*JUNE EYCKMANS*

Ghent University

# Cultural Competence in Translation Studies and its Assessment

**Abstract**

In this chapter, I consider the role that cultural competence has been given in different translation competence models and I will discuss different options for assessing cultural competence, both as a separate construct and as part of translation competence as a whole. With regard to the latter option, I will contend that a norm-referenced assessment method is best suited to put cultural competence on a par with all other sub-competences of translation ability. Not only does this method allow the reliability of the assessment to be checked, but it also has two important advantages when it comes to the validity of measuring (cultural) translation competence: it takes into account that sub-components of translation ability are more or less inextricable in actual performances, and it subscribes to the notion that the manifestation of cultural competence is always dependent on the interaction of a particular translator with a particular text.

**Keywords**: cultural competence, translation competence, phraseology, translation assessment, norm-referenced assessment method

## 1. Introduction

In Translation Studies (TS), a number of scholars have attempted to conceptualize and define translation competence, focusing on the knowledge and skills it requires. A lineup of prevailing definitions (PACTE 2000; Arango-Keith & Koby 2003; Angelelli 2009; ISO 17100 2015) reveals that most contemporary conceptualizations of translation competence follow a functional rather than a linguistic approach. They emphasize the mediating role of the translator who has to transpose a particular text that was written to perform a function in the source language (SL) and culture into a new form in order to perform a function in the target language (TL) and culture. Therefore, sub-competences with names such as 'transfer competence', 'pragmatic competence', 'strategic competence' or '(inter)cultural competence' (ICC) figure in virtually all current definitions (Eyckmans et al. 2009). This development has decidedly been influenced by the cultural turn in TS, in which every text is seen as the result of the "total beliefs and practices of a society" (Nida 1994: 157). In view of the fact that the conventions of text production and reception vary from culture to culture, the practice of translation has been described as a cross-cultural event (Snell-Hornby 1988: 46) and the role of the translator has been redefined in the sense that they have become an intercultural mediator who needs to be proficient in SLs and TLs as well as have a profound knowledge of source and target cultures.

If the ability to convey meaning from a source text (ST) to a target text (TT) according to socio-cultural appropriateness lies at the heart of translation ability, it stands to reason that assessment procedures should encompass this element. However, reports on the assessment of cultural competence are sparse in the TS literature, and cultural competence as a sub-competence has rarely been studied experimentally.

This chapter consists of two parts. In the first, the increased popularity of cultural competence both as a term and as a skill is discussed and the descriptions and definitions that have been put forward in TS literature are described. Next, the question whether linguistic dimensions form part of cultural competence is dealt with by considering the attention that is paid to idiomatic language use in second language acquisition (SLA) literature as well as in TS. In the second part of this chapter, the assessment of cultural competence will be addressed. To this end, current practices in translation

assessment are discussed and proposals for measuring the sub-competence 'cultural competence' are reviewed. Finally, the potential of a norm-referenced method for identifying items that are culturally laden and for measuring cultural competence in a valid and reliable way is outlined.

## 2. Cultural competence within Translation Studies

### *2.1 Background*

One of the most discussed issues within TS is translation equivalence and the translatability/untranslatability of language, with Nida (1964) and Newmark (1981) as well-known theorists in the field. After a period in which TS was dominated by ethnocentrism, poly-system theory emerged and became mainstream in the field. Even-Zohar's (1979) ground-breaking work on the interplay between diachronic (historical) and synchronic (contemporary) dimensions heralded the shift in TS towards a more complex analysis of socio-cultural systems. As such, and in the wake of concurrent developments in Cultural Studies, key concepts such as gender, youth, power, cultural identity and ideology found their way into translation theory and translation scholars began to emphasize the cross-cultural aspects of translation (Snell-Hornby 1988; Bassnett 1991).

Today, it is generally accepted that the quality of a translation does not depend on the TT alone but also on the reception of the text by the implied reader. This implied reader brings along an idiosyncratic collection of social, socio-cultural, political and ideological characteristics. With a view to improving translation pedagogy, translator trainers such as González Davies and Scott-Tennent (2005) have put forward proposals to increase student translators' cultural competence. They advocate the necessity for students to familiarize themselves with cultural references (such as those exemplified in Nida's taxonomy, Nida & Taber 1969) as well as to improve their knowledge of translation strategies. This, they hold, will increase the students' chances of arriving at good solutions to translation problems.

