The Competence Paradigm in Education applied to the Multicomponent Models of Translator Competences

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ABSTRACT

The concept of competence in Translation Studies has been fundamental to many publications that have shed light on its definition, acquisition, components, etc. In recent decades, the amount of research on multicomponential models of translator competences has grown considerably and the main components of translator competence have been established. Some researchers only list the main constituent parts, but others try to establish all the components in extensive lists of skills. Translation Studies, as an interdisciplinary field, must take into consideration the studies carried out in other related sciences in order to expand and enrich the research. The concept of competence is closely linked to education and that is the main reason why we believe that theories from this field should be applied to the studies carried out on translator competence. Three main approaches have traditionally influenced this concept in education: the behaviourist, the functional and the constructivist approaches. In this article we will analyse these theories, along with multicomponential models of translator competences, in order to draw conclusions on how they should influence how the concept is understood.

Keywords: translator competence, multicomponential models, constructivist approaches, competences in education

1. Introduction

The concept of competence has acquired different meanings in several fields. It has been used in linguistics, economics, psychology, education, social anthropology, sociology and sociolinguistics, and the perspectives and models that have influenced its definition vary from one field to another. In the nineties, the term employability also gained a position in European training policies for higher education, and the main principles of competence models, initially conceived for professional training, were taken as a starting point for these new policies (Morón Martín, 2009).

The concept of competence has also become a cornerstone of Translation Studies. Translator competences have been studied from different perspectives: name, definition, components, acquisition, etc. and the most notable classic research includes: Wilss (1976), Delisle (1980), Krings (1986), Lowe (1987), Bell (1991), Hewson and Martin (1991), Nord (1991, 1992), Gile (1995), Kiraly (1995), Kussmaul (1995), Beeby (1996), Hurtado Albir (1996), Hansen (1997), Hatim and Mason (1997), Shreve (1997), Campbell (1998), Presas (1998), Risku (1998), Neubert (2000), Orozco Jutorán (2000), Schäffner and Abad (2000), Kelly (2002,

2005), Colina (2003), PACTE (2003), Pym (2003) and Kearns (2006). Furthermore, over the past decade, doctoral dissertations have emerged in Spanish in which this concept plays an important role (besides others also relating to translator training): Abril Martí (2006), La Rocca (2007), Soriano García (2007), Galán-Mañas (2009), Morón Martín (2009), Cerezo Merchán (2012), Muñoz Ramos (2012), Huertas Barros (2013), Plaza Lara (2014), Acosta Domínguez (2014), Gregorio Cano (2014), Gutiérrez Bregón (2016). In spite of all these studies, there is no consensus about the definition and a wide variety of models that present different proposals for its classification can be found.

Given this diversity, Calvo Encinas (2010) mentions certain categorisation elements that are common to many of these models:

- Whether it is a cognitive or a constructivist model.
- Whether it is a multicomponential model, an open or closed model, or a simplifying-minimalist model.
- Whether it describes the expert's skills or the competences from the learner's perspective.
- Whether the model has been designed from the human resources perspective or from other perspectives (pedagogy, curriculum theory, etc.).
- Whether it is an intuitive, empirical or survey-based model, among others.

As can be seen, the perspective can differ considerably, but this does not mean that these models are exclusive. To these categories, Calvo Encinas (2010) added two more criteria: universality and exhaustiveness when describing competences. These two criteria, as we will see later, form part of the criticism of some paradigms of competences in education.

Taking into account these categorisation elements mentioned by Calvo Encinas, in this article we would like to present a different approach to multicomponent models (also known as multicomponential models) of translator competences: we would like to apply conclusions drawn from studies about competences in the education field to the different multicomponent models of competences proposed in Translation Studies. The paradigm of competences in education has evolved over the last fifty years and it has continuously received criticism from different theoretical approaches. From our point of view, the models of competences in Translation Studies must take these criticisms into account in order to avoid falling into the same traps. For this reason, in this article, we will refer to some of the best-known models of translator competences, summarising the different approaches that have influenced the understanding of competences in education and discussing the criticisms made of them. Finally, we will analyse how those educational approaches should influence the interpretation of the models of translator competences.

