

## **A positive approach to the assessment of translation errors**

**Christopher W**<sub>ADDINGTON</sub>  
**Universidad Pontifica Comillas**

### **Como citar este artículo:**

W<sub>ADDINGTON</sub>, Christopher (2003) «A positive approach to the assessment of translation errors», en MUÑOZ MARTÍN, Ricardo [ed.] *I AIETI. Actas del I Congreso Internacional de la Asociación Ibérica de Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación. Granada 12-14 de Febrero de 2003*. Granada: AIETI. Vol. n.º 2, pp. 409-426. ISBN 84-933360-0-9. Versión electrónica disponible en la web de la AIETI: <[http://www.aieti.eu/pubs/actas/I/AIETI\\_1\\_CW\\_Approach.pdf](http://www.aieti.eu/pubs/actas/I/AIETI_1_CW_Approach.pdf)>.



## A positive approach to the assessment of translation errors

**Christopher WADDINGTON**  
Universidad Pontificia Comillas  
cwaddington@chs.upco.es

### Resumen

Los errores cometidos por los alumnos de traducción pueden tener proporcionar al profesor información de índole diversa. Por una parte, le proporcionan una muestra de la competencia traductora del alumno y seguramente constituyen el factor principal en la evaluación, ya sea sumativa o formativa. Por otra parte, también le pueden indicar el progreso del alumno; Candace Séguinot los llama «portadores de significado» (*carriers of meaning*), y, como tales, pueden ayudarle a comprender el proceso de aprendizaje. Este artículo considera los errores de alumnos traductores desde estas dos perspectivas e intenta establecer una conexión entre las dos. Empieza con la propuesta de reemplazar los métodos tradicionales preceptivos de evaluación basados en listas a priori de errores con un nuevo método basado exclusivamente en considerar cada error de modo individual y en determinar si el error afecta o no la transmisión del significado del texto original al texto de llegada. Este método se presenta como una consecuencia lógica del enfoque que considera que el acto de traducir es esencialmente un acto comunicativo que solamente se comprende en su totalidad si se contempla no sólo a nivel lingüístico sino a otros niveles que tengan en cuenta todo el contexto de la interacción entre los participantes. Se ofrece una breve descripción de un método de evaluación diseñado con este fin, y se dan ejemplos de su aplicación dentro del contexto de la experiencia del autor en España como profesor de traducción inversa del español al inglés en segundo curso de la licenciatura de Traducción e Interpretación. Se comentan los resultados de la aplicación de este método, no solamente a la luz de su fiabilidad y validez, sino también a la luz de los criterios de evaluación que presupone y el efecto que esto tiene en la actitud del corrector hacia la traducción que evalúa. El artículo también investiga cómo el método puede influir en la actitud de los alumnos hacia sus errores y cómo puede resultar en una actitud más positiva por parte del profesor y del alumno hacia la interpretación de los errores como fuente esencial de información acerca del proceso de aprendizaje (cuándo y cómo los alumnos aprenden a traducir) y también acerca de la selección de textos (cómo distintos tipos de problema de traducción puede estimular este proceso de aprendizaje).

## 1. Introduction

In this article I want to link various ideas which spring from the experience I had when conducting the experiment which formed the basis of my PhD research, from my classroom experience as a teacher of translation from Spanish into English in the *Licenciatura en Traducción e Interpretación*, and from ideas put forward by Pym in his article of translation error analysis (Pym 1992) and by Séguinot in her two articles on the subject of the interpretation of translation errors (Séguinot 1989, 1990). The article has three different but related objectives. The first is to put forward an approach to the correcting of student translations which takes into account the effect that mistakes have on overall quality. The second is to comment on the results achieved by applying this method in comparison with those achieved by applying other methods. The third is to propose a positive approach to student mistakes which can guide us in our attempts to measure source text difficulty and to understand the part student mistakes play in the learning process.

## 2. The effect of translation mistakes

In 1983, Sager proposed that translation assessment should take into account not only different types of error but also the effect of a particular error on the whole text and he listed three different types of effect: (i) linguistic effect (does the error affect a main or a secondary part of the sentence?), (ii) semantic effect (does the error affect a major or a minor element?), and (iii) pragmatic effect (does the error affect the intention in a significant or a negligible way?). This proposal is a natural consequence of the opening sentence of Sager's article, which insists on the relative nature of translation quality:

There are no absolute standards of translation quality but only more or less appropriate translations for the purpose for which they are intended.

(Sager 1989:91; this is a new edition of a work originally published in 1983)

Sager makes it clear that his proposal is appropriate for the evaluation of professional translations and expressly excludes from consideration “the evaluation of student exercises” (Sager 1989:99), although he does not give a clear reason for this exclusion. However, he admits that his proposal generates “such a diverse matrix” of correction criteria that this will inevitably have a detrimental effect on the reliability of the assessment, which he suggests should be corrected by multiple correction.

Williams (1989) agrees with Sager about the relative nature of translation quality and also insists on the difference between assessment in an academic environment and assessment in the professional world. He understands that a closed, absolute system of assessment is necessary in the academic environment, because “In an examination, for example, it is important for candidates to be

rated according to a single standard" (Williams 1989:18). However, he argues that such a closed system is not suitable for the professional world:

What are required in the workplace are a range of acceptable standards and an 'open system' approach to evaluation, one which does not function *in vitro* with no reference to the environment in which the translation was produced.

