

Patricia Minacori Vibert*

Translation Assessment: the Creation of a Computer Interface

Abstract

Between September 2004 and January 2006, I analysed assessments of five hundred and forty five translation assignments produced by French native speaker students from English into French. The analysis revealed that the students' translation errors could be divided into four main categories – those of comprehension, expression, research, and revision – which correspond to the major steps a professional translator has to perform in his/her work. The objective of this article is to present an 'error tree', which takes into consideration the analysed, and other potential errors; and it's aim is both to facilitate assessments by teachers, and to help students to adopt a pro-active approach in their work. The error tree is intended to reflect French norms concerning translation assessment at University but some elements can be considered as a transgression of the norms. As of this date, the tree has already been tested and a further category has been added. The ongoing research also led to the creation of an interface for an e-learning platform in 2007, and this is continuing to be tested in conjunction with students.

1. Introduction

In French university language departments, translation classes always form part of the first three years of a primary degree (*Licence* years L1, L2 and L3) and they occur more specifically during Master's degrees in specialised and translation studies. The present article deals only with translations from a foreign language to a mother tongue and the research undertaken concerned French mother tongue students. Translations undertaken during the *Licence* years also have a pedagogical dimension, the aim being not only to teach methodology but also to help students to learn a foreign language's terminology and grammar, notions, and so forth. In the present case, this language was English. The first and second years of a Master's degree (the years M1 and M2) have a different focus, which is to deal with scientific and technical texts for professional purposes. In this case, the objective is to train future translators.

Assessing translation quality is a difficult matter and it is widely recognised that many assessment models exist, depending on the particular criteria being emphasised. The questions which this article seeks to answer mainly deal with the fundamental elements to be taken into consideration in translation assessment, while it also seeks to investigate whether a link can be created between pedagogical and professional translations. Thus, between September 2004 and January 2006 I analysed 545 translation assignments, where translation was conducted from English into French, and carried out by University students ranging from the years L2 to M2, (Minacori Vibert, 2006, a, b). The analysis had two main objectives – to create an 'error tree' which would be useful for teachers (evaluators), and to help students to enhance the quality of the translations they produce. Since 2006, I have been testing the assessment model both with my own students and with other universities (*Université de Mulhouse, Université de Besançon, ESIT (Ecole Supérieure d'Interprètes et de Traducteurs, Paris)* and the *Université de Paris VII, Denis Diderot*).

The first part of the article offers an outline of the different positions relating to assessment adopted by English and French translation specialists. It will then present a method of analysis relating to translation assessments, the results of the analysis, relevant discussions and proposed fu-

* Patricia Minacori Vibert
Laboratoire EILA ARP CLILLAC,
Université Paris Diderot
France
pminacori@wanadoo.fr

ture developments, referring in particular to the creation of e-learning platform concerning translation assessment.

2. Assessment

In the field of Education Science, the French word *évaluation* is the one mostly used to describe a teacher's appreciation of an assignment or piece of homework, in particular because it conveys a connotation of quality. For example, for Hadji (1990, 1992), the word *évaluation* has three intentions – to estimate, to appraise and to understand. As regards the first two intentions the stress is placed on the act of production by the students, and if one understands what procedures the students used, it is then possible to take into consideration the steps employed by them. The aim is to give a mark or grade which reflects a quantitative aspect to the work and sometimes to add comments, annotations, and appraisal corresponding to a qualitative aspect. Certain specialists have shown that the mark can vary according to the evaluator and that certain 'effects' can be envisaged:

- an 'order effect', in which the first translations are more severely assessed compared to the later ones;
- a 'fixing effect', in which one overmarks or, on the contrary, undermarks a work if it immediately follows a work considered as bad or good respectively;
- a 'place effect', in which if the error is situated at the beginning of a work, it creates a negative *a priori*;
- a 'source effect', which describes the influence a student can have on the mark.

These effects show that there is always an element of subjectivity in any assessment.

What exactly is an 'error' in translation? An error can be seen as *An act or thought that unintentionally deviates from what is correct, right, or true* (Concise Oxford, 2005; 459). Martinez Melis (2001) analyzed different definitions of what constitutes an 'error' according to different authors, and they include the following:

- an error is unintentional, recurring and systematic, according to Spilka (1984);
- an error can deal with comprehension or expression, as stated by Gile (1992);
- an error will depend on the impact on the final text, according to Gouadec (1989): if fatal, the error is deleterious for a translator's reputation.

A further aspect of translation deals with quality.

Many attempts have been made over the last forty years to analyse and assess translation quality ranging from Nida (1964) and the analysis of the final product to Darbelnet's (1977) identification of nine parameters according to which the quality of a translation should be assessed, and from Vermeer's skopos theory (1996) to evaluation through discourse analysis by Bensoussan/Rosenhose (1990).

Secara (2005) outlines several models, which have been created by institutional organisations:

- in the 1970s, the Canadian Language Quality Measurement System (Sical) was created and based on the identification of as many as 675 error types (300 lexical and 375 syntactic).
- ATA (American Translators Association) has developed a scheme, which includes twenty-two error types (terminology, register, accents, diacritical marks)
- The ITI (Institute of Translation and Interpreting, UK) model called 'Suggested Conventions for Marking up Translations';
- The SAE J 2450 model, developed by the Society of Automotive Engineers in collaboration

with General Motors based on seven error categories, which all concern terminology (Wrong term, Syntactic error, Omission, Word structure or Agreement error, Misspelling, Punctuation error, Miscellaneous error);

- the European project, Multidoc, coming from the SAE J 2450;
- Blackjack, developed by the British translation agency ITR containing 21 error categories.

