Benjamins Translation Library

127

# Introduction

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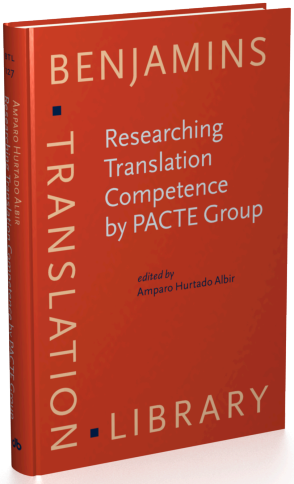


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**Researching Translation Competence by PACTE Group**
**Edited by Amparo Hurtado Albir**
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# Introduction

*Researching Translation Competence* is a compendium of the research carried out on Translation Competence by the PACTE research group.

The ultimate aim of the PACTE Group research is to improve curricular design, and assessment in translator training institutions. We believe that training of translators must be firmly grounded on a definition of Translation Competence (the knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to be able to translate) – the ultimate objective of training – and the way in which it is acquired, i.e. the different phases of development of this competence and the characteristics of each. With this knowledge, curricular design in training institutions can be improved, in particular with regard to the specific competences to be developed; progression in the acquisition of these competences; and assessment criteria and procedures at each stage.

*The aim of this book*

The objective of *Researching Translation Competence* is to present the results of our research on Translation Competence (TC).

The main aim of our research was to identify the characteristics specific to TC, taking the revised version of our holistic dynamic model (PACTE 2003) as our reference. Two secondary objectives were established:

- To develop and test instruments (i.e. resources for data collection) capable of measuring the specific characteristics of TC given the lack of empirically validated instruments for the purpose in Translation Studies (e.g. prototypical texts, questionnaires, etc.).
- To show that TC was qualitatively different from bilingual competence. In our model, the bilingual sub-competence is a sub-competence of TC but it was not considered to be specific to TC.

To attain these objectives, on the one hand, an attempt was made to distinguish between the characteristics of TC and other similar competences. Thus, two groups of subjects from the same experimental universe (specialists in foreign languages, i.e. foreign language teachers and professional translators) were compared. On the other hand, in order to identify the essential characteristics of TC an analysis was made of top-ranked translators in relation to the group of translators in the sample.

To date, PACTE has published 13 articles on different partial aspects of its TC research (see Bibliography) and made 29 presentations at national and international

conferences. This book is a complete, up-to-date compendium of our TC research and the results obtained. This is the first time that many of these aspects have been published together: the conceptual framework (theoretical and methodological) that provides a base for our research and how our research evolved (the development of the TC models and the experimental design in relation to the exploratory test, the pilot test and the final experiment); the results of all the experimental variables (including some data that had not been published before) and the analysis of the corpus of translations resulting from the experiment. This is also the first time that conclusions have been established about how TC functions as a whole. Further unpublished data includes: the characteristics of the subjects selected for the sample used in the experiment; the results of the Efficacy of the Translation Process variable and the Type of Internal Support indicator; the study of the Instrumental sub-competence; the study of the translators who performed the best in the experiment. In addition, this is the first time that all our data collecting instruments have been published (in different appendices) so that they can be used by other researchers.

*Stages of the PACTE Group research: Translation Competence and Acquisition of Translation Competence*

The cornerstone of our research is the concept of translation as a communicative activity, directed towards achieving aims (e.g. Nord 1997), that involves making decisions and solving problems (e.g. Wilss 1988, 1996), and requires expert knowledge.

The first stage in our research was an empirical study of the workings of written TC, as there was no generally accepted TC model that had been validated empirically.

Our research was designed in two clearly differentiated phases:

- The first phase involved an empirical study of TC, in which data concerning the knowledge and behaviour of professional translators was compared with that of foreign language teachers with no experience in translation. This book includes all the research carried out in that first stage.
- The second phase consists of a study of the Acquisition of Translation Competence (ATC) in trainee translators. It is a continuation of the first phase and based on our TC research. The data from the second phase is still being analysed and is not presented in this book, which only provides a brief outline of the study.

*Languages*

Six language pairs came under study: English-Spanish, German-Spanish, French-Spanish, English-Catalan, German-Catalan, French-Catalan. There were several reasons for choosing these combinations:

1. We wanted to experiment with several language combinations to see if TC functioned in the same way in all of them.

2. These six combinations are the most commonly used in the professional translation market in Catalonia. The inclusion of two L1 (Spanish and Catalan) reflects the bilingual, bicultural reality of Catalonia.
3. English, French and German are the three L2 (first foreign language) taught in the Facultat de Traducció i d'Interpretació (FTI) and they are used in translation classes in both directions (direct and inverse translation).

*Methodology*

Our TC research was carried out from two complementary perspectives:

1. Cognitive: gathering and analysing data concerning the mental processes involved in translating, and the knowledge and abilities required.
2. Textual: gathering and analysing data obtained from the results of the translation process (translated texts).