(Williams 1989:18)

Kussmaul (1995), however, marks a change with regards to the contributions of Sager and Williams in the sense that he also proposes what he calls *the professional translator's view* of translation assessment, but he recommends that it should be used to evaluate student translations on university courses. Kussmaul criticises what he calls *the foreign language teacher's view* of translation assessment, which considers the error as an isolated unit (what Williams graphically describes as *in vitro*), and penalises it according to how it reflects on the foreign language competence of the student; errors are consequently weighted according to pre-conceived notions of what is more or less "serious." Kussmaul admits the usefulness of this approach for conducting a diagnosis of students' linguistic shortcomings, but he insists that this diagnostic activity should be clearly distinguished from the assessment of student translations. The teacher's assessment, according to Kussmaul, should be based on a communicative approach to evaluation, which does not automatically classify errors according to pre-established categories, but restricts itself to "the effect the error has on the target reader" (Kussmaul 1995:129). Kussmaul recognises the difficulty of knowing with any degree of certainty what goes on in a reader's mind, but claims that it is perfectly possible for the corrector to put himself in the place of the average reader. This means that there is no simple and convenient way of grading a student translation; in the case of each individual error, the corrector has to study the effect it has on the rest of the translation and decide whether it distorts the sense of a sentence, a passage or even the whole text. However slight an error may be in itself (such as a minor spelling mistake, for instance), its seriousness should be judged according to its "communicative effects" (Kussmaul 1995:142).

Unfortunately, although Kussmaul gives us a number of examples of how translation mistakes should be treated, in this article at least he does not give any indication of how this putative effect may be measured. The closest he comes to the question of measurement is when he declares his support for Pym's distinction between *binary* and *non-binary errors* (Pym 1992). *Binary errors* refer to those mistakes which are clearly wrong, whereas *non-binary errors* refer to the varying degrees of (in)adequacy of a piece of translation. Kussmaul considers that Pym's *non-binary* approach to the correction of translation mistakes reflects his own *professional translator's view* of translation assessment: "It [the non-binary approach] takes account of the fact that evaluation is not only a qualitative but also a quantitative concept" (Kussmaul 1995:129). In the next section of this paper, I describe my own attempt to quantify the negative effect of translation mistakes.

### 3. How to measure the effect of translation mistakes: Method B

As part of my Ph.D. research (Waddington 1999), I designed a correction method (called Method B) based on error analysis which adjusts the penalty for each mistake according to the extent of its effect on the overall quality of the translation concerned. The corrector first has to decide whether each mistake is a translation mistake or just a language mistake; this is done by deciding whether or not the mistake affects the transfer of meaning from the source to the target text: if it does not, it is a language mistake (and is penalised with -1 point); if it does, it is a translation mistake (and is penalised with -2 points). However, in the case of translation mistakes, the corrector has to judge the importance of the negative effect that each one of these mistakes has on the translation, taking into account the objective and the target reader specified in the instructions to the translator for each translation. In order to judge this importance, the corrector is given the table shown in figure 1:

<i>Negative effect on words in ST</i>	<i>Penalty for negative effect</i>
On: 01-05 words	2
06-20 words	3
21-40 words	4
41-60 words	5
61-80 words	6
81-100 words	7
100+ words	8
The whole text	12

**Fig. 1. Marking system**

Here are two examples of how to apply this marking system:

Example (1). The first source text is taken from the introduction to a guide book to Madrid: *“Por ello, y por su situación central privilegiada, fue el lugar elegido por Fernando IV para convocar las Cortes de Castilla en 1309: tal vez el primer paso de Madrid hacia la capitalidad.”* The student's translation was as follows (the mistakes are numbered (A), (B) and (C) and indicated in italics): *“Therefore, and (A) for its privileged central position, Madrid was chosen by Ferdinand IV to summon (B) Parliament of New Castile in 1309, which may have been the first step towards the (C) capitalization of Madrid.”* Correction of the student's translation: errors A and B are both language mistakes and penalised by -1 each (the wrong preposition in A and the omitted article in B), whereas C is rated as a translation mistake: the reader is forced to guess at the meaning (“towards becoming the capital of Spain”) and the error affects the whole phrase after the colon (= 10 words in the source text), so the penalty is -3. Error A is not considered a translation mistake because of the proximity of “Therefore”: the target reader should be able to process the mistake without any problem.

Example (2). The second source text is taken from a newspaper column by the well-known writer Rosa Montero on the subject of corruption: “*Anduvo la cuadrilla de obreros por allí, y el hombre, padre de dos niños, de ocho y diez años, extendió al término de los trabajos el cheque correspondiente.*” The student's translation was as follows: “The gang of workers walked up and down, and the man, (A) *father of two, eight and ten years*, made out the (B) *due* cheque (C) *at the end of the work.*” Correction of the student's translation: Error A: “father of two” would be an acceptable translation of “*padre de dos niños*” if it were not followed by “eight and ten years”, which implies that the father has three children aged two, eight and ten. This is a translation mistake and affects nine words in the source text, so the penalty is -3. Errors B and C are both language errors which do not interfere with the transfer of the meaning of the original.

The final mark for each translation is calculated in the following way: the examiner fixes a total number of positive points according to the degree of difficulty of the source text, which in this case was 85. The corrector subtracts the total number of negative points from this figure, and divides the result by 8.5. For example, if a student is given 30 minus points, his total mark would be 6.5 (pass):

$$85-30 = 55/8.5 = 6.5$$

## 4. The comparison of Method B with other methods of correction

### 4.1. Description of the experiment

Waddington (1999: chapters 7 and 8) describes in full the experiment I set up to test, among other things, the quality of Method B. Five correctors applied it to assess 64 student translations into English of a Spanish editorial on the current position of the Spanish language, entitled “*Diálogo de la lengua*” and published in the Spanish newspaper ABC in April 1997. The students all did the translation at the same time as part of an April mid-term exam, which they took for the subject *Teoría y Práctica de la Traducción General inversa (español-inglés)* which is part of the second-year syllabus of the degree in Translation and Interpreting offered at the Universidad Pontificia Comillas in Madrid, where I teach.

The five correctors were all teachers at Comillas; all had been teachers of English as a foreign language in Spain, but only two had experience of teaching translation, although all had some experience of professional translation. All were native speakers of English and all had lived in Spain for at least ten years and had a fluent command of Spanish.

These five correctors applied three methods of assessment to the correction of the 64 translations: Method A, which is based on error analysis and requires the evaluator to identify errors and penalise them in accordance with pre-established categories; Method B, which, as we have already seen, is also based on error analysis, but requires the evaluator to calculate the effect of the errors detected; and, finally, Method C, which is a holistic method and requires the evaluator to assess the translation according to a series of descriptors of five different levels of achievement.