Translation teaching institutions have also created models adapted to real-life situations, and notable examples include:

- the Translation Assignment Feedback Sheet adopted by the Centre for Translation Studies at Leeds University, and which is based on five parameters;
- the Waddington holistic model (2001) created at *Universidad Pontificia Comillas* in Madrid;
- the *Université de Genève*'s model developed by Lee-Jahnke (2001)
- the MeLLANGE project by Leeds University (2004), which was used by the *Université de Paris VII – Denis Diderot*.

Other experts have also taken theoretical or descriptive methods into consideration, like Waddington (1999) which focus on:

- what constitutes a 'good' translation according to Darbelnet (1977) and Newmark (1991);
- the typology of possible errors, drawing particularly on research carried out by Gouadec (1981, 1989), Nord (1993) and Kussmaul (1995)
- the linguistic approach by House (1981) and Larose (1989).

Empirical studies have also been conducted, such as Campbell's objective (1991) of discovering a translation process from a consideration of thirty-eight productions from Arabic to English.

Standfield et al. (1992) carried out a study with the American Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) to create competence tests specially designed for translators and Waddington (2001: 313) explains:

the study confirms what teachers of translation have long suspected, i.e. that translation competence consists of two different aspects, the ability to understand and transfer the content of the source text and the ability to express this content adequately in the target language.

From these results and also from an enquiry carried out in conjunction with fifty-two translation lecturers from twenty European and Canadian Universities, Waddington (2001) tested four assessment methods:

- Method A, developed by Hurtado Albir (1995), based on error analysis and a list of possible mistakes under the following headings:
 - inappropriate renderings which affect the understanding of the source text,
 - inappropriate renderings which affect expression in the target text,
 - inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of the main or secondary function of the source text.
- Method B, also based on error analysis and designed to take into account the negative effect of errors on the overall quality of the translation (Kussmaul, 1995)
- Method C is a holistic method of assessment (Waddington, 2001)
- Method D consists of mixing Method B and Method C

The conclusion is that all four methods were proven to be equally valid as far as criterion-related validity was concerned, in spite of the considerable differences existing among them.

With regard to terminology, a big difference is discernable between the terms used in French and in American/English research. In the latter case, experts use the references ‘mistranslation, incorrect translation, error, mistake, shift,’ and so on, whereas in French the relevant terms are *non-sens*, *contresens*, *faux sens* (Dussart, 2005). Traditionally, this terminology has been employed in French universities (and schools). In the present paper these words will be used according to the following meanings, which were articulated by Ladmiral (1979: 62)

... le faux sens ressortit à un problème d'expression en français langue-cible maternelle (L1) ; le contresens à la compréhension du texte source, donc à un problème de compréhension en langue étrangère (L2)... ; le non-sens marque que l'intelligence de l'élève s'est trouvée en défaut.

In effect, Ladmiral categorized *faux sens* as an error dealing with expression and the other two, *non-sens* and *contresens* as errors relating to comprehension.

The above-mentioned definitions now raise questions to be answered concerning assessment, in particular related to skills or competencies.

3. Questions related to assessment

Drawing both on research and from acknowledgement of employers' requirements, a number of questions can be posed in relation to assessment, in particular questions about the skills and areas of competence a translator should attain. This present section will also consider the different phases of the translation process.

The Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain, and the PACTE (Process of the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) Group, Martinez Melis/Hurtado Albir, (2001) designed six particularly accurate sub-competencies:

1. Communication competence in both languages. Comprehension in the source language and expression in the target language.
2. Extra-linguistic competence. Knowledge of the theory of translation, bicultural knowledge, encyclopaedic and thematic knowledge.
3. Transfer competence. The ability to perform the entire process of transfer from the original text to the final text.
4. Instrumental/professional competence. Knowledge and skills relating to professional translation practice.
5. Psycho physiological competence. The ability to apply psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources.
6. Strategic competence. Conscious and subconscious, verbal and non-verbal individual procedures used to solve problems, encountered during the translation process.

It is possible to draw a parallel between the above competencies and those called for in international organisations, and to see that common ground can be found. For example, an examination of the Internet-based recruitment sites for international organisations such as the European Union, the United Nations, OCSE, and so on, reveals that the following skills are requested:

- perfect command of all aspect and stylistic levels of the first language, and thorough knowledge of two or more languages;
- familiarities with different sectors and the capacity to rapidly and efficiently obtain the background knowledge necessary to produce a professional translation standard;
- ability to work as part of a team, under pressure, and to fit into a multicultural working environment;
- translation skills including the ability to use research, computer-assisted translation and terminology tools, and so on.

In 2005, the European Union created a panel to ensure a good match between graduates' competencies and employers' requirements. A translator competence profile¹ was drawn up (2009) by a group of European experts and includes no less than forty-eight competencies listed under six headings, and stated in the following order:

- translation service provision,
- language,
- intercultural,
- information mining,
- technological,
- thematic.

As a next step, it is suggested to examine the different elements of a translation process. Research has shown that translation means comprehension of a source text's meaning and the expression of that meaning in a target language, usually in the translator's mother tongue. Even if it is a challenging task to imagine all the processes used in translation, one can roughly consider the following elements:

1. a text is read in a foreign language;
2. the logic, the different parts, the objective and so on are expressed through a lexical structure; grammatical rules, notions, and so on are understood;
3. if not, a gap of knowledge appears between the author of the text and the translator. The translator consciously understands that research has to be undertaken to fill this gap;
4. the translator has to fill the gap by conducting pertinent research on the text itself, by using a logical approach, by investigating context and then through research in other texts (hyper textual research), that is, using monolingual or bilingual dictionaries, but also books, articles and so on;
5. he/she must reach an entire comprehension of the text;
6. he/she rigorously expresses comprehension, respecting the author's intended meaning, the text's objective, with precision and conciseness and also according to the reader's expectations. In this part of the process, supplementary research may be necessary;
7. the translator must also revise the translation. The word 'revise' is employed here rather than 'proof-read' because of the definitions of the two verbs: '*Revise: to examine or re-examine and improve or amend*' (Concise Oxford, 2005: 1180) '*Proof-read: read and mark any errors*' (Concise Oxford, 2005: 1097).