Their pedagogical proposal for student translators includes a wide range of activities in which students are trained in 'translation problem-spotting' and developing written protocols to make their decision-making processes in translating cultural references explicit. In these written protocols translation problems are identified and different solutions are put forward and justified. With these activities the authors aim to (1) develop an awareness of the limitations of any definition of the concept of cultural reference, (2) reconcile students' assumptions about their own community and those of the target culture, and (3) establish the perception in students that culture as a behaviour and as a way of perceiving the world permeates the whole text, not just loose words and expressions (González Davies and Scott-Tennent 2005: 175).

### *2.2 Terminology*

The importance of cultural competence has yielded a plethora of terms in Cultural Studies: multiculturalism, cross-cultural adaptation, cross-cultural awareness, cultural competence, intercultural sensitivity, ethnorelativity, global competence and transcultural communication are but a few of those listed to refer to the ability to communicate across language–culture differences (Fantini 2009). Of course, the definition of 'culture' itself is problematic. It is reported to be one of the most complicated words in the English language (Williams 1976: 87). For their 1952 publication, Kroeber and Klockhohn had already gathered 165 different definitions (1952).

Within TS the European Norm for Translation Services (ISO 17100 2015) is holding on to the generic term 'cultural competence', whereas the European Master of Translation (EMT) expert group prefers 'intercultural competence' (ICC) (2009). The proponents of the Trans-European Voluntary Certification for Translators (TransCert) project (Budin et al. 2013), in turn, use the term 'transcultural competence' in their competence description as integrated in the framework of the European Certification and Qualification Association (ECQA). Meyer (1991) also uses the term 'transcultural competence' and defines it as the highest level of cultural competence. He asserts that learners acquire cultural competence by degrees:

- At a monocultural level they use behavioural schemes that are merely adequate for their own culture and this results in a stereotyped, cliché-ridden and ethnocentric view of the foreign culture.
- At the intercultural level, learners are able to explain cultural differences between their own and the foreign culture.
- At the transcultural level, learners are able to evaluate intercultural differences and negotiate their meaning.

In this chapter, the more generic term 'cultural competence' will be used instead of its many derivatives (i.e. transcultural, cross-cultural or ICC) in order to refer to all the aspects of the translator's cultural knowledge and the strategies he or she uses to transform the cultural dimension of the source text into an appropriate target text (TT).

### *2.3 Cultural competence in translation models*

Although translation scholars and translation trainers have put forward different conceptualizations of translation competence, most of them give a prominent role to cultural knowledge and cultural skills in the translation models they have developed (Nord 1988; Bell 1991; Hewson & Martin 1991; Kiraly 1995; Neubert 2000). Publications in the past decade point to the generally accepted consensus that translation competence should be defined as the combination of advanced language competence in SL and TL language, subject- and culture-specific knowledge, knowledge of text-typological conventions in the SL and the TL cultures, and translation skills (PACTE 2005; Göpferich & Jääskelainen 2009; Malmkjær 2009; Schäffner & Adab 2000).

In what follows, the definitions of cultural competence from three current and prominent frameworks within Europe are listed to illustrate that organizations also recognize cultural competence as an integral part of translation ability:

1. ISO 17100 2015 describes the professional competence of translators as encompassing five sub-competences: translating competence, linguistic and textual competence in the SL and TL, research competence, cultural competence and technical competence. 'Cultural competence' is defined as the ability to make use of information about the locale, behavioural standards, and value systems that characterize the source and target cultures.
2. In the document "Competences for professional translators and experts in multilingual and multimedia communication", the EMT expert group (2009) defines six sub-competences of translation competence, which are presented as interdependent: translation service provision competence, language competence, ICC, information mining competence, thematic competence, and technological competence (see also Rosiers, this volume). Within this framework, ICC comprises sociolinguistic and textual dimensions. The sociolinguistic dimension pertains to recognizing function and meaning in language variation (social, geographical, historical and stylistic) and knowing how to employ a register that is appropriate to a given situation. The textual dimension encompasses the ability to grasp presuppositions, implicit allusions and stereotypes and to identify culture-bound values and references, and also the ability to compare cultural elements and methods of composition.
3. Within the European Life-Long Learning Programme, TransCert (Budin et al. 2013), translator scholars and translator trainers aim to develop a complete certification and training programme for translators at a European level. In order to arrive at such certification the framework from the ECQA is used. This is an international certification scheme for professionals that provides the same examination pool, rules and electronic system for all certification examinations in its member countries. By creating an ECQA skill card for the Certified Translator, TransCert envisages its certification to be recognized in all European Union (EU) countries. The skill card distinguishes seven skills: language, translations, domain-specifics, information mining and terminology, personal translation management, technological and transcultural. These transcultural skills are explicitly related to the values of the EU, for "including transcultural skills

in the training scheme brings innovative European added value to the TransCert program" (Peraldi 2014).