#### 4.2. Method A

Method A is the work of Hurtado (1995); she draws up a list of possible errors which are divided into three categories:

- i) Inappropriate renderings which affect the understanding of the source text; these are divided into eight categories: *contresens*, *faux sens*, *nonsense*, addition, omission, unresolved extralinguistic references, loss of meaning, and inappropriate linguistic variation (register, style, dialect, etc.).
- ii) Inappropriate renderings which affect expression in the target language; these are divided into five categories: spelling, grammar, lexical items, text and style.
- iii) Inadequate renderings which affect the transmission of either the main function or secondary functions of the source text.

In each of the categories a distinction is made between serious errors (-2 points) and minor errors (-1 point). There is a fourth category which describes the plus points to be awarded for good (+1 point) or exceptionally good solutions (+2 points) to translation problems. In the case of the translation exam where this method was used, the sum of the negative points was subtracted from a total of 110 and then divided by 11 to reach a mark from 0 to 10. For example, if a student gets a total of -66 points, his result would be calculated as follows:  $110 - 66 = 44 / 11 = 4$  (fail).

#### 4.3. Method C

Method C is a holistic method of correction with the following features:

- i) It presents a unitary scale which considers the translation competence as a whole, instead of dividing it into various sub-scales representing different sub-competences.
- ii) The descriptors do not use terminology that would presuppose specialist knowledge (such as applied linguistics) on the part of the correctors.
- iii) It includes only five main levels in an attempt to achieve maximum consistency between raters (see Pollitt 1991:90), although there are two marks within each level in line with the traditional Spanish system of marking (from 0 to 10).

The correctors are asked to apply the scale shown in Fig. 2. The scale is unitary, but requires the corrector to consider different aspects: *accuracy of transfer* from source to target text, *quality of expression* in the target language and *degree of task completion*. There are two reasons for this decision. The first is theoretical: overall translation competence is split into *accuracy of transfer* and *quality of expression*, in line with findings published in Stansfield *et al.* (1992), who claim to have empirically identified the presence of these two separate components. *Degree of task completion* was added because the text the students were asked to translate gave clear instructions to the students, following recommendations made by Nord

(1991:164) and Hatim & Mason (1997:201). The second reason for designing a unitary scale with different aspects is practical: the scale offers the corrector a series of levels which are clearly differentiated, in an attempt to achieve more consistent marking. It also offers the possibility of placing students between two levels: in the event of a student translation only partially fulfilling the requirements laid down for level 4, for instance, then the corrector can award either the lower mark (7) at that level, or the higher mark at the next level down (that is, 6 at level 3).

Level	Accuracy of transfer of ST content	Quality of expression in TL	Degree of task completion	Mark
5	Complete transfer of ST information; only minor revision needed to reach professional standard.	Almost all the translation reads like a piece originally written in English. There may be minor lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Successful	9, 10
4	Almost complete transfer; there may be one or two insignificant inaccuracies; requires certain amount of revision to reach professional standard.	Large sections read like a piece originally written in English. There are a number of lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Almost completely successful	7, 8
3	Transfer of the general idea(s) but with a number of lapses in accuracy; needs considerable revision to reach professional standard.	Certain parts read 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	5, 6
2	Transfer undermined by serious inaccuracies; thorough revision required to reach professional standard.	Almost the entire text reads like a translation; there are continual lexical, grammatical or spelling errors.	Inadequate	3, 4
1	Totally inadequate transfer 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	1, 2

Fig. 2. Unitary scale for Method C (holistic)

#### 4.4. Method D

Method D is not a new method in itself, but consists of combining error analysis Method B and holistic Method C in a proportion of 70/30; that is to say, Method B accounts for 70% of the total result and Method C for the remaining 30%.



## 5. The training of the correctors

Before applying these methods to the correction of the student translations, the five correctors were trained in their use. They were given each method to study individually and in different order (Method A/B/C, C/B/A, B/A/C, etc.), to control the variable of one method influencing the following one; there was also an interval of at least one month between the application of one method and the next. In the case of Methods A and B, the individual training given was the same: first, I presented each corrector individually with the method to be applied and went over potential problems in its application. In the case of Method A, for example, it was necessary to explain the difference between *serious* and *less serious* mistakes (-2 and -1 respectively), whereas, with Method B, I had to explain the difference between a *language mistake* and a *translation mistake*. The corrector was then asked to practise using the method on his own by applying it to a number of student translations of a different text from the one used in the experiment. Finally, the corrector presented me with the corrected translations and we compared the corrections and the marks awarded with the results of my own application of the method in question. This was clearly an important part of the experiment, as it involved the correctors and myself agreeing as closely as possible on the criteria to be applied in the assessment. Perhaps the most important criterion was that of *marking everything in the translation which was clearly unacceptable*; some of the correctors, in view of the fact that the students were translating into a foreign language, were initially tempted to be lenient, especially when it came to judging the students' attempts to translate difficult passages, which would have obviously undermined inter-rater reliability. Another criterion was that the exam the students had done was a task-based activity and that *the adequacy of student solutions to the translation problems posed by the source text should be judged in the light of the task set*: "Your translation will be published in the English newspaper *The Times* as part of an article on European languages. Your text will figure as a translation of an article from a Spanish newspaper".

In the case of the holistic Method C, each corrector had to apply it to the correction of 11 student translations of a different text from the one used in the exam. To help them gauge the marks more easily, they were given a set of corrected translations of the same text, which represented levels 3 to 9. Once they had corrected the translations, they presented them to me and we compared the marks with those I myself had awarded, and attempted to iron out difficulties.

## 6. Results of the empirical study

The results of the application of the three methods of correction by the five correctors can be seen in Waddington (1999:324). In the table (see appendix), the rows are the 64 students and the columns represent the 5 correctors who applied the three different methods.

