*A prose that is altogether alive demands something of the reader that the ordinary novel-reader is not prepared to give.*"

viii See more details on the web page of the project https://www.euatc.org/news/item/162-european-masters-in-translation-emt-project (last accessed on August 29, 2017)

ix See https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic-plan-2016-2020-dg-t_march2016_en.pdf for a detailed description of DGT aims and mission for the next years (last accessed on August 29,2017)

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xi In his famous example of 1957: "*Colourless green ideas sleep furiously*"

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