Notwithstanding the different terms that are used in these models and descriptions, it can be concluded that the terms refer to the same construct – cultural competence – which is invariably defined as a combination of knowledge, attitudes, behaviour and know-how. However, the second and the third model mention a (socio)linguistic dimension in their definitions of (trans)cultural competence, whereas the first does not. The role of linguistic knowledge and skills in the conceptualization of cultural competence is discussed in the next section.

### *2.4 Phraseology*

Although the link between language and culture is complex and the directionality of the relationship is still often debated (language can be seen to reflect as well as influence a community's pattern of thought), not many contemporary linguists would dispute the close relationship between a language's lexicon and the cultural segmentation of reality of its speakers. Not only does a language's lexicon contain keywords that reveal key concepts of core cultural values in any given language community (Wierzbicka 2001); it also possesses an important cultural dimension in the sense that it consists of a wide range of (semi-)preconstructed word combinations that are language-specific. These include idiomatic expressions, collocations, phrasal verbs, metaphorical expressions, similes, proverbs, compounds and discourse markers. Together they constitute what is called a language's idiomaticity or a language's phraseology. As Stubbs puts it: "our knowledge of a language is not only a knowledge of individual words, but of their predictable combinations, and of the cultural knowledge which these combinations often encapsulate" (2001: 3). Studies of first-language (L1) discourse have revealed overwhelming evidence of collocational tendencies, and adult native speakers' phrase lexicon is estimated to consist of many thousands of chunks (Pawley & Syder 1983; Foster 2001; Wray 2002; Schmitt 2004). Corpus linguistic research into the English language, for example, has revealed that half of all written English is made up of lexical phrases (Erman & Warren 2000; Butler 2005).

Within second-language (L2) acquisition research, language learners' struggle with the phraseological dimension of language is well attested. They have been found to acquire the phrasal component of the TL only very slowly (Durrant & Schmitt 2009; Li & Schmitt 2010; Yamashita & Jiang 2010). Even at quite advanced levels, learners are known to produce word combinations that sound odd to native speakers (e.g. **say the truth*; **throat ache*) and that require effortful interpretation on the part of the latter (Millar 2010). Often, such non-nativelike word combinations can be traced back to the learner's L1 (Nesselhauf 2005; Laufer & Girsai 2008). Studies of native and non-native speakers' use of phrases in writing (Granger 1998) have demonstrated non-natives' overuse of certain lexical phrases (*the fact that* and *as far as X is concerned*), their great reliance on a limited repertoire of what may be called 'fixed anchorage points', and their inability to detect deviant collocations from standard collocations.

In translator training, idiomatic language use is at least as important as it is in L2 acquisition. The translation of fixed phrases constitutes a double challenge: the ability to establish the meaning of the fixed phrase, and the ability to find an equivalent and idiomatic formulation for fixed phrases in the TL. When one skims the research on the linguistic dimension of cultural competence, one finds accounts of translation challenges in published works that include phraseology (Katan 2004; House 2006; Colson 2008; Bahumaid 2010; Park et al. 2015). One fairly recent example is Dinçkan's analysis of the translation of culture-bound collocations in bestsellers (2010). In his study the author points to the challenges of culture-bound collocations in the two directions of translation: when translating from one's native language into a foreign language the choice of the appropriate collocation may be problematic; when translating from a foreign language into one's native language the recognition of culture-bound collocations might prove too challenging. Both situations may result in erroneous translations. The English collocation *terraced housing*, for example, may be understood by Dutch- and French-speaking translators as referring to houses with patios whereas it refers to a row of joined houses.

Dinçkan observes in his corpus that both foreignizing and domesticating strategies are used by his participants when translating culture-bound collocations. Among the foreignizing strategies he counts loan collocations, literal translations, footnotes, translations by paraphrase and translations by a collocation with a similar meaning. The domesticating strategies that the translators in his study employ are translation by cultural substitution and omission. His analysis of the participants' performance revealed that the collection of mistranslations contained examples of both categories.