### 6.1 Results of the reliability study

The results of the inter-rater reliability study are shown in the following table:

	reliability/columns
<b>Method A</b>	.93
<b>Method B</b>	.93
<b>Method C</b>	.84
<b>Method D</b>	.94

**Fig. 3. Results of inter-rater reliability**

According to these results, the two error analysis methods A and B are equally reliable, and clearly more reliable than the holistic method C. However, when we combine the results achieved by the application of both Method B and Method C in a proportion of 70/30, the new combined error-analysis/holistic Method D gets an even better reliability rating.

### 6.2 Results of the analyses of variance

Another way of establishing the quality of the different methods of assessment as applied by the correctors is to submit the results obtained to analyses of variance. If the reader looks at the table of the results of the application of the three methods by the five correctors, he will see at a glance that there is a considerable amount of variance, that is to say, of discrepancy between the marks. The aim of the variance analysis is to determine the source of this variance: is it caused by the students (the rows) or by the correctors applying the methods (the columns)? One would expect differences between the students, because in fact their translation competence varied considerably and covered the whole range from excellent to inadequate, and one would hope that the variance detected would be mainly explained by these differences. Obviously, one would hope that less variance would be caused by the correctors applying the methods.

In fact, the analyses of variance revealed significant amounts of variance both in the rows (the students) and in the columns (the correctors applying the methods), so I had to calculate the size of these two sources. To do this, I applied a post-ANOVA analysis called eta-squared, which gave the results shown in figure 4 for the four methods. These analyses show that, with Method A, 62% of the variance detected can be attributed to the rows, i.e., the differences between the students, whereas only 22% to the columns, i.e., the teachers applying the methods. These figures improve with Method B: 68% as against 14%. With Method C, they are quite a bit worse: 45% as against 26%. But with the combined Method D, we achieve the best results of all: 79% as against 3%.

These variance figures bear out what was already indicated by the inter-rater reliability figures. There is little difference between the two error-analysis methods A and B; these are clearly more efficient than holistic Method C. However, when error-analysis Method B is combined with holistic Method C, the results are the best of all. This quantitative analysis suggests that there are limitations in

methods of assessment based exclusively on error analysis, which can be palliated if they are accompanied by a holistic appreciation of translation quality.

			$\eta^2$
Method A	$\eta^2$ rows =	$\frac{583.2}{944} =$	.618
	$\eta^2$ columns =	$\frac{203.49}{944} =$	.216
Method B	$\eta^2$ rows =	$\frac{524.29}{768} =$	.683
	$\eta^2$ columns =	$\frac{105.06}{768} =$	.137
Method C	$\eta^2$ rows =	$\frac{439.55}{979.2} =$	.449
	$\eta^2$ columns =	$\frac{257.799}{979.2} =$	.263
Method D	$\eta^2$ rows =	$\frac{460.792}{585.846} =$	.787
	$\eta^2$ columns =	$\frac{17.427}{585.846} =$	.03

Fig. 4. Coefficients of eta-squared for Methods A, B, C and D

### 6.3 Results of the validity study

To assess the criterion-related validity of the four methods, the results obtained by their application to the 64 translations were compared to the results obtained by the students in seventeen external criteria which were based on their knowledge of languages (Spanish and English), their results in intelligence tests (which are part of the Comillas University entrance exams), their average mark in the second-year translation course (Spanish-English), and, finally, the marks they achieved in other translation exams taken during their degree studies. For a full report of this validity study, the reader is referred to Waddington (2001).

As the 17 external criteria used were varied in nature, a factor analysis (Varimax rotational method) was conducted to determine their underlying structure, and this analysis revealed the presence of four underlying factors which could be identified as (i) *Translation Competence*, (ii) *Native Language Competence*, (iii) *Students' Self-Assessment of their Translation Competence*, and (iv) *Mathematical Intelligence*. The main factor was clearly identified as *Translation Competence*, and the correlational study showed that this main factor related closely to the second two. However, as was to be expected, none of these first three factors related to the main variable in the fourth factor. Figure 5 shows the correlations between the mean scores reached by the five correctors applying the four methods and the four factors identified by the factor analysis:

	Method			
	A	B	C	D
Translation Competence	.630*	.609*	.578*	.623*
Native Language Competence	.626*	.568*	.555*	.587*
Students' Self-Assessment of Translation Competence	.454*	.381*	.470*	.424*
Mathematical Intelligence	.261**	.240	.164	.226

**Fig. 5. Correlations between the mean scores reached by the five correctors applying the four methods and the four factors identified. \*p<.001 \*\*p<.04**

These results show that there is a moderately high, statistically significant correlation between the correctors' application of the four methods and the three factors related to *Translation Competence*, but not between the methods and the factor of *Mathematical Intelligence* (except for Method A). This supports the criterion-related validity of the four methods of assessment, in spite of the considerable differences between them. The fact that differences were not detected between the validity of the methods may be explained by the fact that the methods used in the experiment were carefully designed, tested and applied.

#### 6.4. Conclusions of the experiment with the methods

Although Method B, which aims to judge the effect of student mistakes on the overall quality of their translations, does not prove to lead to more consistent marks than Method A, which is based on error categories fixed a priori, it is still worth remembering two facts. The first is that Method B is more in keeping with a communicative, professional approach to translation, which insists on the need to base translation strategies and decisions not only on linguistic but also on pragmatic considerations, such as context, participants, initiator and translation instructions. The second fact is that the above experiment was based on the correction of translations into the foreign language, which obviously generate a large number of mistakes, especially mistakes of a purely linguistic nature. If this method were applied to the correction of translations into the students' native language, it might possibly get even better results due to its capacity to distinguish between translation errors.

However, the importance of using a communicative approach to correcting student translation is also brought out by the limitations of any method based purely on error analysis alone. Although the two error analysis methods produced more consistent results than the holistic method, it is logical to suppose that it is dangerous to reduce the overall quality of a student translation simply to the sum of the mistakes encountered, and the excellent results obtained by the combined Method D clearly support this supposition.

