

## **Translation Assessment in Educational Environments: Teacher's Criteria and Students' Awareness**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Although significant findings have come from several recent research on two different areas of translation teaching methodology and various types of translation tests respectively, very few studies have explored the close relationship between these two factors in teaching translation courses in universities. The main purpose of this study was to conduct a survey among translation students to find out the translation assessment criteria used by their translation instructors and the extent to which these students are aware of such criteria. Therefore, a questionnaire was administered to 100 female and male translation students doing the last semester of their BA studies in 20 different Iranian universities. The results obtained from the analysis of the available data showed that translation instructors were not unanimous in terms of the criteria they used in assessing students' translations. Furthermore, in most cases, the students were not aware of such criteria. Therefore, establishing unanimous criteria for assessing students' translations and informing students of such criteria will have a remarkable effect on the quality of translation courses.

**KEYWORDS:** Assessment Criteria, Students' Awareness, Translation Assessment, Unanimous Criteria.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, fewer studies have been carried out to discuss the interrelation between translation teaching and testing in educational system. Whereas, most research into assessment in translation concentrates on developing different frameworks for translation assessment criteria or constructing quality scales for educational purposes in educational learning environments. Even there is limited consensus on what the criteria might be and what translated texts that meet these criteria might get more scores. On the other hand, there seems to be quite unaware among many translation students of the way their translated texts are evaluated based on clearly defined criteria.

However, Heaton points out that "both teaching and testing are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other" (Heaton, 1990). In fact, he is of the opinion that results obtained from well-designed tests help teachers improve their teaching methodology. Therefore, as Khodabakhshi states, teachers should tend to adopt the most suitable teaching methodologies in their classes to "put what they have elicited from their students into practice" (Khodabakhshi, 2009). To see the other side of the coin, approaches to translation teaching determine the type of testing as well. According to Heaton, "the interrelation between teaching and testing is a mutual process in which one determines the other" (Heaton, 1990).

Translation teaching and testing are no exceptions. A suitable test to assess translation students' knowledge lets the instructor select the best way of teaching in translation classes (Heaton, 1990). On the other hand, being aware of the assessment criteria in translation before the exam, the translation students will understand what the characteristics of a good translation are and they know what criteria and factors are important to their instructors.

1. Are translation students aware of the assessment criteria their translated texts are evaluated by translation instructors?
2. Which test item format is accepted by translation students to evaluate their translated texts?

This paper explores these two questions by weaving together teaching and testing in university translation classes. This research finding would be useful to both translation teachers in improving teaching or testing translation courses and to translation students in becoming aware of translation assessment

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criteria. Also, the obtained results can help instructors in designing proper test item format evaluating students' translations.

## INTERRELATION BETWEEN TEACHING AND TESTING TRANSLATION

Research in the field of translation quality assessment has achieved no consensus in introducing the assessment criteria used in evaluating students' translations by instructors. Therefore, different theories and frameworks are presented regarding evaluating students' translations in educational environments. Some researchers seek to develop models that provide the instructors' needs in evaluating students' translations and try to minimize the gap between translation theory and practice (Farahzad, 1992). On the other hand, some researchers seek to find the objective criteria regardless of imposing one's taste on translation assessment (Tajvidi, 2005).

Carol Ann Goff- Kfoury in her paper entitled 'Testing and Evaluation in the Translation Classroom' refers to four different types of tests that translation students should take in universities: placement test, diagnostic tests, progress tests and achievement tests (Goff- Kfoury, 2004). In short, by placement test she means the first test a translation student will sit for at university. According to her, diagnostic test is designed to "facilitate the student's learning and encourage students to correct areas of weakness" (ibid). Goff- Kfoury adds that a progress test is to "determine if the students have mastered material that has already been taught" (ibid). Also, achievement test is meant to determine if the student has met the course objectives or not.

Then Goff- Kfoury states that all these four types of test are broadly divided into two traditional categories of formative and summative assessment. She defines formative assessment as follows:

... the most common form of assessment in higher education and constitutes the bulk of instructors' efforts to evaluate students. Formative assessment takes place during the instruction period and is designed to guide instructors to adjust their teaching (Gage and Berliner, 1998, stated in Goff- Kfoury, 2004).

Summative assessment is designed to "attribute value" as well as to estimate the degree to which learning objectives have been fulfilled. The very good examples of summative assessment are achievement tests, final exams, oral or written, and research projects (Goff- Kfoury, 2004). However, if summative evaluation shows that the majority of the class is not at the level the instructor had targeted, then it has come too late and the formative assessment was also not sufficiently well planned (ibid).