I consider that the notion of improvement in revising is of great importance for the translator and this phase goes well beyond '*reading and marking error*' (Minacori Vibert, 2001). I also acknowledge that a reviser is a professional, part of whose task is to review another's translation. By employing the word 'revise' I wish to stress the fundamental element, which any professional translator puts into practice, and which has to be considered with great attention by students.

Revision can be divided into three phases:

- During Phase One the source text (ST) and the target text (TT) are compared to see if each message intended by the author is expressed, that is, if the meaning of the ST is present in the TT. The first phase can be helpful to check if a phrase, a sentence or a full paragraph was not omitted, and if the author's intention was fully respected.

1 http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/key_documents/emt_competences_translators_en.pdf (accessed 15 October 2009)

- Phase Two deals with the quality of the target text. It is fundamental to revise the target text separately so as to remove the linguistic outer shell of the source text and to concentrate on the translation's quality. This is a fundamental phase during which students must pay special attention to avoid any process of calquing.
- Phase Three concerns revision to check grammar and syntax. I recommend separating Phases Two and Three so working memory is not impaired when checking the form and the substance.

These elements constitute a minimum in order to attain a professional translation quality but they are time consuming. One of the many reasons for this could be that they are the exact reverse replica of what reading is – revising goes from concept, via form to surface elements, while reading involves first decoding surface elements (letters), then forms (words, collocations, phrases) and concept and at last meaning. Another reason could be that it is difficult to reach objectivity when revising one's own translation. This is probably the reason why it takes so much time to revise a text, but it is an indispensable element of any translation. Revision has to be taught and it should be taken into consideration with great care by students.

The first five translation process elements concern comprehension, the sixth element deals with expression, and the seventh with revision. Research can be carried out during any element of the process. This is the reason why when the text is fully understood, expression is easy. As Boileau (1952: 245) observed:

Ce qui se conçoit bien s'énonce clairement et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément.)

(What is understood well can be clearly expressed, so words come easily. My translation)

The different elements involved in the translation process do not necessarily occur in the very same order as mentioned above. Sometimes the translator gets the impression of understanding a passage of a text but when he/she comes to translate it, he/she realises that an element of the puzzle is missing. Research must then be carried out – comprehension and expression have a back and forth movement if words do not come easily. This is also a good way of knowing if a passage of a text is well understood or not.

The central element of any translation is comprehension. For Blanc/Brouillet (2003: 147):

Comprendre un texte, c'est construire une représentation cohérente en mémoire.

(Understanding a text means constructing a coherent representation in one's memory. My translation).

Understanding means connecting what one reads to what one already knows in order to relate the text's information and the information a translator already has. The above-mentioned authors see in comprehension a relation between *le monde du texte, le monde évoqué par le texte et le monde du lecteur* (2003: 158) ('the text's world, the world around the text and the reader's world'). If a vertex of this triangular relation is missing, the connection to comprehension cannot be established.

What does understanding a text in a foreign language mean? This is an ongoing question but we can reasonably consider that a triangular relation must also be created, and that memory plays a fundamental role. From this aspect we can consider several consequences: first of all we must make students aware that translation is not an exercise on words but on meaning. For example, students may be capable of understanding every word without being able to translate the meaning, if a particular notion is not known. Comprehension in a foreign language goes well beyond knowledge of words or grammar structures. Extra linguistic notions – the implicit message, different type of references (cultural, historic and religious and so on) – must be taken into account.

Comprehension also means establishing a link between (the text and) our own knowledge in a conscious fashion. Awareness means *cum scientia* that is 'with knowledge'. So awareness can be related to knowledge. For a student this implies that when a text is read in a foreign language, he/

she is conscious that he/she does not understand certain elements of the text and mitigates the lack of comprehension. But if an error is made, many reasons can be noted; the student did not read the text properly, or the text was read correctly but:

- a. context was not used to understand the text;
- b. the text was not linked to other texts in order to research ‘around the text’;
- c. research was done but not properly.

I have already examined in a previous article what the translator’s level of awareness corresponds to. (Minacori Vibert, 2005). When a translator reads a meaning element, different levels of awareness can be reached on a scale of 0 to 5:

- a lexical term, a grammatical rule, a notion, a cultural reference and so on is known precisely by the translator – for this particular element, his/her level of awareness is 5;
- a element of the text is more or less known so research is done to confirm and define this element of the text – in this case the level of awareness can vary between 1 and 4;
- the translator is not aware that he/she does not understand an element of the text, and his/her proposal is ill founded – here the level of awareness is null.

The major difficulty for evaluators is to help students to move from level 0 to level 1. For the moment, it may be asserted that there is only one possibility for helping them – they must question their translation and make sure they have understood what they have expressed in it. This difficulty can only be partly solved through an assessment method, which will be described in the next section.

4. Method

I have been teaching translation to L1, L2, L3, M1 and M2 students for more than twenty years and it is to be noted that types of texts vary according to the level of the classes.