## 7. A more positive approach to student mistakes

One of the problems with teaching translation into the foreign language is precisely the number of mistakes generated, with the inevitable risk of demotivating the students. A possible solution to this is positive assessment as put forward by Hewson (1995), who insists on the need to distinguish between purely linguistic errors and major translation problems. Hewson suggests that any reasonable assessment of a student translation must not just penalise the purely linguistic errors but also try to give the student credit for appreciating and solving, even if only partially, the translation problems involved. As a result, he proposes a double marking scale: negative for clear errors and failure to recognise problems, and positive for identifying and solving specific translation problems. He further suggests making the positive scale variable and awarding between 5 and 1 points for more or less adequate translations.

Hewson's proposed system of assessment requires the identification of translation problems prior to the students doing the translation. This is also recommended by Nord (1991; 1995) and it was precisely the difficulty of training my correctors to conduct this prior identification which prevented me from using her method of correction (Waddington 1999:282-285). However, since the time of writing my thesis, I have come increasingly closer to both Hewson's and Nord's position, and I have attempted to design a system of measuring the difficulty of texts, which is laid out in the next section.

### 7.1 A system of measuring ST difficulty

#### 7.1.1. Course objectives and translation problems

The system is based on the list of course objectives and translation problems which form the basis of the syllabus for the course I give in Comillas in translation into the foreign language. I also take this opportunity of mentioning my debt to the excellent work of Allison Beeby in this field (Beeby 1996), which showed me the way to formulating objectives for a translation course.

#### 7.1.2 Description of the system

The difficulty of a text is calculated on the basis of the following five aspects:

- i) Degree of necessary re-expression (R is the abbreviation used in the analysis recorded below). The teacher calculates the number of ST words affected by each section of the ST which does not permit a more or less literal translation, and he gives one point for each word.
- ii) Number of translation problems (indicated below as P; "Pii" means the second problem on the above list taken from the course syllabus). The teacher counts one point for each problem and only gives an individual problem more than one point if reformulation is necessary, in which case he counts the number of ST words involved.

- i) To learn the basic terminology of translation metalanguage.
- ii) To learn how to use monolingual and bilingual dictionaries.
- iii) To learn the basic methods of documentation.
- iv) To understand the communicative nature of translation (to recognise the importance of the participants; to recognise the ST and TT context; to recognise the main function of the text, and the secondary functions of parts of the text).
- v) To recognise the different steps in the translation process: comprehension, deverbalization and re-expression.
- vi) To learn to analyse the ST (to detect lexical and syntactic differences; to recognise ST cohesion and coherence and possible problems in transferring them to the TT).
- vii) To learn to distinguish between different text types and types of translation (author-centred, reader-centred, etc.)
- viii) To develop creativity to solve translation problems.

**Fig. 6. List of course objectives**

- iii) Number of lexical differences (indicated as LD). The teacher gives one point for each problem (such as false cognates, prepositions, problems of collocation, etc.) that have not been considered already under aspect (i).
- iv) Number of syntactic differences (indicated as SD). The teacher gives one point for each syntactic difference, unless considerable reformulation is necessary, in which case he calculates the number of words involved and gives this number of points.

- i) Proper names.
- ii) Cultural differences.
- iii) Headings.
- iv) Lack of equivalence.
- v) Idiomatic expressions.
- vi) Words in inverted commas, in italics or underlined.
- vii) Metaphorical language.
- viii) Expressive elements (irony, anger, enthusiasm, etc.)
- ix) Acronyms.
- x) Aspects of style and register that are difficult to convey in the TL.
- xi) Long sentences that are difficult to break down.
- xii) TL words in the ST.
- xiii) Quotations from TL writers or speakers.
- xiv) Defects in the ST.
- xv) Repetition of words within the same text.
- xvi) Figures and systems of measurement.

**Fig. 7. List of translation problems**



- v) Failure to fulfil the learning objectives (indicated as LO; “LOiv” means the fourth objective on the above list taken from the course syllabus). The teacher counts one point for each, unless reformulation is involved, in which case he applies (i).

Once the teacher has conducted the above analysis, he adds up the number of points and calculates what percentage they are of the total number of words in the source text; the higher the percentage, the more difficult the text.

### 7.1.3 Application of the system

The following information was given to the students together with the ST:

Author: Juan Carlos Conde López

Source: IFEMA

Genre: Guidebook

Date of Publication: 1994

Topic: Madrid

Target audience: General Public

Number of words: 227

Instructions: The following text is part of the introduction to a guidebook on Madrid, which is going to be published in English and sold mainly in the UK. You must find a solution for elements in the source text which could constitute a problem for readers who may not have much knowledge of Spanish culture.

Figure 8 shows the source text, the code of translation difficulties, and a possible translation of the text into English.

Diagnosis of ST difficulty:

The points add up to 47, and this is 21% of the total number of ST words (=227); the ST difficulty is then 21.

## 7.2 The link between mistakes, testing and teaching

Séguinot (1989) criticises what she calls the prescriptive approach to errors which treats them purely as a violation of translation norms and leads to more time and money being spent on signalling and classifying errors than on studying and eliminating them. Instead, she recommends a non-prescriptive approach which considers errors as “carriers of meaning” that can help researchers investigate the nature of translation operations and even make “better predictions about what kind of errors are likely to occur in translation, where they are likely to occur, and under what conditions” (Séguinot 1989:74). Especially interesting are her comments on the possible nature of skill learning and her conclusion that errors may be an indication that learning is taking place; this conclusion is based on her study of good students who begin to make errors in the middle of their programme that they did not make at the start. She suggests that this unsettling discovery may be explained by the fact that this apparent step backwards in the students’ progress is the result of them concentrating on new aspects of translation competence:

Source text	Trans. Diff.	Possible translation
<p><b>Introducción</b></p> <p>Las primeras noticias históricas sobre lo que iba a ser Madrid nos (1) <i>llevan</i> hasta (2) <i>los</i> tiempos del Paleolítico: en las riberas del Manzanares (3) <i>se emplazaba</i> un importante asentamiento humano, tal vez el mayor (4) <i>de</i> Europa. Las (5) <i>siguientes</i> noticias, tras un largo período de oscuridad, son de tiempos (6) <i>muy posteriores</i>: concretamente del (7) <i>siglo</i> IX, cuando el emir de Córdoba (8) <i>Mohamed I</i> levantó una fortaleza (9) <i>en el emplazamiento</i> que hoy (10) <i>ocupa</i> el Palacio Real. Alrededor de ese alcázar (11) <i>se desarrolló</i> una pequeña (12) <i>población</i> (13) <i>de carácter militar</i>, (14) <i>fuertemente amurallada</i>. Los avatares de la (15) <i>Reconquista</i> afectaron (16) <i>a</i> Madrid, que sufrió (17) <i>diversos</i> ataques hasta que finalmente (18) <i>Alfonso VI</i> la conquistó en 1083. (19) <i>Data</i> de alrededor de 1200 el (20) <i>Fuero de Madrid</i>, (21) <i>primer</i> (22) <i>Corpus legal vigente</i> en la (23) <i>villa</i>: el Madrid medieval iba ganando (24) <i>paulatinamente</i> (25) <i>carácter ciudadano</i> y perdiendo carácter militar. (26) <i>Por ello</i>, y por su situación central privilegiada, fue el lugar elegido por (27) <i>Fernando IV</i> para convocar las (28) <i>Cortes de Castilla</i> en 1309: tal vez (29) <i>el primer paso de Madrid</i> (30) <i>hacia la capitalidad</i>. Como toda (31) <i>Castilla</i>, Madrid (32) <i>vivía</i> (33) <i>en las postrimerías de la Edad Media</i> las convulsiones causadas por las (34) <i>banderías</i> y las guerras civiles. (35) <i>No tenía la importancia</i> de otras ciudades castellanas como Burgos, Segovia o Toledo, pero (36) <i>desde</i> los (37) <i>Trastámaras</i> fue lugar de residencia predilecto de los monarcas: (38) <i>son los casos</i> de (39) <i>Enrique III</i>, (40) <i>Juan II</i> y Enrique IV.</p>	<p>1.SD 1 2.LD 1 3.SD 1 4.LD 1 5.LD 1  6.LD 1 7.Pii 1 8.Pi 1 9.LD 1 10.SD 1 11.SD 1 12.OAV 1 13.SD 3 14.SD 1 15.Pii 1 16.SD 1 17.LD 1 18.Pi 1 19.SD 1 20.Pi 1 21.LD 1 22.LD 3 23.Pii 1 24.SD 1 25.R 2 26.LD 1 27.Pi 1 28.Pi 1 29.SD 1 30.R 3 31.Pi 1 32.LD 1 33.SD 1 34.OAV 1 35.LD 1  36.LD 1 37.Pii 1 38.SD 1 39.Pi 1 40.Pi 1</p>	<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <p>The first archaeological evidence of what was eventually to become Madrid takes us back to Palaeolithic times: on the banks of the river Manzanares there are signs of an important human settlement, perhaps the largest in Europe. The next piece of evidence appears after a long period of silence, and belongs to much later times: the 11th century, when the Emir of Córdoba, Mohammed I, constructed a fortress on the site now occupied by the Royal Palace. Around this fortress, there grew up a small strongly fortified garrison town. Madrid was involved in the <i>Reconquista</i>, the troubled times when the people of Spain drove out the Moslem invader; it came under attack on several occasions before it was finally conquered by Alfonso VI in 1083. The Charter of Madrid, the town's first legal statute, dates from about 1200: mediaeval Madrid was gradually changing from a garrison into a town. This, together with its privileged central position, led Ferdinand IV to choose it as the site for summoning the Castilian Parliament in 1309, which was possibly Madrid's first step towards becoming the capital. At the end of the Middle Ages, like the rest of Castile, Madrid suffered the upheavals caused by conflicting factions and civil wars. It was not as important as other Castilian towns such as Burgos, Segovia or Toledo, but from the middle of the 14th century it became the favourite residence of monarchs of the House of Trastamara, such as Henry III, John II and Henry IV.</p>

Fig. 8

Attending to specific aspects of translation may be a way of learning to improve, and the errors that result from this focussing of attention are not necessarily a reflection of overall competence.

(Séguinot 1989:79)

In another article, Séguinot claims that errors obviously give us information about translation quality but are also “windows into the translating process”, which leads her to state that “evaluating the seriousness of an error is a less interesting exercise than interpreting the source of an error” (Séguinot 1990:68). Although she may be right, the teacher of translation still has to combine the two activities and should probably combine both the prescriptive and the non-prescriptive approach to translation mistakes. The prescriptive approach is necessary to deal rapidly with what Pym calls “binary errors”, whereas the non-prescriptive approach is more suitable for “non-binary errors”, where class discussion centres on differing degrees of the adequacy of translation proposals. A connecting point between these two approaches could be a clear definition of the skills needed to translate a particular text, and of the nature of the problems that translators have to overcome; Nord (1991) has shown how this can be done using her particular scheme for textual analysis, and I have put forward my own system in the present article.

The results of my research imply that mistakes by themselves are not the only guide to translation quality, and that their analysis should always be accompanied by an attempt on the part of the corrector to assess overall quality from the point of view of degree of task completion. However, mistakes are doubtless the main factor in influencing our judgement of translation quality, and I would like to end with a plea for a more positive attitude towards them. Instead of dismissing them too quickly with splashes of red ink, they should be regarded as potential information about student progress in particular and about the process of learning to translate in general. It may even be, as Pym suggests, that the difficult texts which provoke the most mistakes may also lead to “moments of revelation” (Pym 1992:287), which offer our students the kind of experiences and insights they need on their way to becoming competent translators.