Data concerning the mental processes involved in translation were obtained using *Proxy* and *Camtasia* software programs, direct observation charts, and different types of questionnaires. Data from the translated texts focused on the solutions found for prototypical translation problems (*Rich Points*); categories and criteria of acceptability were established for this purpose. Corpus linguistics methodology was used to analyse the translations.

A combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods was thus used in a multi-methodological approach in which data obtained from several different types of instruments were triangulated.

The absence of an established tradition of empirical research in the field of Translation Studies, comparable to that which exists in other disciplines in the Social Sciences, such as Psychology, Pedagogy or Applied Linguistics, and the consequent dearth of validated measuring instruments with which to collect data, accounts for the need to carry out exploratory tests and pilot studies to fine-tune our research design and validate the instruments developed for data collection and analysis purposes.

*Tests carried out*

Given the absence of a tradition of empirical research in Translation Studies at the time, we were obliged to carry out exploratory tests and pilot studies before embarking on the TC experiment. These were needed: to advance our hypotheses; determine the variables; design the experimental tasks, data collecting, and data analysis instruments.

Two series of exploratory tests were carried out between June 2000 and January 2001 in the run-up to the experiment on TC. In the first, subjects were members of the PACTE research group; in the second, subjects were six professional translators (two for each language combination). A pilot study was then carried out to test the

hypotheses and instruments (February – April 2004). Subjects were three professional translators and three foreign language teachers (one for each language combination). The final experiment took place (October 2005 – March 2006) with 59 subjects: 35 professional translators and 24 foreign language teachers.

*Organisation of the book*

This book has been organised in four parts, and includes eight appendices and a glossary. The four parts correspond to the different aspects treated in the book: concepts, research design, results and conclusions.

Part I of the book presents the conceptual and methodological framework of PACTE's research design. It focuses on the most important concepts related to translation and TC as well as the methodological presuppositions behind our research. It also includes the TC models developed by PACTE that have provided a referential framework for our experimental design.

Part II focuses on the methodological aspects of our research design and its development. These include information on the exploratory tests and pilot studies carried out; experiment design; characteristics of the sample population; procedures of data collection and analysis.

Part III presents the results obtained in the experiment. This part is organised around Acceptability, the transversal indicator in the experiment and the six dependent variables (Knowledge of Translation; Translation Project; Identification and Solution of Translation Problems; Decision-making; Efficacy of the Translation Process; Use of Instrumental Resources), in each case presenting the measurements and results obtained. Part III also includes the results of the *Dynamic Translation Index*, which was obtained by crossing the results of two variables, Knowledge of Translation and Translation Project. Finally, this part presents a corpus analysis of the translations produced in the experiment. Given the wide variety of phenomenona described in this part (acceptability analysis of the translations, the declarative knowledge of the subjects, their decision-making capacity, instrumental competence, etc.) we decided to look for a way to organise the chapters so they could stand on their own and be accessed individually according to the interests of each researcher. Thus, each of the chapters on the different variables as well as the chapter on Acceptability have an introduction with a table laying out their design and a brief summary of their main characteristics.

Part IV presents the conclusions and the perspectives of our TC research. The first chapter presents an analysis of the top-ranked translators, that has allowed us to corroborate our findings about TC. This is followed by the main conclusions of our TC research: TC characteristics, methodological contributions made by our study, as well as further lines of research. The final section provides a short outline of PACTE's ATC research and its applications, which is the continuation of our TC research project.

Eight appendices of different types are included. Appendices I, II and III present the instruments used in the exploratory tests, pilot study and the experiment itself. Although these instruments were originally produced and used in their Spanish language version, they have been translated into English to facilitate understanding for a global audience. The remaining five appendices present data analysis instruments or supplementary data.

The glossary includes definitions of terms from three main areas: the most important terms associated with the conceptual framework of PACTE's research on TC; terms pertaining to research methodology; and finally terms related to statistical analysis. The methodology terms were selected and defined by Wilhelm Neunzig; these terms can also be found in a table at the end of Chapter 3. The statistical terms were selected and defined by Anna Kuznik.

Throughout the book, some previously published results are given and when this occurs (most frequently in Part III) references are given to the earlier publication. If there are tables or figures without references, this means that they have not been published previously or that they have been updated for this book.

Current members of the group who participated in the research project on TC have contributed most of the chapters. Some chapters, however, have been written by individual members of the group and reflect their personal contribution to the research project (Chapters 1, 3, 6, 15 and 16).

The abbreviations most frequently used in this book are: Translation Competence (TC), Acquisition of Translation Competence (ATC), Rich Point (RP), Source Text (ST), Target Text (TT), Source Language (SL), Target Language (TL), Language 1 (L1) and Language 2 (L2).

PACTE GROUP
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