For L1 or L2 students, for example, articles are taken from the general press. They deal with political institutions, cultural and everyday life topics and so on. The objective is to work on comprehension of the foreign language, and expression in the students’ mother tongue. The way research can be carried out is by utilising not only dictionaries but also taking into account other press articles (www.theworldpress.com) to check terminology in French.

L3 students work with articles from the economic press – in this case notional research is carried out using dictionaries, encyclopaedias, manuals, specialised sites on the Internet, and so on;

For M1 and M2 students, professional texts are chosen which display specialised language from the corporate world and are drawn from relevant Internet sites or internal documentation, such as patents, statements of ‘General Conditions’ and scientific texts from the specialised press.

Assessment is not an easy matter especially if exams are taken in class. The alternative the evaluators are facing is, on the one hand, a situation in which equity is important, and each student should be placed in the very same conditions. In my own classes, for example, no documents whatsoever are allowed. On the other hand, certain dictionaries, such as monolinguals, are allowed, but in this case difficulties arise in imposing the very same dictionary on every student. I have opted for the ‘no documents solution’ and choose texts according to this principle.

Assessment texts for L2, L3 and M1 students deal with subjects connected to those translated in class. Length is also an important factor: L1 students have around 225 words to translate in one hour (English to French), L2 students 250 words, L3 students, 275 words and M1 and M2 around 300 words. I always present a text that corresponds to Aristotle’s definition – a text is composed of a beginning, a middle part and an end. Since comprehension is the fundamental phase of a translation, and a text can only be understood first within its integrity, context is of utmost importance for the student as far as terminology, and also reasoning, is concerned. I insist on the fact that if

a word or a phrase is not understood, the first act a student must do is to reason from within the text, in accordance with the context.

For M2 students, assessment is different since professional texts are proposed. Taking my own classes as an example, the students translate each text in their own time, outside of class. The texts are corrected during class with the input of the students and of the teacher, and the teacher assesses them. This method allows fostering with regard to comprehension and expression but also enables research and revision – the four major elements of any translation.

For M2 students, an additional criterion can also be introduced, which states the professional level of any translation, that is the level under which a translation cannot be revised in view of the fact that there are too many missing elements.

4.1. Collecting and analysing data

Between September 2004 and January 2006, I analysed and assessed 545 translation exams from English to French for:

- 215 second-year students (L2),
- 134 third-year students (L3),
- 76 fourth-year students (M1),
- 120 fifth-year students (M2).

For each text, it was decided to list errors by collecting them into different categories. In this process, I found it useful to apply Gile's (1992) definitions of errors, as comprehension and expression errors. I also added two other types – those of research and revision.

The focus was not on a quantitative study concerning the number of errors but on a qualitative study, so as to take into account the largest possible type of errors.

4.2. Objective

The objective of the study was to take into consideration the largest possible typology aiming at:

- analysing the assessment criteria for translation exercises used in French universities and refining them,
- making the assessment procedure easy,
- being as objective as possible,
- facilitating error annotation,
- helping students to understand their errors and not to reproduce them,
- proposing methodology aspects,
- linking professional requirements to student teaching, avoiding any linguistic-only approach,
- creating an evolving element.

Since I conducted the analysis on texts which were translated from English to French, the more detailed account of the research is available in French (Minacori Vibert, 2006, a, b).

As previously stated, assessment is a time-consuming procedure and one of its objectives is to make students aware of the types of errors they make. Out of all the assessment models I analysed, the structure presented in the MeLLANGE project², created by Leeds University is easily readable, but only two types of errors are proposed – the first linked to “content transfer” and the second to “language”.

2 http://mellange.eila.jussieu.fr/Annotation_Schemes/translation_error_tree_fr.jpeg (accessed 15 October 2009)

This kind of structure comes from a ‘decision tree’ used, in particular, in information mining, with the aim of creating a simple model from a more or less complex phenomenon measured. It is designed for classification and for decision; simply put, it is a classifier in the form of a tree structure.

In the MeLLANGE case, it is called an ‘error tree’ because the intention was to list errors and to link them with possible causes. This link is particularly adapted to helping students to understand their errors in a simple way. The structure used is easy to understand, innovative and evolving, since it is always possible that it can be enriched by future research. Therefore, I decided to use the form of a tree, including elements I reckon as fundamental.

5. Results and discussions: the error tree

Because I teach in France, I wanted my work to relate to the different elements used in translation assessment in French universities – my goal was therefore not to create new assessment elements but to adapt existing ones. Moreover, I wanted to take into consideration the four main elements of the translation process to help students step by step. Finally, I hypothesised on the reasons why students made errors and tried to typify them. From existing errors collected from their translations, I extrapolated different sub-categories. The tree is far from being exhaustive and, for each category, I included an evolution element named ‘Other’ as one can see in figure 1 below.