Dinçkan's analysis reveals how the boundaries between language competence and cultural competence are difficult to maintain when analysing SL–TL examples. Translation problems that concern culture-bound collocations in different areas of life such as beverages or food (*spring roll*), holidays (*Bank Holiday*), and leisure (*Happy Hour*) illustrate the linguistic component of cultural competence. This inevitable mixture of cultural and linguistic competence also concerns the connotations of language-specific collocations. In Dinçkan's English–Turkish corpus, the English collocation *single mother* was often mistranslated as "a widowed mother" in Turkish since in Turkey having children is usually directly associated with being married: if a mother lives alone, she is thought to be either divorced or widowed. The Turkish student-translators either did not appear to know the connotations of being a *single mother* in the source culture or they passed on their own value judgments during the translation process (Dinçkan 2010: 466–467).

The listed examples illustrate that the cultural component of translation ability includes both culture-bound terms (the so-called *culturemes*; Vermeer 1983) and phraseology at large. In fact, phraseology can be considered as an interface between culture and language. As Katan (2004: 11) puts it:

> The role of language within a culture and the influence of the culture on the meanings of words and the structures of discourses are so pervasive that scarcely any text can be adequately understood or effectively presented in a translating process without careful consideration of the factors of culture in it.

In view of the acknowledged cultural dimension of formulaic language (see also Skandera 2007), it is clear that linguistic competence and cultural competence show significant overlap. This needs to be taken into account when the assessment of translation competence is considered.

## 3. The assessment of cultural competence

Before the options for assessing cultural competence as a dimension of translation competence are discussed, some general assessment issues within the domain of TS need to be considered.

### *3.1 Issues in translation assessment studies*

Notwithstanding the enormous turnover that translation activities represent in today's society and the concomitant number of translation courses around the world, surprisingly little attention has been paid in TS to the assessment of translation. This is probably attributable to the fact that prescriptive translation theory and translation criticism have prevailed within TS since its inception. It is not difficult to come across publications that discuss the translation choices made by translator X or Y as they tackled a literary novel, but publications on the subject of translation assessment within translator training programmes at university are rare. Beeby attributes this dearth of publications to the fact that translation competence is not yet fully defined and that it includes sub-competences which seem to include "the world, the universe and everything" (2000: 185). An alternative explanation (Anckaert et al. 2008) is that the teaching and testing of both translation and interpreting skills has generally been in the hands of practitioners rather than researchers, which has led to a situation in which assessment has been informed by practice rather than by empirical research.

An important issue resulting from the lack of empirical research in translation assessment is the omission of reliability indices from translation tests. In foreign-language assessment the introduction of psychometrics has led to the development of numerous studies on the reliability of language tests, yet these issues have been addressed only sparingly in TS. As a result, questions about the reliability of assessment methods have remained largely unanswered (Eyckmans et al. 2009; Eyckmans et al. 2012; Eyckmans et al. 2016). This deficit of reliability indices has a negative influence on the

presumed validity of translation tests, since one of the fundamental principles of measurement theory is that no test can be considered valid if it is not proven reliable (Bachman 1990: 238).

Another matter of importance when considering translation assessment is the issue of certification. Most translators are nowadays trained and certified in educational settings. Both the training of translators and the certification of translation skills first requires translation competence to be defined. Within educational methodology it is generally accepted that the assessment of a competence in any field entails five steps: (1) defining the competence, (2) defining its sub-components (sub-competences), (3) formulating competence descriptors for each of the sub-competences, (4) linking the competence descriptors to observable behaviour, and (5) developing instruments to elicit and score this behaviour (Bachman 1990). Since the last decades of the 20th century, several TS scholars have taken up the challenge to describe the sub-components of translation competence (Bell 1991; Campbell 1991; Pym 1991; Shreve 1997; PACTE 2000); yet to our knowledge to date no methodology has been proposed in which competence descriptors of the several sub-competences are turned into instruments that enable translation performance to be scored reliably. Moreover, although scholars have suggested that the overarching construct of translation competence and its set of interrelated sub-competences can be studied both in isolation and in combination with others (Schäffner & Adab 2000), both theoretical and empirical studies about this are also notably absent from the literature. In fact, to the best of my knowledge, sub-competences such as cultural, heuristic and technical competences are almost never measured separately in the assessment practices of translation training programmes. Neither are the psycho-physiological components that are deemed to be important components of strategic competence (PACTE 2005). Therefore, let us first look at the separate measurement of cultural competence before moving on to contextualized ways of measuring it – ways that translation practitioners at large generally deem to be more valid.