On the other hand, according to Campbell and Hale, works on translation assessment can be divided into two broad categories based on the purpose of assessment: accreditation or pedagogy (Campbell and Hale, 2003). In the accreditation area, the works deal in some fashion with tests that bestow a public validation of competence, while the pedagogy area in translation is less clear cut in terms of purpose. For example, Brunette makes some reference to translation didactics in her attempt to establish a terminology for translation quality assessment, but is not clear about propose, for example, diagnostic, formative, or summative assessment (Brunette, 2002). For example, some researchers are clearly concerned about formative assessment (Dollerup, 1993; Kussmaul, 1995; Sainz, 1993), and others discuss summative assessment in the form of final translation examinations at university (Farahzad, 1992; Ivanova 1998). Whereas, Campbell make some small inroad into diagnostic assessment (Campbell, 1991; Campbell and Hale, 2003). Now, dealing with education of translation students, the present paper attempts to focus on translation testing for education.

According to Haiyan, students' passive learning is not only due to fruitless classroom teaching, but is also related to translation testing (Haiyan, 2006). Another factor in students' passive learning of translation is the separation in content between translation teaching and translation testing. It is not unusual that poor assessment practices divert students' efforts from the pursuit of instructional objectives. Since translation testing has little relation with what they have learned in each class, students either prepare for it aimlessly or give up their preparation altogether. The worst result is that they will not even care about the instructor's lecture (ibid). Therefore, getting correctly together two categories of teaching and testing translation

encourages the students to participate in class activities. Translation testing should be designed to train translation students rather than to evaluate the students' competence. In the other words, translation testing should be looked upon as an effective method in training the translation students. Hence, through holding translation tests, the translation instructors are responsible for helping the students to know their strengths and weaknesses, checking their progress, and using the tests results in evaluating their progress. In addition, the transition tests can act as a source of information helping the instructors to evaluate the influence of his/her teaching method in the classrooms (Ruslin et al., 2011). Therefore, training properly the translation students will be accomplished when the instructors create a direct relationship between teaching and testing translation (Rahman at al., 2011).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this study the scaling method has been used to gather the information. The selection of the sample focused on the translation students in the last semester of the University of Isfahan, Kerman, Sistan and Baluchestan, Jahrom, Bushehr, Chabahar, Abade, Hormozgan, Mohades Nouri, and Open University of Kazerun. The main reason for selecting these last-semester students was that they passed or were passing the practical courses including translation of press texts, political texts, literary texts, the economic texts, Islamic texts, translations and interpreting letters, and documents.

The sampling method used to gather the information was clustering method. In each university, the sampling was conducted in accordance with the proportion of the last- semester translation students to total of all last- semester students of ten universities. Then, the questionnaires were randomly distributed among these students of translation.

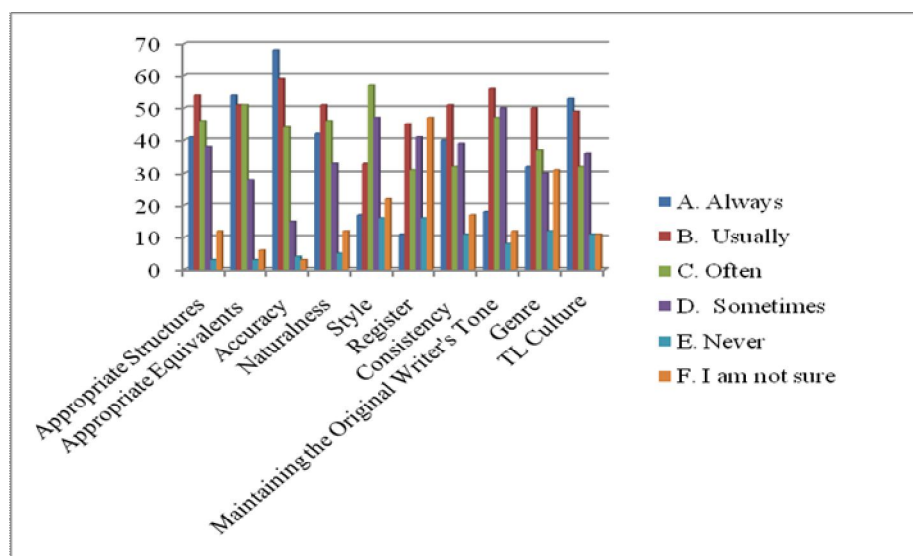
**Table 1:** Last-semester Translation Students from Ten Universities

University	Isfahan	Kerman	Sistan and Baluchestan	Jahrom	Bushehr	Chabahar	Abadeh	Hormozgan	Kazerun	Mohades Nouri
The Number of Students	25	16	19	19	17	16	21	18	21	20

Since there was no questionnaire similar to this case study, the authors prepared the questionnaire through finding the topics in translation evaluation criteria in the academic environment. This questionnaire is basically composed of two parts. The first part included 16 questions about students' awareness of the criteria that translation instructors used to assess their students' competence. The second part had five questions and the purpose of these questions was to figure out the translation students' favorite test item format. In this questionnaire, the students provided their own comments on their awareness of translation assessment cities and their favorite test item format through selecting one of the five options.