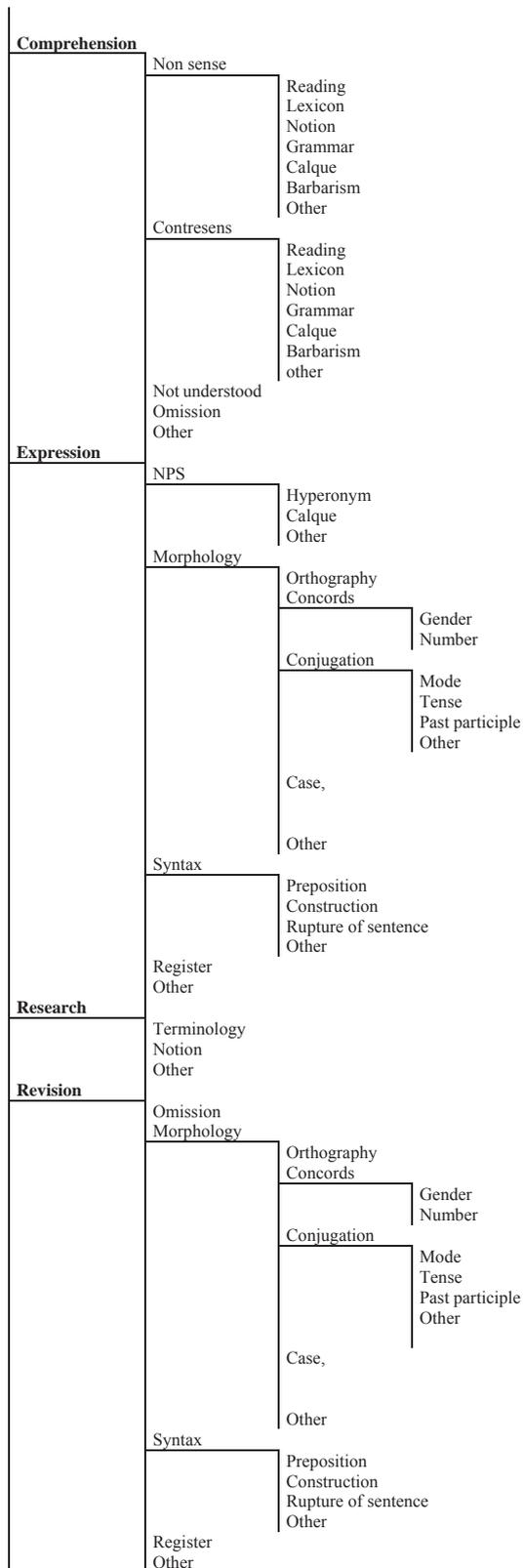


Figure 1. Error tree as in 2006

The first category is that of comprehension, and it contains several subcategories:

- *nonsense* can be compared to an absurdity – the student proposes something which does not suit the meaning of the author in any way, or which does not translate the author’s meaning at all. Nonsense can be considered the worst error;
- *contresens* means that the student gives a meaning other than that intended by the author. It may be the exact contrary or something very different;
- ‘not understood’ is a sub-category inspired by many cases in which students showed great difficulties understanding the meaning of a part of a text. A particularly effective example to illustrate this issue is the expression WMD (‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’). A text was presented in class on the subject of the War in Iraq, in which WMD was mentioned. The notion was explained and then the text was given as an exam, the very same notion was present. Some students forgot, or were not in class during explanations for example, and could not understand the acronym. Consequently, they had no other option than to write an expression directly translated and copied from the English. However, the acronym has no meaning in French. From a linguistic point of view, an evaluator could assess this error as an absurdity, a type of ‘nonsense’, but on a translatology level, the error simply means the student could not possibly understand the term ‘WMD’. The situation was puzzling for the evaluator – one possibility was to create another category different from ‘*nonsense*’ and ‘*contresens*’, that is ‘not understood’, stressing the fact that any attempt to reach comprehension was not possible;
- omission is relatively common in the translations which I read – students skip over a difficulty and in this case they leave a blank in the position of an unknown word, phrase, expression, sentence and so on. The other possibility is that they skip over a part of the text without noticing it because revision had not been carried out effectively. Omission can then be considered a comprehension error or a revision error.

The second sub-category concerns expression errors. For many years, French teachers have been working with a category which is called ‘*faux sens*’ whose Delisle’s definition (1999: 40) lacks precision:

Faute de traduction qui consiste à attribuer un mot ou à une expression du texte de départ une acception erronée qui altère le sens du texte, sans pour autant conduire à un contresens.

(A translation error consisting of giving a word or phrase a sense which alters the meaning of a text but without reaching the level of a *contresens*. My translation).

In fact thirty years ago, Ladmiral (1979: 62) already declared:

un faux sens ressortit à un problème d’expression en français.

(a *faux sens* belongs to a problem of expression in French. My translation).

Thus I propose to use the word *sens* for meaning and change *faux sens* into something different to draw a clear distinction between comprehension and expression. This is why I decided to use the phrase *signification non pertinente* (SNP) (non-pertinent signification).

For example, when French students read the word *company* they tend to copy the English word and translate it by *compagnie*. But ‘company’ can be translated in different ways according to the context:

- generally speaking it can be translated by *société*, *entreprise*, and so on;
- with transportation, it can be translated by *régie* as in *Régie autonome des transports parisiens* (RATP) – the Parisian Metro, or by *compagnie de transport maritime*;
- with the notion of insurance, it becomes *compagnie d’assurance*, and so on.
- associated with the pharmaceutical sector, it becomes *laboratoire pharmaceutique*, for

instance.

This example also illustrates the student's tendency to calque an English word or phrase, without considering context and expression in the mother tongue language. Calque is common-place for first or second-year students, and this way of translating can be quickly avoided if they get used to activating their mother tongue and drop the outer shell of the source text.

Morphology and syntax errors also derive from the fact that French is a difficult language in particular as regards the agreement of the past participle. It is then very useful to consult manuals like Hanse's *'Nouveau dictionnaire des difficultés du Français moderne'* (1996) or *'Lexique des Règles typographiques en usage à l'Imprimerie nationale'* (1990) or any other morpho-syntax manual to check rules.

Case is also highly irregular, as is illustrated in the following examples – *la cordillère Bétiqne*, *la Cordillère centrale*, *la cordillère des Andes*, involving rules and exceptions to the rules.

Research errors are of at least two types – terminological or notional. Adequacy can be reached through the use of the Internet, and for applied languages, it is highly profitable to refer to authentic documents written by companies about their products, or articles, manuals and encyclopaedias to find the best possible solution.