## References

- BEEBY LONSDALE, Allison. 1996. *Teaching Translation from Spanish to English*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.
- HATIM, Basil & MASON, Ian. 1997. *The Translator as Communicator*. London: Routledge.
- HEWSON, Lance. 1995. Detecting Cultural Shifts: Some Notes on Translation Assessment. In Ian MASON and Christine PAGNOULLE, eds. *Cross-Words. Issues and Debates in Literary and Non-literary Translating*. Liège: L3 - Liège Language and Literature, pp. 101-108.
- HURTADO ALBIR, Amparo. 1995. La didáctica de la traducción. Evolución y estado actual. En P. Fernández, ed. *X Perspectivas de la Traducción..* Valladolid: Universidad de Valladolid, pp. 49-74.
- KUSSMAUL, Paul. 1995. *Training the Translator*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- NORD, Christiane. 1991. *Text Analysis in Translation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi

- POLLITT, Alastair. Response to Charles Alderson's Paper: Bands and Scores. In Charles ALDERSON and Brian NORTH, eds. *Language Testing in the 1990s*. London: Macmillan, pp. 87-94.
- PYM, Anthony. 1992. Translation Error Analysis and the Interface with Language Teaching. In C. DOLLERUP and A. LODDEGAARD, eds. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting. Training, Talent and Experience. Papers from the First Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark, 31 May - 2 June, 1991*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, pp. 279-288.
- SAGER, Juan C. 1989. Quality and standards - the evaluation of translations. In C. PICKEN, ed. *The Translator's Handbook*. London: ASLIB, pp. 91-102 [This is the second edition of *The Translator's Handbook* (1983)].
- SÉGUINOT, Candace. 1989. Understanding Why Translators Make Mistakes. *TTR (Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction)* 2 (2), pp. 73-102.
- . 1990. Interpreting Errors in Translation. *Meta*, XXV (1), pp. 68-73.
- STANSFIELD, Charles W., Mary Lee SCOTT, and Dorry Mann KENYON. 1992. The Measurement of Translation Ability. *The Modern Language Journal*, 76 (iv), pp. 455-67.
- WADDINGTON, Christopher. 1999. *Estudio comparativo de diferentes métodos de evaluación de traducción general (Inglés-Español)*. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas.
- . 2001. Different Methods of Evaluating Student Translations: the Question of Validity. *Meta*, XLVI, 2, 2001, pp. 311-325.
- WILLIAMS, M. 1989. The Assessment of Professional Translation Quality: Creating Credibility out of Chaos. *TTR (Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction)* 2 (2), pp. 13-33.