2. Models of translator competences

The expression multicomponent or multicomponential models of translator competence could be defined as a group of competences that define translator's *supercompetence*. In Pym's words:

> Since the 1970s the notion of "translation competence" has been viewed as at least 1) a mode of bilingualism, open to linguistic analysis, 2) a question of market demands, given to extreme historical and social change, 3) a multicomponent competence, involving sets of skills that are linguistic, cultural, technological and professional, and 4) a "supercompetence" that would somehow stand above the rest. The general trend among theorists has been to expand the multicomponent model so as to bring new skills and proficiencies into the field of translator training.
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> <div align="right">(Pym, 2003: 481)</div>

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Before moving to multicomponent models of translator competences, we would like to present Anthony Pym's proposal and his minimalist approach. His perspective could be considered as the opposite to multicomponential models. The author defines translator competence as follows:

> [...] the training of translators involves the creation of the following two-fold functional competence (cf. Pym, 1991):
>
> • The ability to generate a series of more than one viable target text (TT1, TT2 ... TTn) for a pertinent source text (ST);
> • The ability to select only one viable TT from this series, quickly and with justified confidence.
>
> <div align="right">(Pym, 2003: 489)</div>

As can be seen, Pym focuses solely on translation competence, i.e. the process of understanding, creating and troubleshooting that is involved in translation. He does not exclude terminological or computer skills (they are included in the two abilities mentioned as part of the translation process), but he criticises their inclusion in closed models. Why define a model with 6 sub-competences? Why not 16 or 127?

Now let us take a look at some of the well-known multicomponential models of translator competence. We cannot go into detail about the different models that can be found; however, we will remark upon four proposals that have set a precedent in Translation Studies.

2.1 PACTE (2003)

Among multicomponent models of translator competences, the PACTE group (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) is one of the leading research groups in this field. They have carried out a large number of empirical studies and have presented a holistic model for translator competences.

This group defines translator competence as "the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed to be able to translate" (PACTE, 2000: 100). From their point of view translator competence is an operative and expert knowledge that not all bilinguals have. They present a model comprising five sub-competences: bilingual sub-competence, extra-linguistic sub-competence, knowledge about

translation sub-competence, instrumental sub-competence and strategic sub-competence (PACTE, 2003). They also include a psycho-physiological component. To validate their model, this group has carried out several empirical studies based on the hypothetico-deductive method and their results have confirmed most of their initial hypothesis.

2.2 Kelly (2002 and 2005)

A very similar competence model is that of Kelly. In *A Handbook for Translator Trainers* (2005), the author mentions the following competences: communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and cultures, cultural and intercultural competence, subject area competence, professional and instrumental competence, attitudinal or psycho-physiological competence, interpersonal competence and strategic competence (Kelly, 2005). According to Kelly (2002), all of these sub-competences are interconnected, but the strategic sub-competence is the one that manages the application of the others during a task.

2.3 EMT (2009)

The EMT is a partnership project between the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT), the European Commission and higher-education institutions. Its main goal is to improve the quality of translator training and to get skilled translators for the EU. It is therefore a reference framework for Translation and Interpreting Studies programmes.

This project involves experts from different European universities, professional associations and international organisations. Their translator competence profile details the competences translators need to work successfully in today's market.

Although this model is quite similar to the previous ones, one of the main differences is that it does not explicitly include sub-competences related to personal skills, such as attitudinal or psycho-physiological elements. However, when analysing the different sub-competences listed for each category (cf. EMT, 2009: 4-7), we can find skills such as time and stress management. Most of these skills are included in the translation service provision sub-competence. This fact highlights the importance that general competences, applicable to other professions, have for translators. The only problem we can see with this model is its overly detailed description of sub-competences. Nonetheless, the fact that it was created by experts from the whole continent shows that there is a consensus about the basic components of translator competence.

2.4 Kiraly (2013 based on his proposal of 2006)

Kiraly's proposal has evolved in the last decade. In his publication *A Social Constructivist Approach To Translator Education: Empowerment from Theory to Practice*, he distinguished between translation and translator competence, a distinction that was later reflected in his componential model of translator competence.

The author believes that a professional translator's competence comprises three types of sub-competences: social competences, personal competences and translation competences. As can be seen, the author's proposal differs from the previous models, as personal and social sub-competences are included in different categories to that of translation competences, albeit all three forming part of the translator's macro-competence. This perspective anticipates some of our conclusions in this article.

2.5 Comparison of multicomponential models of translator competence

After having analysed these four models, we can conclude that most of the multicomponent models of translator competences include the same competences, but with different names. As Morón Martín remarks:

> Translator competence is like a container with different vessels and each of them is filled with a certain material. The difference observed between some models and others is that the same material can be placed in different vessels from one model to the next. The number of vessels needed to hold that substance can vary. That is the reason why some people need more compartments and others less.
>
> (Morón Martín, 2009: 149)

In the following table we have summarised the four models here analysed. To demonstrate their similarities, we have taken PACTE's model as a reference, and in the same row we have included the corresponding competence(s) from the other models.