### *3.2 Measuring cultural competence as a separate construct*

One of the few reported initiatives for measuring cultural competence as a separate component in translation is that of Bahumaid (2010). This researcher developed a "Test of Cultural Competence in Translation" to verify the translator's knowledge of the target culture, linguistic and otherwise. In his test, Bahumaid targets knowledge of British life and culture among Arabic native speakers and incorporates translation problems that cover various areas of life (food and drink, sport) or genres (literary, political) and include several linguistic culture-specific expressions (metaphors as well as similes and proverbs). According to his analysis of the test scores, the Arabic students had inadequate knowledge of the political, social and religious aspects of both the source and the target culture. They also suffered from a lack of awareness of certain semantic problems such as culture-specific idioms and similes.

Tests such as Bahumaid's that measure cultural knowledge of the TL and culture separately from the act of text translation can take many forms (e.g. multiple-choice formats, true/false format) and can be developed for different SL–TL combinations. Such tests would typically target critical items that cover knowledge of the target culture or the difference between the source culture and the target culture (e.g. terms and references such as 'trick or treat' or 'Speaker of the House of Commons' are to be translated into Arabic in Bahumaid's Test of Cultural Competence). Tests of declarative knowledge such as these have their merits but they carry the disadvantage that it is impossible to predict whether these critical items will surface in an actual translation exercise or what the relationship is between knowledge of these critical items and the translator's skill in applying it (or to use heuristic competence skills to find a solution to a particular cultural translation problem) when confronted with the multifaceted process of translating a text.

Another approach to measuring cultural competence separately – one that is becoming increasingly popular in Communication Studies – is the appraisal of individuals' cultural attitudes and abilities. On the basis of questionnaires that tap into the meta-cognitive and behavioural aspects of personality, indices of cultural intelligence or cultural effectiveness are calculated (see also Rosiers in this volume). These indices serve as quantitative indicators of the way in which an individual functions in culturally

diverse settings, or the degree of mental flexibility and open-mindedness an individual has (with reference to remaining unprejudiced towards different cultural norms and values). Within TS, Olalla-Soler (2015) has included this dimension in his PhD research on cultural competence. Apart from having students translate a text that contains five culturemes, he administers a (cultural) declarative knowledge test and asks the students to fill in a number of surveys (such as the Cultural Intelligence Scale and the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire) with a view to triangulating these data. Although these surveys may provide valuable information about the conative characteristics of translators, they constitute a very indirect way of gauging a translator's cultural competence.

With a view to test and task authenticity, the measurement (of the subskill) of cultural competence might be best served by contextualized assessment, that is, as part of a test that requires students to demonstrate their cultural competence by translating a text (or part of a text). This is explained in the next section.

### *3.3 Measuring cultural competence by means of text translation*

#### *3.3.1 The holistic and analytic method*

In most translator trainer programmes, the translation product is seen as evidence of the student translator's competence (Waddington 2001; 2004; PACTE 2005). Although the field currently lacks the necessary psychometric underpinnings to affirm this nexus (one of the pitfalls of the equation between product and competence being that the source text – and the resulting translation product – may not be sufficiently challenging to reveal a translator's competence), one may assume the ecological validity of the argument that the quality of translation products can be used to infer student translators' translation skills.

During translator training, student translators' texts are evaluated in order to give the students feedback on their translation practice or, in an examination, to decide on their final mark. The methods used to score these translations are almost always based on either a holistic or an analytical assessment approach. When applying a holistic approach, the assessor reads the product and awards it a score on the basis of a general impression of its quality. There is no reason to think that cultural knowledge and skills would not form part of the assessor's global impression. It is up to the assessor to decide intuitively the degree to which the translations they appraise show evidence of cultural competence on the part of the student translator. However, research has shown that the highly subjective nature of the holistic approach, together with the reality of having to score many translations, may cause translations to receive diverging scores from different assessors (Waddington 2004; Garant 2009).