Revising a text is a long but necessary procedure. It allows the translator to take some distance from the produced text, and the aim is to be as objective as possible. The translator checks if the meaning intended by the author is rigorously and precisely respected and adapted for the reader. Notions, technical and scientific terminologies have to be checked as morpho-syntax of the target language.

To this point, this article has essentially been discussing 'errors'. However, one must also envisage positive assessment. Bastin (2003) showed the importance of expressing when a student shows a real ability in inventing good solutions. This can also apply when students solve difficult translations concerning expressions, collocations, metaphors, but also when the research for technical terms is well managed.

Positive assessment also develops confidence in the students and shows the evaluator the level of difficulty felt by them.

The detailed phase of giving marks for translations will not be discussed here, since the French system is considerably different from those applied in English speaking countries. However, the system I have designed is not rigid and allows a permanent adaptation to different kinds of students, according to the level of their studies.

6. Testing the error tree

Tests on the tree from January 2006 until June 2008 (L1 to M2 students), led to the realisation that an element was missing – 'method'. Even if it still underlies the four elements of the tree, I considered it important for the students' benefit to add this fifth category. Moreover, 'method' must deal with the recipient.

An example comes from The Metropolitan Museum of Art's website (www.metmuseum.org) on which one can read its 'Terms and Conditions', and in particular the following paragraph³: "The text, images, and data on The Metropolitan Museum of Art (the "Museum") website (the "Site") are protected by copyright and may be covered by other restrictions as well. The Museum retains all rights, including copyright, in data, images, software, documentation, text, and other information contained in these files (collectively, the "Materials"). Copyright and other proprietary rights may be held by individuals or entities other than, or in addition to, the Museum".

The allusions in brackets, (the "Museum") (the "Site"), refer respectively to 'The Metropolitan Museum of Art' and to the museum's website, exclusively. This way of qualifying entities is well attested in any legal site. In French, the same way of qualifying references exists using capi-

3 <http://www.metmuseum.org/information/terms.asp> (accessed 15 October 2009)

tal letters. Some students failed to notice this aspect and/or did not carry out sufficient research so they did not take into consideration the capital letters and simply wrote *le musée*, *le site*, and so on. Consequently, this is not only a 'case' error or a 'typography' one, but a 'method' error.

These examples illustrate the way destination messages have to be taken into account, to respect the reader of the translation. I was then able to conceive of at least one sub-category that I entitled 'Recipient' in which any aspect concerning the recipient's specificities should be accepted as expression aspects, professional or corporate jargon, and so on. From this example I also added another element missing in the tree that is Typography.

After testing the tree with my colleagues (*Université de Paris VII – Paris Diderot*), their advice led to the addition of the category 'Collocations' within 'Research' and 'Expression'. Its inclusion reflects a conviction that finding and using collocations is also of key importance for a translator. From the latest tests conducted in June 2008, I modified the tree as shown in figure 2 below:

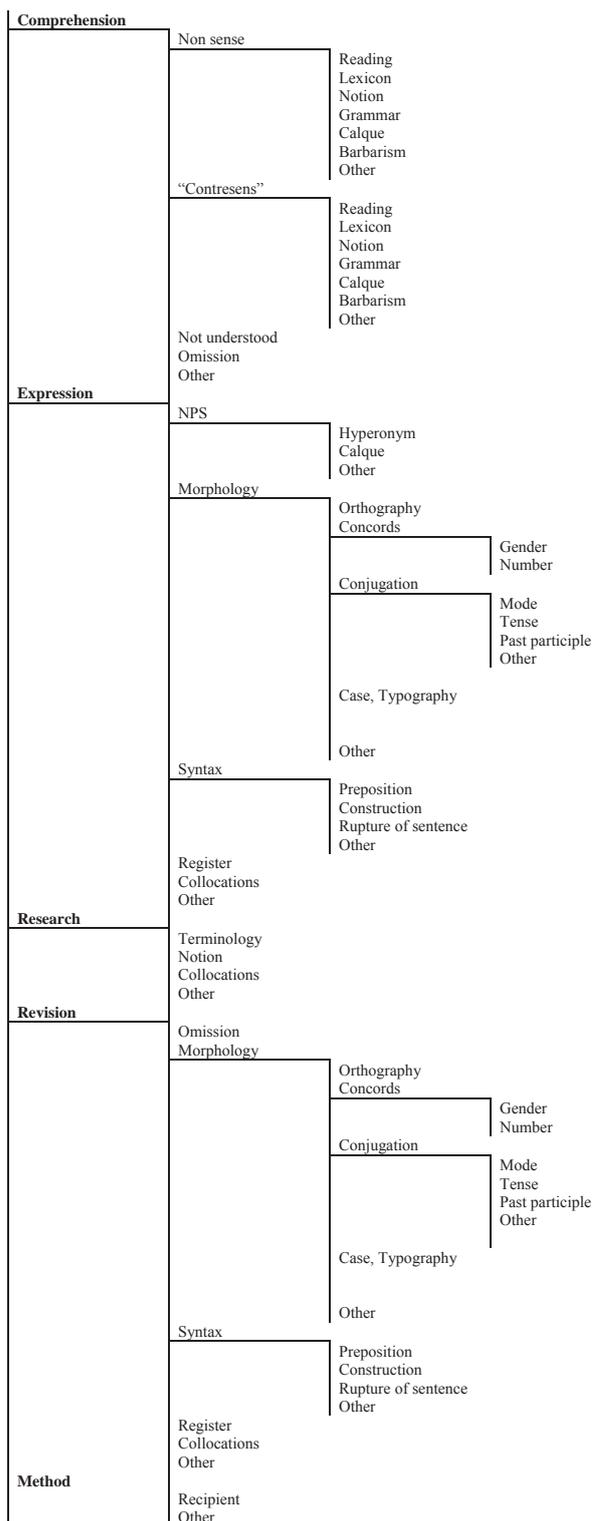


Figure 2. Modified error tree as in 2008

While working on the tree I also had the rewarding opportunity to work with multimedia programming specialists at *Université de Franche Comté* (UFC), France.