PACTE (2003: 58-59)	Kelly (2005: 32-33)	EMT (2009: 4-7)	Kiraly (2013: 202)
Bilingual sub-competence	Communicative and textual competence	Language competence	Translation competences (TC): Linguistic, text typology, norms and conventions, terminology
Extra-linguistic sub-competence	Cultural and intercultural competence Subject area competence	Intercultural competence Thematic competence	TC: cultural, norms and conventions, world knowledge
Knowledge about translation sub-competence	Professional and instrumental competence	Translation service provision competence	TC: norms and conventions, terminology, strategies, research
Instrumental sub-competence	Professional and instrumental competence	Technological competence Info mining competence	TC: technology, research

Strategic sub-competence	Strategic competence	Translation service provision competence	TC: strategies, research
Psycho-physiological components	Attitudinal or psycho-physiological competence Interpersonal competence	Translation service provision competence	Social competences Personal competences

Table 1. Comparison table of multicomponent models of translator competence

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This table allows us to link our reflection to Pym's questions about the exact number of competences a model of competences should include and Calvo's concepts of universality and exhaustiveness. In our opinion, and as we will see later on, when analysing competences in education, it is impossible to systematise all of the sub-competences a translator should have. Professional profiles vary continuously depending on the job, the country, the company, etc. We can establish categories that can cover different sub-competences, but an exact list of all of those sub-competences is almost impossible. This does not mean that multicomponent models are not suitable approaches to translator competence, but we must be aware that an extensive list of sub-competences for educational purposes won't guarantee that translators will be able to apply them in the future. Only by providing students with the appropriate tools to deal with different situations will they be able to adapt to different professional contexts.

Having anticipated this, how do the different theories of competences in education affect these models? We analyse this in the following chapter.

3. Paradigm of competences in the education field

The connection between education and the world of employment dates back to the nineteenth century, when competences started to be incorporated into educational and academic contexts in order to satisfy market demands. The starting point of the paradigm of competences in education was McClelland's article *Testing for competence rather than for intelligence* published in 1973 in the scientific journal *American Pyschologist*, in which he states that knowledge, academic records and intelligence quotients are not indicators of professional success. This new paradigm starts to focus more on personal skills rather than on contents (Checchia, 2008): for professional success, the academic background is not as important as approaches to thinking and the, skills and knowledge applicable to a situation when required.

Although the concept of competence has been used in different fields that adopt a different perspective when defining this notion, according to Blanco Prieto (2007), in education we can distinguish three main approaches to competences:

- Behaviourist approach: From this point of view, competences are defined by taking into account the behaviour of a group of people with positive results and professional success. The main problem with this perspective is

that not all competences are directly observable, so we cannot draw conclusions about their acquisition.

Pérez Gómez (2008) comments on three main features of competence definitions from this perspective: fragmentation of complex behaviour into micro-competences that can be reproduced, the mechanistic and linear approach to these micro-competences and the juxtaposition of micro-competences to generate complex behaviour.

- Functionalist approach: From this perspective, the connection between skills, knowledge and abilities is analysed through their results. This enables us to establish the most relevant characteristics required to fulfil a number of objectives. One of the main criticisms levelled at this approach is its interest in results rather than processes.

This perspective can be summarised with Goñi Zabala's (2007) formula:

COMPETENCE = (OPERATION + OBJECTIVE) + CONTEXT AND AIM

According to the author, competences consist of an operation (mental action) carried out on an object (knowledge) to achieve an aim in a specific context.

- Constructivist approach: In the constructivist approach, cognitive components, individual characteristics and the social and working environment gain importance. It focuses on the process of acquiring competences within a specific context and the way people use them in different scenarios. This approach has been criticised due to its focus on very specific contexts. From this perspective, competences are not understood as the sum of their parts, but as new activation processes that are put into practice in different situations. Zabala Vidiella and Arnau Belmonte (2007) define this concept as the ability to carry out tasks and face certain situations effectively in a certain context. To achieve this, attitudes, skills and knowledge must be activated at the same time and in an interrelated manner.

The three approaches analysed, irrespective of their point of view, distinguish between disciplinary knowledge and social and personal skills, but depending on their perspective they focus on some more than others. Social and personal skills are not easily observable and cannot always be measured with exams or academic tasks. That is the reason why some behaviourist models tend to omit these competences from their models. These kinds of skills can be applied to different jobs and can be defined as transversal competences (organisation skills, problem-solving, decision-making, self-learning, empathy, etc.).

