

Saudi MA Translators: An Evaluation Issue

Adel Salem Bahameed

Department of English

Faculty of Languages & Translation

King Khalid University, Abha, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

This paper aims to enlighten the way for teachers concerning the translation assessment process. The main research question is whether the holistic method is applicable. The study highlights the appropriateness of adopting this method to evaluate students' translations of the final year translation project. The study has the importance of trying to find the most appropriate evaluative way for students' conversions. The evaluation was carried on five female MA students at the postgraduate translation final project at the Faculty of Languages and Translation at King Khalid University in KSA. The hypothesis regarding the effectiveness of using the holistic assessment method and the possibility to improve the quality of assessing the students' translations in the future based on this method wasn't verified. This study concluded that the main factor which is identifiable was translation competence. Also, this method was found out to be too lenient to give impartial translation quality assessment for the students' translations.

Keywords: evaluating translation, holistic method, MA students, translation project, translation errors

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1. Introduction

It is confusing for translation teachers to assess their students' performance in the translation final exams and projects because the types of translation mistakes are various, and there is no one translation method, strategy, or approach that can handle all these disparities of translation. If using one strategy by itself can make the teacher deal with some translation mistakes fairly, it might not be applicable for others. It is not logical to treat all the different religious, cultural, structural, and semantic errors in the same way. Each case should be processed and assessed on its own (See de Beaugrande, 1978, p.135; Hatim, 2001, p.155). The careful scrutiny at the relevant studies on evaluating translational outputs indicates that the previous related literature was mainly theoretical. They have focused mainly on (1) Establishing the criteria for a "good translation" (Newmark 1991); (2) Comparing translation errors with language errors (Kusssmaul 1995); (3) Creating a pertaining system of translation errors (Kusssmaul, 1995; Pym, 1992; Williams 1989); (4) Evaluation according to the psycholinguistic "scenes and frames" theory (Bensoussan & Rosenhouse, 1994; Snell-Hornby, 1995); (5) The need to assess quality at a pragmatic scale as an extra dimension (Hatim & Mason, 1997; Hewson, 1995; Kusssmaul, 1995; Sager, 1989; Williams, 1989); among other things.

2. Literature Review

The empirical studies about the translation quality assessment have been relatively small in number. These studies are: (1) Campbell (1991) tries to see to what extent the translation tests have an impact upon the translator's competence, focusing on the processes of translation. The study was administered to 38 respondents who belong to four different ability groups. The test papers have been in English-Arabic translation. The researcher depended on certain analysis that included the length of the word, the ratio of lexical variety, omission in translation, among other things. This study is somewhat similar to other research conducted by Séguinot (1989, 1990) in the sense that both examine the processes of translation as reflected in the quality of the translator's work. However, Séguinot concentrates on students' mistakes, while Campbell examines other aspects as well. These different aspects are mainly linguistic. Campbell neither pays no attention to the students' ability to handle the pragmatic side nor consider the factor analysis to determine the nature of the elements of translation aptitude.

(2) Stansfield et al. (1992) produce a study depending mainly on a certain work that was done in favor of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to improve the staff translation capability for their job. Two skills were tested for FBI employees with the purpose of enhancing their competence. These skills include *accuracy* and *the ability of expression*. The researchers present descriptions for the different levels of translation skills for each aspect of translation competence. They applied them to the correcting process of the next exams. They concluded that *accuracy* appears to be "the more valid measure of translation ability" (Stansfield et al. 1992: 461).

(3) Waddington (2001) introduces related research focusing on experimenting in an academic university atmosphere. A questionnaire was sent to 52 teachers working in many universities in Canada and Europe. He aspires to discover the best correction way in the colleges of translations. Holistic approach (38.5%) and the way of error analysis (36.5%) were used by those teachers. The third way was a combination of error analysis with a comprehensive appreciation (23%). These ways constitute the results of his study.

4) Bahameed (2014) has experimentally given research using Hurtado's method of assessment on English department undergraduate students in a Yemeni environment. This method was followed on the correction of beginners' translations of the final exam containing different texts which were translated in both directions between English and Arabic. The review was administered to 43 respondents. This method was considered the best option as stated in the study results.

The current paper varies from Stansfield et al. (1992), Bahameed (2014), Campbell (1991), and Waddington (2001) in the following points:

- (1) It concentrates on translation courses in a different setting (i.e., King Khalid University, Abha, KSA).
- (2) This study has been administered to a higher sample of MA final year students.
- (3) The researcher, who has been teaching translation courses for 12 years, approved the material of the students' final project to find out the kind of translation project and the suitable evaluation method.
- (4) The researcher applied only one different approach, which is the holistic method, excluding the error analysis method because the researcher wants to see to what extent the former way is applicable.
- (5) This paper considers the results obtained through applying this method to the evaluation process for purpose investigating the pros and cons of this final project in the MA translation program to improve it for academic years to come.