7. Creating an e-learning platform

In my former professional position, I belonged to a research group called LASELDI (*Laboratoire de SEMio-linguistique, Didactique et Informatique*). LASELDI aims at developing new activities in research and training, which involve using multimedia elements in e-learning. I was delighted to have the opportunity to create an computer interface with students from Oradea University (Romania), who were participating in an internship.

LASELDI chose to use a platform called Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional for many reasons, one of which was the possibility to use:

- a great number of interfaces,
- content management and also users and groups management,
- a white board,

Moreover, as can be seen on the screenshot in figure 3 below, through various platforms, users can:

- chat and or establish a visual communication with one another;
- share a computer screen, documents, white board, web links.

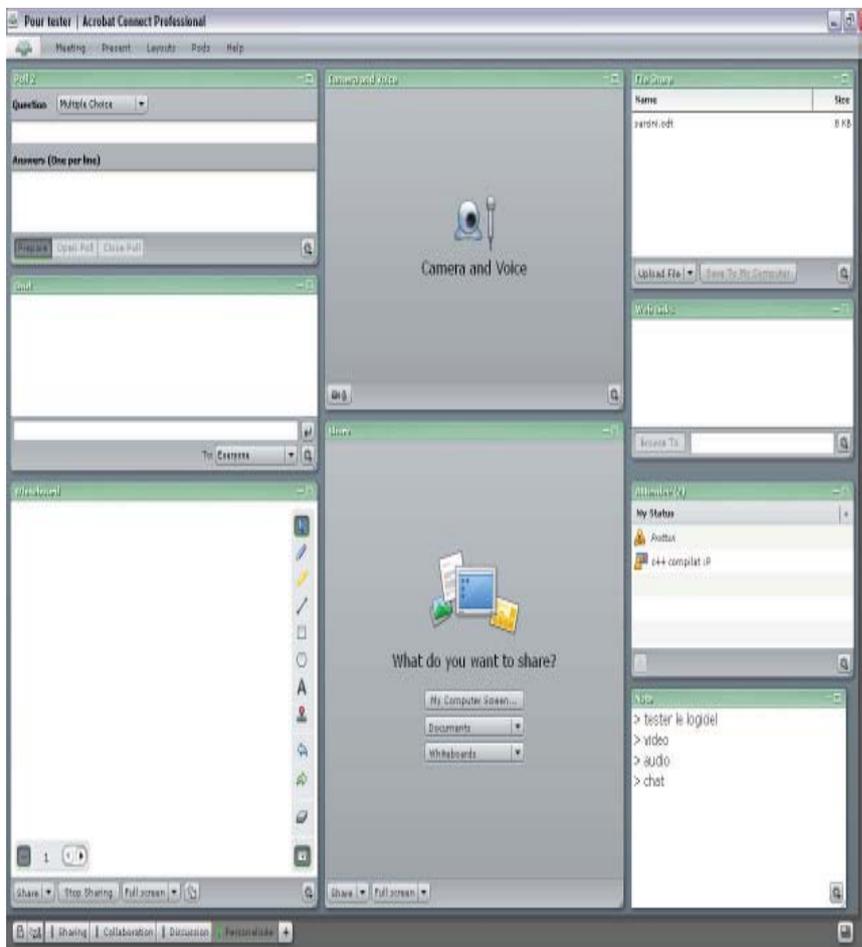


Figure 3. The Platform

A remarkable collaboration was organized between myself and the multimedia students to create an interface for assessing translations. The interface was attuned to the research conducted on the error tree, and to the objectives of ease, rapidity of execution and feedback for the students.

The following scenario can be implemented through the platform:

- the teacher has the possibility of creating groups of students or of assigning one piece of work per student;
- s/he then downloads a file containing the original text via the platform;
- students organize/access the assignment using video and audio communication;
- depending on the task provided by the teacher, the students can send one or more translations via the server;
- the teacher uses the application to assess the translation(s) posted by the students;
- students can read the resulting file stating both the type of errors and comments, and get a final mark.



Figure 4. The Interface

As can be seen in figure 4 above, the interface is divided into different zones containing:

- the original text, on the left,
- the translated text, on the right
- a 'pop-up' with the annotations, top right

- the assessment elements, on the right
- a cursor to subtract points for each error, bottom right
- the final mark, bottom of screen (middle)

The first action is to browse and download the original text on the left, and then the translated text on the right. Paragraphs appear side by side which facilitates assessment by the evaluator (teacher).



Figure 5. Downloading texts on the interface

1. The teacher focuses on errors. In the error-example ‘est à son apogée’ he/she clicks on the B button, and the phrase appears in red.
2. Then one clicks on the error type “Expression SNP”.
A ‘pop up’ appears on the top right of the page and annotations can be added. For example, I wrote the error ‘est à son apogée’ and offered a better translation – ‘atteint un pic’, using the right collocation for this context.
3. Then one can give a value to the error (in this case, 0.49) and validate it. So far, the mark is 19.01 out of 20.

The assessment continues until the end of the text. And of course one’s final move is to save the file.