We can therefore conclude that, along with rational competences, the theory of emotional intelligence plays an important role in the paradigm of competences. This theory is attributed to Daniel Goleman and, although his early research was focused on basic and educational psychology, his interest in the professional world allowed him to apply his theory to the field of work. He analysed those emotional

competences related to efficient job performance and concluded that they play a more important role in positions with greater responsibility.

In short, when defining competences, we should focus our attention on an equitable combination of rational and social/personal competences. The former can be "easily" defined and observed, as long as we are clear about the discipline we are working for, the profession and its professional profiles. Those related to social and personal skills and those that can be applied across several fields are not as clearly defined as the former and can be transferred from one situation to another, whether it be academic, professional, social or personal (Morón Martín, 2009). In this regard, contextualisation is of paramount importance. That is the main reason why we consider the constructivist approach to be the most suitable approach for the models of translator competences.

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We can therefore speak of general competences, applicable to several contexts, and specific competences, related to disciplines. This is the same distinction as was proposed in the Tuning project (González and Wagenaar, 2003: 81-82) and in the White Paper on Bachelor Degrees in Translation and Interpreting (in Spanish *Libro Blanco sobre el Título de Grado en Traducción e Interpretación*) (Muñoz Raya and ANECA, 2004).

3.1   Criticisms of the paradigm of competences in education

Some researchers in the education field think that competences have become the cornerstone of a new pedagogical change (Escudero Muñoz, 2009: 68), but in their opinion they have actually only resurrected the old model of objectives proposed at the beginning of the 20th century. In this section, we want to distinguish between objectives and competences because, although they are closely interrelated, theories can be found that have influenced how they are perceived and that consider them to be synonyms or antonyms of one another.

Although nowadays we can distinguish between a technical-behaviourist and a practical-constructivist approach to objectives, at the beginning of the 20th century, pedagogy based on objectives focused solely on the behaviourist approach. According to this theory, objectives can be defined as observable behaviours that can be stated explicitly. As can be seen, this perspective is closely linked to the behaviourist approach of competences, as it omits behaviours that are not directly observable (personal thinking, for example). Some theories that did not properly understand the principles of the competence models started to establish behaviourist lists of competences. Furthermore, the importance that the concepts of employability and professionalism acquired in the paradigms of competences caused many researchers to think that these models were only intended to systematise education by listing the competences needed to work, as had occurred with the behaviourist model of objectives.

In her revision of the model of competences and its implications for the European Higher Education Area, Morón Martín (2009) lists a number of criticisms of this recent paradigm:

•   Teaching and learning processes are extremely formalised. There is no room for dynamism.

- Submission of universities to society.
- Difficult to distinguish between competences and general and specific learning outcomes.
- Neo-pedagogicism: competences are only understood from the point of view of labour training; they try to meet the needs of the labour market.
- Great number of models of competences and a lack of definition of the latter.
- Scepticism about the role that the students play.

Among all these criticisms, we must point out the mercantilism to which education is subjected when the paradigm of competences is incorrectly understood, leading to education being reduced to a simple factor of economic (re)production, so that social, cultural or political aspects are undervalued (Angulo Rasco, 2008: 187). According to the opinion of critics, society is in continuous development, competences are always changing and they cannot be systematised. It is impossible to propose a definitive and standard definition of professional profiles, because market demands vary. The problems professionals meet in their daily work are not clearly delimited and structured, so we cannot apply predefined models.

In our opinion, all of these criticisms are based on a limited perception of the model of competences in the education field due to the initial influence of the behaviourist approach on the theories regarding objectives and the relationship between objectives and competences. The teaching and learning processes can only be extremely formalised when taking into account a static and short-term view of competences, limited to the point of view of employers, trainers or markets, and when they are understood as a sum of different observable and evaluable components. This perception matches the behaviourist approach towards competences. From this point of view, behaviours are fragmented into micro-competences that can be reproduced in a mechanical way, and it is possible to juxtapose those micro-competences to get more complex behaviours (Pérez Gómez, 2008). Only a correct contextualisation of competences will allow us to achieve a constructivist approach that includes rational, social and personal skills.

4. Applying the constructivist paradigm of competences in education to the multicomponent models of translator competences

How do all these paradigms and approaches affect the definition of competences in translation and interpreting? One of the main handicaps of multicomponential models of translator competence is their extensive lists of sub-competences. Most of them include virtually identical categories, but some of them are tempted to include endless lists of the skills that are part of those sub-competences.