## DATA ANALYSIS

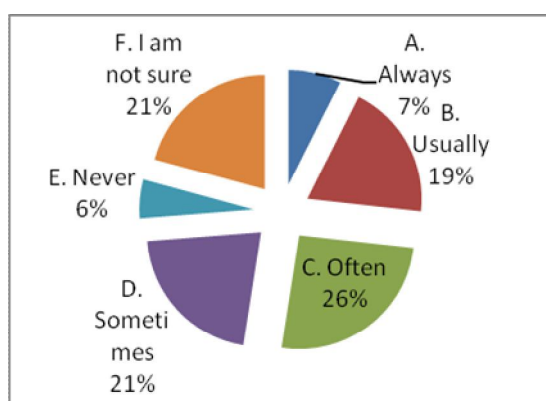
The first and second part of Questionnaire A, containing 16 questions, were designed to examine the first question of the research study, that is students' awareness of translation criteria before the exam. To get a clear picture of translation students' comments on their awareness of translation assessment before the exam, Fig. 1 shows the proportion of students' awareness of ten translation assessment criteria used by the instructors to evaluate their translated texts.



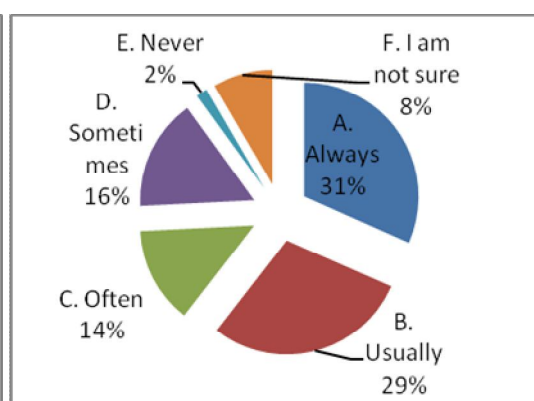
**Fig. 1:** Students' Awareness of Criteria in Translation Classes

In the second part of Questionnaire A, there were two questions regarding the possibility of objective evaluation as well as students' awareness of translation assessment in general. Indeed, Fig. 2 and Fig.3 reflect student' comments on these two general questions. Therefore, according to Fig. 2, 7% of students always, 19% usually, 26 % often, 29% sometimes, 6% never assert the possibility of objective assessment, and 21% of students were not sure about objective assessment.

Also, Figure 3 represents that 31% students were always, 29% were usually, 14 % were often, 16% were sometimes, 2% were never aware of assessment criteria, and 8% of students were not sure whether they aware of these criteria of translation assessment before the exam.

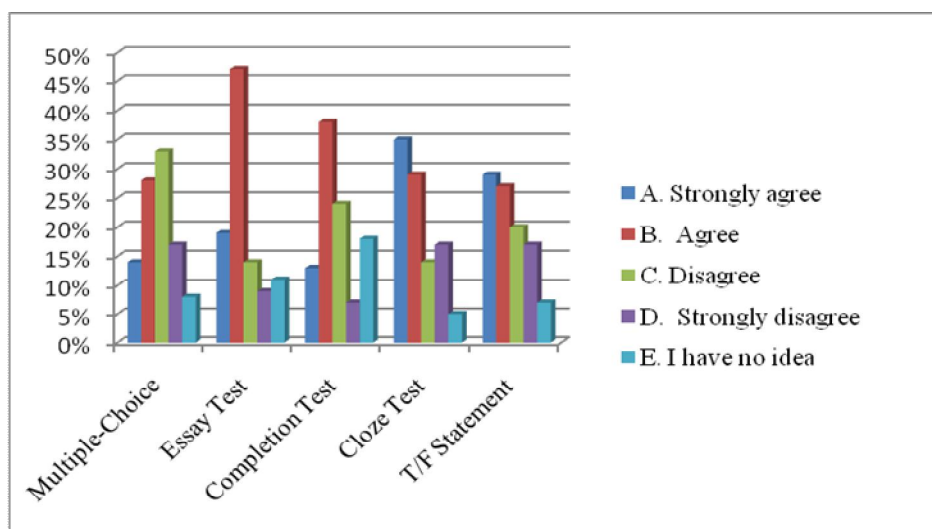


**Fig. 2:** Objective Assessment



**Fig.3:** Assessment Criteria

Fig. 4, which is provided with the questionnaire B, included five questions about students' comments on the best form of translation test. In other words, a type of translation test item format helping translation students to improve their abilities in translating English to Persian or vice versa. According to Fig. 4, 14% students agreed with multiple-choice test, 47% students agreed with essay test, 38% students agreed with completion test, 35% students agreed with cloze test, and 29% students agreed with true or false statements as five forms of translation test. As a result, essay test was recognizes as the most favorable form and multiple-choice test was regarded as the least favorable form of translation test among students.