3. Description of Experiment

3.1. Holistic Method of Assessment

The holistic method of assessment is believed to be accurate and objective. It considers a project as a whole, rather than as separate parts. However, it has a limited range of flexibility and subjectivity depending on the corrector's appreciation and the kind and number of translation errors the candidate does. This range makes it different from the error analysis correction method (Kusmaul, 1995, p. 129). The holistic approach was described differently by teachers. The three descriptions which the researcher found have based their scales on the requirements of professional translators. This approach was consequently of little use for judging the quality of the translation of beginners students. As a result, I adopted Waddington's (2001) holistic method, as it seems to be more applicable and compatible with the sample level of this study. The scale is existing as a single unit and treats translation competence as a whole. However, it requires the corrector to consider three different aspects of the student's performance, as shown in Table 1. Every one of the five levels has two possible scores to comply with the University marking system of 0 – 100. This method gives a range of freedom to the teacher. He can freely move within this range and give a higher mark to the respondent who did a good job that comes close form requirements of a higher level. He can give a lower score to the candidate whose translation was not as good as it should be.

Table 1. *Scale for Holistic Method C (Waddington, 2001, p. 6)*

Level	Accuracy of conveyance of ST content	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of Task Completion	Mark
Level 5	Complete conveyance of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach a proficient level.	Almost all the translation looks like a piece originally written in English. There may be minor lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Successful	95-100
Level 4	Almost complete conveyance. There might be one of the insignificance ambiguity. It requires a certain amount of revision to reach a proficient level.	Large sections look like a piece originally written in English. There are several lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Almost completely successful	70-94
Level 3	Conveyance of the general idea(s) but with several lapses inaccuracy; needs considerable revision to reach a proficient level.	Certain parts look like a piece originally written in English, but others read like a translation. There are a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Adequate	50-69
Level 2	Conveyance undermined by serious imprecision; thorough revision required to reach a proficient level.	Almost the entire text looks like a translation; There are continual lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors.	Inadequate	30-49
Level 1	Inadequate conveyance of ST content; the translation is not worth revising.	The candidate reveals a total lack of ability to express himself adequately in English.	Totally Inadequate	10-29

4. The Hypothesis

It is possible to develop the estimation quality of the students' translations in the light of holistic method. The appropriateness of using this method is high. To confirm the hypothesis, the results should be reasonable in the sense that students' failure cases should not exceed 40 %, and the highest top students should not exceed 20 %.

5. The Study Sample

This study focused on a sample of five Saudi MA female translation students. All the sample elements are female students, studying in the second and final year of their postgraduate study at the university for the academic year 2019. MA students were selected because they are supposed to have a relatively good command of English and Arabic (mother tongue). They also have integrated skills in translating texts from Arabic into English and vice versa. They have already attended translation courses in their BA degree program and the first year of the MA program to gain the necessary translation skills. These matters could help them handle the SL text properly.

6. The Final Translation Project

The translation project (Table 2) was quite similar to other final projects of the same course adopted last year. It consisted of long written text (50 pages), selected primarily by the students. However, it was approved by the supervisor. Inappropriate selections were excluded. Arabic is the mother tongue of the students, and students used different translation directions. Four students have chosen to translate their project text from English into Arabic, while the fifth one has taken the challenge and brought her material the other way around. Consider Table 2.

Table 2. *The material of 50 pages translated by MA female students at KKU*

Candidate	Title of the Book	Author	pages	Direction
Candidate Translator 1	Atomic Habits	James Clear	1-50	From English into Arabic
Candidate Translator 2	The Three Questions	Don Miguel Ruiz and Barbara Emrys	1-50	From English into Arabic
Candidate Translator 3	تاجر السعادة Merchant of Happiness	Eid Obaid Al-Rashidi	1-50	From Arabic into English
Candidate Translator 4	Better Than Before	Gretchen Rubin	67 - 117	From English into Arabic
Candidate Translator 4	The Rules of People	Richard Templar	1-50	From English into Arabic

The material of these books is so recent and essential, and famous authors wrote them. These books speak mainly about social matters, the development of one's personality utilizing the experiences of others, and displaying contemporary methods to achieve ones' goals in life. The selected part of the book is quite lengthy, and it is expected to contain diverse translation problems. Using dictionaries is allowed to translate this MA translation project. The total number of texts was about 12500 words long. Students were given a final evaluation out of 100 marks.