From the point of view of constructivist approaches, the definition of competences is not based on the observation and description of the skills of the most efficient workers. Factors related to rationality and emotions on a professional, social and personal level must be taken into account. As Cerezo Merchán (2012: 38) remarks, university courses must not only be planned by the

market, but should be planned to pursue social, economic and cultural development. Tasks and professional profiles cannot be understood in a mechanical way, quite the contrary, so competences are focused on adapting graduates to a great number of situations. We must focus on employability and personal development in society and not on a list of skills. We should focus on contextualisation.

As Escamilla González (2008) points out, the problem is not the model of competences, but a restricted behaviourist view of it. Gimeno Sacristán (2008) mentions that the concept of competence has always existed in education, but it has acquired different meanings according to different interpretations. In this regard, Bolívar Botía (2010) presents a distinction between the model of objectives, traditionally linked to the behaviourist approach, and the model of competences, which in his opinion should be related to the constructivist approach. Whereas behaviours that learners must develop are accurately described from the point of view of pedagogy by objectives, from the perspective of the model of competences, special attention is paid to the application of what is learnt to different contexts. According to the author, it is no longer necessary to accumulate knowledge due to the continuous growth of information. We must provide a way to contextualise competences and the ability to learn.

In this context, Bolívar Botía distinguishes two schools that try to establish a relationship between objectives and competences: the Canadian group *Observatoire des réformes en éducation*, according to which the model of competences is a step change of the model of objectives, and the Louvain group, led by Xavier Roegiers, which states that objectives and competences can be compatible if they are not understood according to the behaviourist approach. Operational objectives must be left behind to give way to constructivist approaches with global objectives. Although this distinction is mainly made for basic education, in our opinion Roegiers's perspective is applicable to higher education and Translation Studies, because it does not concern the level of education, but the way both models are interpreted. The behaviourist approach will be continuously present if competences are understood as contents or operational knowledge that are not applicable in context, and if they are all thoroughly defined in order to have exact definitions of them.

What is then the relationship established between competences and the other curricular elements (objectives, contents, methodology and assessment)? According to Escamilla González (2008), competences are implicit in all of these elements and the importance of contextualisation reorients them towards functionality. Therefore, all of these elements should be understood differently, although, as Bolívar Botía (2010) remarks, this is not an easy process: the lack of a sound basis in the design and development of curricula based on competences means that we continue planning them based on the behaviourist approach to objectives, calling the old objectives competences.

In this regard, Calvo Encinas (2011) mentions the need to contextualise a curriculum and deliberate before applying competence models. As she says, "by picking up a competence model without appropriate contextualisation, we expect reality to adapt to our drafted plan and not the other way around" (Calvo Encinas, 2011, unpaginated).

All of our conclusions can be related to Göpferich's perspective on translation competence development and its relationship with Dynamic Systems Theory (DST). The author considers it important to investigate the development of translation competence in its continuity. When applying DST theory to this field, she states the following:

> Competencies or skills are envisaged in DST as dynamic systems, i.e., sets of variables that are interconnected and thus interact over time (de Bot et al. 2007: 8). With regard to translation competence, these variables can be regarded as variables for translation sub-competencies that, in their entirety, make up translation competence.
>
> (Göpferich, 2013: 64)

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As can be seen, the concepts of interconnection and interaction of competences are always present. Competences cannot be understood as individual elements, and this must be reflected in the curriculum and in the planning of the different subjects. Teachers must be aware that translation competence is not the sum of individual micro-competences or sub-competences, and functionality and contextualisation must always be kept in mind in order to provide a constructivist definition of competences. In this regard, Kiraly states the following about translator competence and its relationship with the concept of emergence that stems from complexity theory:

> My understanding of the concept in terms of developing translator competence is that such competence is not built up bit by bit through the accretion of knowledge, but creates itself through the translator's embodied involvement (habitus) in actual translation experience.
>
> (Kiraly, 2013: 203)

In conclusion, and according to the reflections presented in this article, we can state that only a constructivist approach to competences in Translation Studies will enable the integration of sub-competences into the learning process and, subsequently, into professional practice. An extensive list of translator competences would only be feasible for theoretical purposes. However, if that thorough description is to be applied to the classroom, we cannot continuously divide sub-competences, as they are not all directly observable and they will not be interrelated by students. We must promote students' disciplinary, social and personal skills and make them face different situations in order to tackle complex problems that cannot always be solved by learning by heart.

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