In an analytical approach assessors use a scoring protocol in which translation errors are categorized and weighted. Such a scoring protocol enables a detailed analysis of the translation performance and it can be used as a justification of the given scores. Again, it is fairly easy to imagine the incorporation of cultural competence in such an assessment protocol. The construct of cultural competence would simply be added to the list of assessment criteria that make up the assessment grid or the scoring protocol. Mistakes against the translation of culturemes or errors that are the result of a lack of phraseological competence can be categorized separately and the assessor can decide on their weight. The disadvantages of the analytical method are its time-consuming nature and the fact that studies have demonstrated that applying an analytical approach to assessment is no guarantee of an objective or reliable assessment (Eyckmans et al. 2009; Eyckmans et al. 2016). Not only is there the problem of disagreement between assessors on the typology or weight of a mistake; the analytical method does not allow to control the degree of difficulty of a ST (Waddington 2001; Anckaert et al. 2008; Eyckmans et al. 2009). In the same vein, deciding on the typology or weight of a culturally inaccurate or poor translation choice could be cumbersome and this would undermine the assessment's reliability.

Both the holistic and the analytical approaches are criterion-referenced assessment methods, which means that the assessors base their scores on pre-established criteria. These criteria – whether exemplified in a scoring protocol in the analytical approach or presumed by the evaluator in the

holistic approach – are essentially subjective. The subjective nature of the assessment of translation competence is inevitable because of the nature of human judgement, and arguably desirable, but the problem is that this subjectivity makes the assessment susceptible to reliability errors.

As a way of dealing with the inherent subjectivity of criterion-referenced approaches, norm-referenced assessment has been developed in the realm of language testing. In norm-referenced approaches an individual's performance is determined in relation to the performance of others on the same measure. The primary advantage of norm-referenced tests is that their scores are based on item analysis. Calculating item difficulty and item discrimination not only provides the test developer with indispensable empirical data about how individual items and whole tests are performing in real test situations; it also allows test reliability to be calculated directly, which means that the inevitable margin of error that is the result of human judgement can be quantified and controlled.

### *3.3.2 The Calibration of Dichotomous Items method*

To our knowledge, the only norm-referenced method that has been proposed for the assessment of translations is the Calibration of Dichotomous Items (CDI) method (Eyckmans et al. 2009). In this method the well-known 'item' concept of traditional language-testing theory is transferred to the domain of translation assessment. In a pre-test phase the performance of a representative sample of the student population is used in order to identify text segments that have so-called 'discriminating power'. Every element of the text that contributes to the measurement of differences in translation ability acquires the 'item' status. Only these items inform the scores in the actual translation test. As in language testing, the norm-referenced method presupposes a dichotomous approach: a translated text segment is either acceptable or not (i.e. correct or not), hence the name 'CDI method'. There is no weighing of mistakes (or bonuses) against other alternatives. This does not imply that there is only one appropriate translation for a text segment. Rather, one or more evaluators decide whether alternatives are acceptable or not for each translated segment. The different steps that lead to the calibration of items and tests – pre-testing, establishing discrimination power and estimating the test reliability– allow standardized tests of translation to be constructed across languages (see Eyckmans et al. 2009).

In view of the fact that cultural competence in translation manifests itself at different levels (morphological, syntactic, lexical, discoursal features of texts), and that the sub-components of translation ability are more or less inextricably linked in actual performances, the CDI method seems well equipped to account for the dimension of cultural competence in a translation performance. Similar to that in the holistic and analytical approach, the CDI assessor's task will be to move flexibly from considerations of a linguistic nature to considerations of cultural transfer in order to determine which translation choices are appropriate (and therefore acceptable). However, the advantage of the CDI method is that this necessary element of human appraisal is enveloped in a psychometrically sound methodology that enables the reliability of each translation test to be checked, thus bestowing a much-desired level of objectivity on the assessment of translation competence. Among the total number of items with discriminatory power derived from the CDI method during the pre-test phase of the assessment, the test developer can identify those that involve cultural competence. In this categorization process, it is up to the test developer to decide whether to use a broad or a narrow definition of cultural competence (for example, whether to include instances of unidiomatic language usage in the category of cultural competence). This means that when the actual test is administered, the test developer not only knows how many items fall under the construct 'cultural competence', but he can also calculate their contribution to the global test score. Because of the implementation of the 'item-concept' from language testing, cultural competence can be measured in proportion to the other challenges set by the text (since not all text types contain cultural references to the same extent for example).