**Fig. 4:** The Frequency of the Test Formats Selected by Translation Students

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluating students' awareness of translation criteria indicated less emphasis on two criteria of register and style in the classes before the translation exams. However, the translation students paid more attention to three criteria of naturalness, consistency, and genre more than the previous two criteria. But there seems to be less consensus among the translation students' awareness of the necessity of these three criteria. On the other hand, most translation students agreed that they were informed of all the assessment criteria before the exam and that objective assessment was possible. However, it seems that the students were mostly aware of the following translation assessment criteria:

1. Approximately most of the students agreed that they were informed of the importance of the correspondence between source and target texts, that is the translation students were informed of paying attention to the criterion of accuracy in rendering the exact message from the source language to the target language.
2. The uses of appropriate structures as well as appropriate equivalents were previously advised to the students as an important translation criterion in evaluating their translated texts. This means that students were aware of finding the most accurate grammatical structures and equivalents in the target language.
3. Most students were recommended to maintain the original writer's tone as a criterion, which is used in the evaluation of their translated texts. Therefore, it was properly informed translation students to transfer the tone of the author otherwise their mistakes would affect the entire translated text.
4. Most students were advised first to consider the cultural differences between the source and target texts and then began to translate the original texts according to the source culture. This means that students learned that preserving source culture had a higher priority over the target culture otherwise the translated texts in the target language seem vague and obscure.

From the other hand, as can be seen in Appendix B, the students were asked to choose the appropriate test item format among the most common types of test item formats, including multiple-choice, essay test, completion test, cloze test, and T/F statement in order to evaluate the students' awareness of translation assessment criteria. Almost all kinds of test item formats had been accepted from the viewpoint of translation students. However, most students' first priority was essay translation amongst the other formats. Thus, the students preferred to translate a relatively short text depending on the type of the text.

## CONCLUSION

Although there was a consensus among students that they were informed of most translation assessment criteria before the exam, the obtained results revealed that too much emphasis was placed on accuracy, the use of appropriate structures and appropriate equivalents, and maintaining the original writer's tone. While the translation students should be equally informed of the other criteria as naturalness, clearness, consistency, and finally considering style and register. Also, the translation students believed that they could better translate the original if an essay text was considered as the test item format so it could properly be assessed by the instructors. So if the instructors use this type of exam in evaluating students' translations, they will more easily come to a conclusion by assessing the translated texts more objectively.

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## Appendix A

1. My translation instructors consider the use of **Appropriate Structures** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
2. My translation instructors consider the use of **Appropriate Equivalents** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
3. My translation instructors check **Accuracy** in rendering the exact message from the source language to the target language in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
4. My translation instructors consider **Naturalness** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
5. My translation instructors consider **Clearness** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
6. My translation instructors attend to **Style** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
7. My translation instructors consider **Register** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
8. My translation instructors consider **Consistency** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
9. My translation instructors consider **Maintaining the Original Writer's Tone** as a criterion in the evaluation of my translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
10. Students must take care of **Genre** through the translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
11. Students must translate the text exactly according to the **SL Culture** even though it may not make sense in the TL.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
12. Students must observe the differences between TL & SL Cultures and translate the text according to the **TL Culture**.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
13. Students should have the chance to **Invent Equivalents** for the words that have no proper equivalents in the TL.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
14. **Additions and Omissions** on the part of students are acceptable in translation.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
15. **Objective Assessment** of translation is possible.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure
16. Students should be **informed of** the translation **Assessment Criteria** before the exam.  
a. Always   b. Usually   c. Often   d. Sometimes   e. Never   f. I am not sure

## Appendix B

1. I think **Multiple-Choice** is a proper test type to assess students' translations.  
a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree   e. I have no idea
2. I think **Essay Test** is a proper test type to assess students' translations.  
a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree   e. I have no idea
3. I think **Completion Test** is a proper test type to assess students' translations.  
a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree   e. I have no idea
4. I think **Cloze Test** is a proper test type to assess students' translations.  
a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree   e. I have no idea
5. I think **T/F Statement** is a proper test type to assess students' translations.  
a. Strongly agree   b. Agree   c. Disagree   d. Strongly disagree   e. I have no idea