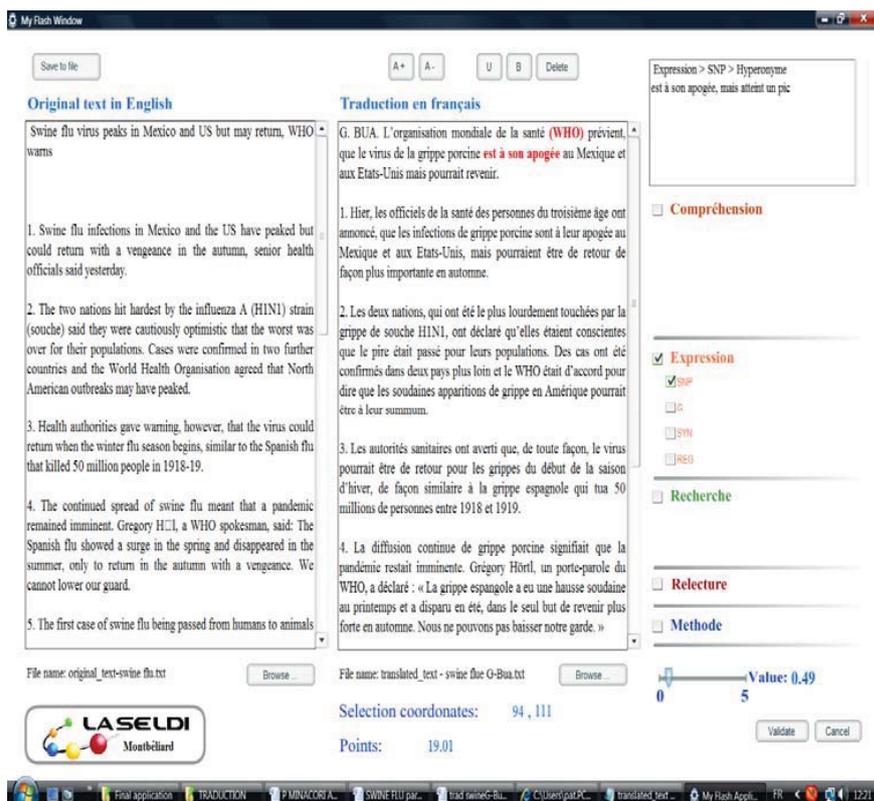


Figure 6. Assessing translation on the interface

Multiple advantages can be seen from using the platform:

- for the teacher, the assessment is much quicker: 10 minutes versus 30 minutes on average for a 'by hand-assessment'. As the teacher can see the original text and the translation side by side, he/she can easily choose the error category, decide the points (marks) to subtract for each error and the program gives a final mark;
- the platform is also user-friendly for the students since they can share the questions and procedures they apply to translate a text, and revision is easier in a group;
- the students can see the list of errors they made and follow the reason why any error is made, since the pop-up used by the teacher is dedicated to explaining the errors;

The interface has some drawbacks that can be improved with the help of computer programming specialists.

First of all the cursor to calculate the mark is very sensitive and is not easy to handle.

However, the major problem is posed by the XML file showing the errors made by the students, as can be seen in figure 7 below.

```

<?xml version="1.0" encoding="ISO-8859-1" ?>
<translation points="17,5">
  <selection begin="44" end="49" style="1">
    <value>0.5</value>
    <annotation>Expression > SNP > Calque WHO mais OMS</annotation>
  </selection>
  <selection begin="50" end="58" style="1">
    <value>0.5</value>
    <annotation>Expression > SNP > Calque pré@vient mais met en garde</annotation>
  </selection>
  <selection begin="94" end="110" style="1">
    <value>0.5</value>
    <annotation>Expression > SNP > Calque est À son apog@e mais atteint un pic</annotation>
  </selection>
  <selection begin="199" end="230" style="1">
    <value>1</value>
    <annotation>Compréhension > Contresens > Lexique personnes du trois@me Âge mais les hauts responsables de l'OMS</annotation>
  </selection>
  <selection begin="292" end="298" style="1">
    <value>0</value>
    <annotation />
  </selection>

```

Figure 7. XML File for students

Firstly, as shown in the above window, ASCII typing is not possible, for the time being, but programming specialists should easily correct this drawback.

Secondly, the presentation of the errors could probably be improved, for example, the paragraph in which the errors occurred does not appear. The students may also need to have better feedback on the precise place of the error. For the time being, the interface only shows the situation of the error with the reference 'selection begin = 199 end 230', but this is not sufficient and more precision is needed.

8. Conclusion

Between 2004 and 2006 I analysed and assessed 545 translation exams to create an error tree linking competencies students should acquire in vocational training, and professional skills requested particularly in international organisations. For example, the category 'Research and Revision' was introduced into the tree to reflect professional skills. From 2006 to 2009, I have been testing this error tree and I have already modified it adding a new category 'method', and by adding 'collocations' in 'Research' and in 'Expression'. I have found the notion of competences presented by the European Commission in EMT to be very useful.

The main objectives of the error tree are to facilitate the assessment procedure for evaluators and to create the opportunity for feedback for students.

As a further development and with the help of multimedia programming specialists, I designed an interface for a collaborative platform for e-learning. The platform, which is used, is Adobe Acrobat Connect, and this research was possible through a collaboration between *Universi-*

té de Franche Comté, Montbéliard, Laboratoire Laseldi, France and Universitatea din Oradea, Romania. I am now testing this interface with my French students to guide their understanding of errors in translation.

The tree and the interface may be seen as one among different translation assessment methods. It is also intended as an example of how assessment can be finely tuned to the procedures familiar to French students. The error tree could be adapted to other realities, and tuned to assessment methods used in different countries, to be useful to any other context. A collaboration is already going on with University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to adapt the interface to American students.

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