Thanks to the norm-referenced approach, it becomes possible to determine the degree to which a particular text taps into cultural competence. If desired, the items that measure facets of cultural competence can be further categorized. To follow Nord's (1988) four main types of translation problem, for instance, pragmatic translation mistakes (e.g. culture-bound terms, references to time

and place, proper names) can be distinguished from intercultural translation mistakes (e.g. measuring conventions, text-typological conventions), interlingual translation mistakes (e.g. differences in the use of vocabulary and syntax), and text-specific translation problems (e.g. alliteration, puns, rhetorical features and metaphors).

The challenges with respect to cultural knowledge that a text represents also depend on the SLs and TLs at hand. Cultural knowledge or typical phrases that pose difficulties for translators of a certain linguistic and cultural background may be child's play for translators of another linguistic and cultural heritage. Therefore, the actual extent to which the construct of cultural competence intervenes in the translation assessment of any text (or language combination) is hard to predict and can be ascertained only retrospectively. We illustrate this by means of an example: a text that contains cultural references might yield a different distribution of (cultural) items with discriminating power, depending on the characteristics of the group of translation students. Items that involve the translation of terms such as 'tax poll' or 'cream tea' in a translation of an English ST might prove discriminating in an English–French translation but not in an English–Dutch translation. It is precisely the interaction between a particular group of translation students with a particular text that will determine which text segments contribute to the measurement of translation competence. In fact, the only way to differentiate between the different sub-competences in an actual translation is by logging the translation solutions and translation errors that result from the translation from SL to TL by a representative population and to calibrate them as items. When these items are known, the test developer or translator can categorize them according whichever taxonomy they prefer in order to arrive at a profile of the text and the sub-competences it taps into for a particular population of translation students.

In short, the contribution of the CDI method lies in the empirical investigation of competence: through the identification of items that discriminate between weak, mediocre and strong student translators, it becomes possible to assemble a list of translation errors (i.e. items) that is representative of the types of challenge that a particular translation presents for translators of a specific mother tongue. As a next step, this list of items or translation errors/bonuses can be analysed: each mistake or bonus can be traced back to the sub-competence (or combinations of sub-competences) it presumes and can be related to the underlying translation models (PACTE, EMT, TRANSCERT).

A disadvantage of the CDI method is that it is inclusive of every possible sub-competence of translation ability only in so far as the interaction of a particular text with a particular population gives rise to the demonstration of this sub-competence. But in this respect it is no different from the holistic or analytical approach. However, the fact that flaws inherent in the text choice (e.g. a lack of calibrated items because of a mismatch between the students' translation competence and the level of difficulty of the text) will be exposed by the item analysis can be considered an important asset of the method.

## 4. Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, the construct of cultural competence within TS was characterized as a rightful concern for translation scholars whose proposed models of translation competence all share the view that translation requires making contextually and culturally adequate lexical and syntactic choices. After describing three authoritative models of translation competence, the close link between linguistic and cultural competence was investigated. It was argued that, next to culturemes, multiword combinations can be considered as indices of socio-cultural competence, and that phraseological knowledge therefore needs to be included in definitions of the construct of cultural competence. Student translators should realize that, since language expresses and embodies cultural reality, a language contains a wide array of cultural deposits in vocabulary, grammar and forms of address. Translation courses would benefit from a strong focus on various aspects of source and target cultures in order to increase students' awareness of the prevalence of culture in several aspects of the texts at both a conceptual and a linguistic level.

In the second part of this chapter, the range of sub-competences of translation competence as a whole that have been put forward in the literature were listed, and it was observed that they are

almost never measured separately in current translation assessment practice. With reference to the measurement of cultural competence, few assessment tools have been developed and even fewer have been reported in translation journals. Of the proposed methods and approaches, none relates the assessment of translation performance to the described competence models in a principled way. It was argued that although cultural competence can be measured in a decontextualized way (by tapping into the cultural knowledge of translators by means of tests or by gauging their propensity for dealing with cultural differences), it seems more ecologically valid to assess cultural competence as part of text translation.

Holistic as well as analytic approaches can be used in order to assess the dimension of cultural competence when it is incorporated in a global textual analysis of the translation product. However, a norm-referenced approach seems ideally suited to putting cultural competence on a par with all other sub-competences of translation ability. In the proposed CDI method, the assessment of the sub-component 'cultural competence' will be based on a consideration of the performance on the entire text. This is important because in actual performances sub-components of translation ability are more or less inextricable, and the quality of a translation originates in the interaction of a particular text with a particular translator. Moreover, the use of the CDI method will make it possible to gauge the relative weight of cultural aspects in any given text for translators with any particular L1 background.

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