6. How the Method Was Applied

This method was employed to evaluate the MA students of the translation degree program, done by five English department female students to verify the hypothesis. This assessment method was used by a professional professor whose major is Arabic-English translation and has got 12 years of experience in translation teaching. He used this method for these 50-page projects in the final

year. These projects are the last essential requirement to get an MA degree in translation. The researcher considered the accumulative lessons, technical information, practical skills that those students acquired in the previous year. Applying the evaluation process was straightforward and systematic in the light of the holistic method. One red line is marked under the minor mistake, which doesn't affect the sentence general intended meaning. More than one red line is brought under the severe error that can affect the general intended meaning. After completing the marking process, the more lines the evaluator finds on the answer sheet, the less level the student gets under Waddington's (2001) holistic method. This is the way of assessment, carried out to get the result of a student.

7. The Study Findings

The evaluation process of the students' translation project was followed by an oral exam using an online blackboard method to make sure that the student herself did the translation. Students were also asked to submit a commentary report, which usually contains three main parts: (1) An introduction which generally includes the importance and reasons for choosing the source language (SL) text. (2) This second part constitutes the body that focuses mainly on the translation problems, which were encountered during translating the project and how they manage to tackle them. (3) This final part usually gives conclusions, suggestions, and recommendations to enhance carrying out similar projects in the future. That being the case, each student has submitted source text, target text, and the commentary report at the end of the semester. Having used Waddington's (2001) holistic evaluation method stated above, Table 3 shows the overall detailed result of the students.

Table 3. *General detailed result*

Student No.	The Holistic Method	
	Degree of Task Completion	Mark
Student 1	Successful	98
Student 2	Successful	97
Student 3	Successful	97
Student 4	Successful	95
Student 5	Almost completely successful	92

The first look at Table 3 indicates that applying this correction method resulted in no failure cases. The student needs 60% marks to reach the lowest pass mark, which is compatible with the typical system at Saudi Universities. To precisely calculate the result with numbers and percentages, we can take a look at Table 4.

Table 4. *General accumulative result*

Type	Pass			Fail		Total
	Successful	Almost completely successful	Adequate	Inadequate	Totally Inadequate	
Frequency	4	1	0	0	0	5
Percentage	80	20	0	0	0	100 %

Table 4 reveals that 4 cases (80 %), which is equal to the sum of the successful and the small instances of the whole number of the study, were nil. The faculty educational system regards this as too high percentage of success rate, which does not typically exceed (20 %) in most subjects taught in this particular English department. To carry on the data analysis, translation direction was also calculated to see whether this relevant factor has any influence. Table 5 shows a particular outcome of the students no. 1, 2, 4, and 5 who selected their translation to be from English into Arabic and student no. 3, whose text was translated from Arabic into English.

Table 5. *Impact of the translation direction on the failure rate*

Student No.	Direction to Arabic (100 marks)	Direction to English (100 marks)
Student 1	98	
Student 2	97	
Student 3		97
Student 4	95	
Student 5	92	

Table 5 displayed the students' results, bearing in mind the translation direction. It was noted that there is no impact of the translation direction on the overall effect. Having no failure cases in this program requirement is a strong indication that students' competence of the English language, especially in writing skills, is remarkably advanced.

8. Discussions

Critics may say that the holistic method is reasonable. However, it does not have enough degree of precision and objectivity because of its partial reliance on the corrector's anticipation and appreciation. For instance, the corrector can give 90 or 100 marks according to his ability to behave sensibly and make personal decisions. There is no technical standard to select either one as exactly as the error analysis method (Kussmaul 1995, p. 129) to produce an objective result without the corrector's interference. Also, this method did not show any failure cases. However, the holistic approach proponents defend it by saying that it is logically elegant. They also say this high percentage of success happened because the students are excellent in translation and writing skills. They have already undergone excessive practical courses in the MA first year, and this resulted in acquiring excellent and advanced command of both languages. They became experienced translators in maneuvering the text and handling different kinds of translation problems. However, critics would feel that the holistic method is more lenient in favor of the students. It gives more chance to the subjectivity in the correction process.

Furthermore, taking a close look at the students' overall accumulative result (Table 4) has offered a negative feeling that this method is too loose and flexible. It calls for some kind of rigidity. This is clear in the result, which contains 80% have got a successful level, which is the highest marking of the holistic method for the top students out of the translation class. Consider the illustrative diagram in Figure 1.