## Appendix

## Results of the three methods of correction by the five correctors

STUDENTS	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	B1	B2	B3	B4	B5	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
1	4	5.82	5.27	5.91	5.14	6.47	6.71	4.71	7.41	4.71	4.5	6	6	5	6
2	0.7	4.82	3.82	3.86	4.05	4.12	4.35	3.29	5.88	3.53	2.5	4	4	4	4
3	2.7	6.82	5.82	6.45	6.27	6.47	7.18	6.12	7.88	6.24	2.5	7	6.5	5.5	6
4	4.5	5.64	5.27	6.27	6.27	7.29	7.06	3.76	6.94	6.59	4.5	4	6	5.5	5.5
5	2.4	4.45	5.41	4.73	5.91	5.29	5.06	3.65	5.53	5.29	4.5	5	6	7	6
6	3.1	6.91	6.18	6.64	6.09	5.65	5.88	4.94	7.06	6.71	5	4	7	6.5	4
7	3	3.82	4.36	4.32	3.18	5.41	4.24	2.59	5.18	3.18	2.5	2	6	3	4
8	3.5	4.91	6.68	5.77	5.32	5.18	5.76	6.24	7.18	5.88	2.5	6	7	6.5	6
9	3.2	5.82	6.32	8.59	6.14	6.82	7.18	6.35	8	5.88	6	6	8	6.5	7.5
10	4.7	7.27	6.64	7.73	6.45	6.82	6.24	6	8.12	6.47	4.5	5	8.5	7	8
11	4	7.18	7.36	7.5	7.18	6.24	7.53	6	8.47	6.12	4.5	4	8	7	7
12	3.6	6.55	5.64	6.86	6.41	6.35	7.65	5.06	8	5.76	4.5	5	6.5	5	6
13	3.8	5.82	7	7	6.91	7.18	6.82	7.18	8.12	6.94	3	3	9.5	5	7.5
14	3.3	5.55	6.36	6.64	5.41	7.41	7.18	4.71	8	4.94	4.5	5	9	4	6.5
15	3.3	2.55	4.82	5.77	5.45	6.24	5.53	4.82	7.18	5.06	2	4	6	3	5.5
16	5.8	5.73	7.82	7.09	7.09	7.53	7.53	7.29	7.88	7.18	3	6	7.5	3	7.5
17	4.5	5	5.64	7.68	5.05	6.35	7.18	5.41	8.82	5.29	2	7	6.5	4	5.5
18	1.8	4	3.82	2.82	1.73	5.29	3.29	2.71	4	1.18	3	4	4	2	3.5
19	3	5.45	4.86	3.23	3.68	4.94	4.82	4.59	3.06	4.59	2.5	3	5	3	5
20	4.6	7.45	6.55	6	6.64	7.65	7.65	6.35	7.53	6.47	3	5	8.5	6	6.5
21	5.4	6.64	7.55	7.14	6	6.35	6.71	5.18	5.76	6.35	3	4	8.5	8.5	5.5
22	2.9	6	5.73	6.91	5.36	5.41	6.71	4.71	6.94	5.88	5	5	8.5	7	5.5
23	3.8	6.27	6.27	5.91	5.32	6.71	6.24	6	6	6.24	4.5	5	8.5	6	5.5
24	4.2	6.82	6.36	3.64	5.91	3.76	5.41	5.18	3.29	5.65	2.5	5	8.5	5	5
25	1.4	4.09	3.55	3.55	2.82	5.06	4.35	3.88	5.88	4.12	2.5	5	4	4	4.5
26	2.2	4.45	4.64	4.27	4.55	5.88	5.76	3.88	6.71	5.76	2	3	4.5	3	4
27	4.5	5.18	5.64	5.64	5.45	6	5.76	5.06	6.82	4.71	3	5	5	3	4.5
28	5.3	7.36	5.68	7.05	6.82	8.12	7.65	6.35	8.71	7.29	5	6	8.5	7	7.5
29	-0.1	3.82	2.27	4.45	2.5	3.76	4.24	2.71	4.59	2.59	4	5	6	3	4
30	1	4	3.41	3.64	2.36	4	4.94	2.71	4.59	3.65	5	4	4	3	4
31	5.4	8.64	8.36	8.64	8.32	7.65	7.88	7.65	8.59	8.24	5	8	9	8	9
32	3.8	7.82	5.82	6.55	5.45	6.71	6.71	6	8.71	6.47	5	8	8.5	6	6.5
33	5.1	8	6.77	7.5	6.5	7.65	7.88	6.59	8.12	7.41	5	7	9	7	7.5
34	4.7	5.82	4.91	6.36	5.45	6.82	5.18	5.29	6.59	6.24	5	6	6	4	6
35	2.9	5.82	5.27	4.95	5.86	6.94	5.76	4.47	6.71	6.59	5	5	6	6	6.5
36	4.6	6.45	6.09	5.91	6	7.18	6.59	6.47	7.65	6.82	4.5	6	7	5	6
37	4.7	6.09	6.14	5.14	5.05	6.82	6.47	5.29	7.53	4.82	6.5	6	7.5	6	5.5
38	5.8	9.27	7.95	8.09	8.64	7.88	8.35	7.41	9.29	8.71	5	8	9	9	7.5
39	2.7	6.45	5.82	6.68	6.05	6.94	6.94	4.82	7.88	5.65	5	5	8.5	7	5.5
40	3.6	7.18	5.82	6.09	6.36	6.35	7.29	5.76	6.94	6.71	7	6	8	6	6
41	3.2	5.91	6.27	5.64	6.09	6.24	6.71	5.76	6.24	5.88	5	5	8	4.5	5.5
42	6.5	7.64	7.73	6.82	7.09	8.71	7.06	6.82	7.29	7.53	7	7	9	5.5	7
43	2.4	3.91	5.23	3.09	2.55	6	2.82	4.35	2	2.12	5	4	6.5	2	4
44	3.5	5.45	5.91	6.05	5.73	6.12	6.71	4.71	7.65	5.88	7	5	7	4.5	6.5
45	6.1	4.18	5.45	4.05	2.55	5.65	5.41	4.82	5.88	3.76	5	4	6.5	3	5
46	6.4	7.09	6.59	6.82	8.09	7.88	6.94	6	8.82	7.65	5	5	6.5	6	7
47	2	5.45	4.68	5.36	4.45	5.53	5.41	3.65	7.41	4.24	7	6	6	5	5.5
48	3.3	5.82	5.36	6.73	5.82	4.94	6	4.35	6.59	6	5	7	6.5	4	6
49	6	8.82	7.05	8.73	7.55	7.65	8.12	6.47	8.47	7.65	8.8	7	9	9	8
50	5.2	7.82	7.77	8.09	7.64	7.53	7.53	7.29	7.41	7.41	5	7	9	7.5	7.5
51	3.8	7.18	5.68	6.91	6.55	6.24	7.06	4.47	7.88	6.12	5	6	8.5	5	7.5
52	5.5	7.55	6.14	6.59	7.68	7.76	7.76	5.65	7.65	7.76	5	7	9	4.5	7
53	1	4.64	3.64	3.55	4.09	4.59	4.94	2.82	5.88	3.88	4.5	5	7.5	4	5.5
54	4.2	7.55	5.95	7.91	6.59	6.94	7.18	5.53	8.12	6.35	3	6	8.5	8	6.5
55	5.3	6.91	6.68	6.55	6.64	7.18	6.94	6.47	8.12	5.88	4.5	7	6.5	7	6
56	2	5.09	5.14	4.82	4	6.12	5.88	3.65	5.76	4.47	4.5	5	5.5	6	5.5
57	5.6	7	7.18	7.55	7.73	7.41	8.12	6.82	8.47	7.53	5	7	9	8	8.5
58	7.5	8	8	7.18	8.82	8.47	7.06	7.88	8	8.59	6	7	9	9	8.5
59	4.9	6	5.86	5.95	4.64	7.41	6.94	5.65	6.94	4.47	4.5	8	8	4	6
60	2.7	4.45	5.27	5	5.09	5.88	5.18	5.65	6.59	5.76	3	6	6.5	3	5
61	3.5	5.55	6.05	4.73	3.45	5.88	6	4.82	5.76	3.53	3	6	6	3	5.5
62	5.6	3.36	4.82	6.23	4.5	6.47	4.94	4.12	6.12	4.24	3	5	5	4	5
63	2.2	2.2	3.05	3.36	1.64	3.65	4.94	1.76	3.88	2	3	5	6.5	3	4.5
64	2.6	3.64	3.77	2.82	3.23	3.88	3.88	3.29	0.35	4.47	5	5	4	2	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>244.4</b>	<b>377.7</b>	<b>369</b>	<b>379.5</b>	<b>353.4</b>	<b>404.8</b>	<b>401.2</b>	<b>330</b>	<b>434.8</b>	<b>361.1</b>	<b>279.3</b>	<b>349</b>	<b>453.5</b>	<b>333.5</b>	<b>380.5</b>
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>3.819</b>	<b>5.902</b>	<b>5.765</b>	<b>5.93</b>	<b>5.521</b>	<b>6.325</b>	<b>6.269</b>	<b>5.156</b>	<b>6.794</b>	<b>5.642</b>	<b>4.364</b>	<b>5.453</b>	<b>7.086</b>	<b>5.211</b>	<b>5.945</b>
<b>ST DEV</b>	<b>1.538</b>	<b>1.568</b>	<b>1.265</b>	<b>1.532</b>	<b>1.673</b>	<b>1.199</b>	<b>1.247</b>	<b>1.379</b>	<b>1.709</b>	<b>1.599</b>	<b>1.413</b>	<b>1.322</b>	<b>1.553</b>	<b>1.866</b>	<b>1.287</b>