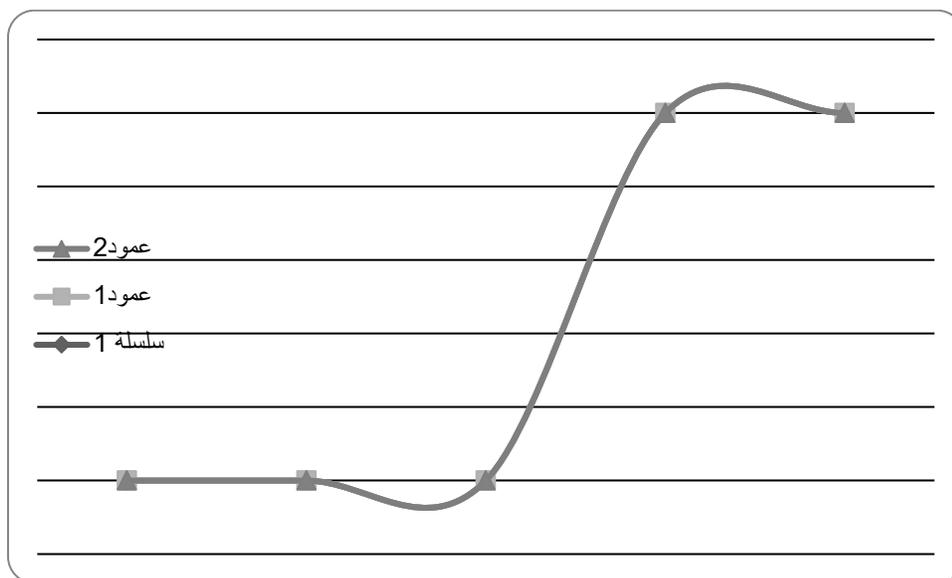


Figure 1. General accumulative result

Therefore, when the majority gets such top markings, it will be considered too much. One could feel that students can quickly become part of this level without exerting much effort. Meanwhile, the excellent top students in reasonable typical cases are expected not to exceed 10 %. That being the case, the result indicates that the majority can make their translation reads like a piece initially written in the TL. Perhaps this happened because the holistic method pushes the corrector to consider lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors to be minor. Any spelling mistake, for instance, was considered a grave mistake by the error analysis correctors, while holistic translation teachers assume this to be a trivial mistake. However, the comprehensive teachers' assumption was unjustifiable. It is worth mentioning that the students took around three months long, which is considered enough time to check the spelling in a dictionary. This procedure supports the idea that the holistic correction method was not strict enough to make only the diligent respondents pass the project. Other students who might not be attentive enough can give the project too. The holistic method considers spelling mistakes to be dangerous if only such errors are many.

On the other hand, this method considers lexical mistake to be trivial unless they are many as well. In the error analysis method, the penalty of subtracting four marks is carried out for the inappropriate lexical item. This matter happens when a student chooses a wrong word or select a wrong meaning out of many definitions of a polysemous word. However, the penalty of the latter method is reasonable because committing such a grave mistake could negatively affect the general sense of the next sentences or the whole text. Other lexical errors include the omission mistakes such as skipping translating a word. The loss of meaning can occur when the corrector feels that the definition of a translated sentence is blurred or incomplete. The latter two cases were penalized severely, as these mistakes can negatively distort the meaning of all the SL text, so this constitutes a sensible way. But in the holistic method, these mistakes are severely penalized if they are many.

Moreover, the researcher observed that the direction of the translation was not a remarkable factor and didn't have a clear connection with the degree of difficulty of the project. The result in

Table 5 supports the assumption that translating into one's mother tongue is as equal as the other way around.

9. Conclusions

The conclusions are that if this holistic evaluation method is too lenient and allows top level students to be so many, it remains a dependable way because it was employed adequately to all students without any distinction. If we adopted other assessments such as the error analysis correction method (Kussmaul, 1995:129), the evaluation would cause the failure rate to exceed the reasonable ratio.

The other accusation of the holistic method is that it allows some range of assessment to depend on the evaluator's subjective intuition. This matter might be too flexible and hard to measure. However, this intuition is rather sensible since the personal range is limited, and the evaluation process is always performed by proficient translation scholars.

In addition, this method is accused of being unable to easily make a distinction among the diligent respondents as long as their number may reach 80% out of the whole translation class. That is to say, it can give senior positions to many students, and this might give a negative impression. Besides, this method is too lenient to the extent that it can give very little chance to see the individual differences among these many top students. The lenience of the holistic method is also manifested, according to the findings, in the fact that those students are not accountable for the minor lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors. These errors constitute a matter of the holistic method that it is too broad to measure. It was not made clear in this method about how many minor faults could be overlooked and excused by the project evaluator.

Indeed, being too lenient will be negatively reflected in the long run on the assessment quality system, and the general teaching process. This matter would lead the graduates to have a low standard. Consequently, this point would make us assume that the hypothesis regarding the appropriateness of using this holistic assessment method hasn't been confirmed.

About the Author:

Adel Salem Bahameed, is an Associate Professor of Translation at the department of English, Faculty of Languages and Translation, King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia since 2018/2019. His areas of interest include Cross-cultural Translation, Assessment of Translation, Interpreting, Technicalities of Translation. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0666-9824>

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