

Addressing Certain Grey Areas in the Students' Translation Feedbacks

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Abstract

Students' feedback is an essential part of improving competence and performance of students' own translation abilities. This feedback provides real information for teachers and trainers to consider in their teaching professional development. However, in the field of translation, as for several other disciplines, knowledge, practice, and even curricula should be influenced by student feedback, and in turn, students' competence, performance and expectations can be directly affected by what they are actually exposed to in the classrooms. This study tries to penetrate deep through the formative feedback to arrive at the main influential factors behind the difficulties that students face in translation. The study explores certain gaps between some aspects of course content and the actual needs of students as translators. It also investigates the factors behind the difficulties that students face in translation. These factors can be summarized as follows: (1) the subject matter of most courses is irrelevant; (2) the actual needs of student translators are not always addressed; (3) gaps exist among the three components of the curriculum – language skills, linguistic skills and translation skills, and (4) the absence of translation training or practice outside the college in real situations. The study tries to clarify the identified problems and suggest some solutions to address these gaps in order to help students develop into professional translators. The study suggests the need for a radical change in the subject matter of language skills courses and the whole curricula.

Keywords: bilateral interpretation, consecutive interpretation, curricula components, formative feedback, summary, translation Introduction

Introduction:

This paper addresses some grey areas which the students' translation feedback indicates. The indications of students' translation feedback explore some factors behind the difficulties which the students face in translation. These indications will help the teacher trainer to know the current performance of the students in order to set up a meaningful strategy to improve their competence and performance to achieve the goal, which is to churn out high quality translators. The researcher has taught translation courses over the last several years in different fields such as administration, education, agriculture, engineering, humanities, media, commerce, physics, computer science, petroleum science, in addition to at-sight and summary translation. The researcher has noticed that, more often than not, students commit the same errors and mistakes in their translation from Arabic into English and vice versa. The analysis of the errors and mistakes as well as the oral discussions directed the researcher to the main factors behind these difficulties which lead to their decline in the performance of translation. The students are exposed to different statements and texts as a formative mechanism. The researcher has always received feedbacks from students out of the tasks and assignments which they have been handed for correction. The feedback is given to the students in the form of discussions with the whole group. All the students participate in the discussion till we arrive at an appropriate solution to the errors and mistakes. The study begins by synthesizing findings from observational classroom research on underlying students errors in classroom work and outside tasks to identify the main factors behind the difficulties which students face in translating from Arabic into English and vice versa. The study is based on the formative feedback from students who have been involved in different translation courses which cover various fields of knowledge.

Ultimately, in order to effectively train student translators, one has to create a high-performance learning team in a suitable environment in the classroom, where the students and the teachers are accountable to one another. The trust created in such an environment will allow us to improve our performance and achieve quality translation. What takes place inside this environment is a realistic feedback from students and from the trainer to the student trainees. Students should receive feedback from the trainer after the correction of their translation activities in order to overcome the errors and improve their performance in translation. The study utilizes the students' translation feedback as well as the discussions to arrive at some grey areas which embody the main factors behind the difficulties that students face in translation.

The objective of the study:

The students' translation feedback offers some indications which direct our attention to see the big picture of the whole curricula components. The study tries to address some grey areas in a larger picture. The study aims to clarify the main factors behind the difficulties which students face in translation. The study also aims to convince the faculty that all the course contents should be, in one way or another, linked and directed toward translation profession. The link of the subject matter of each course to translation will directly lead to the following functions:-

- Capturing student time and attention.
- Generating appropriate training activities.
- Helping students to improve their competence and performance in translation.
- Bridging the gap between what takes place inside the classrooms and the actual needs of student translator outside.

- Moving on with students towards translation quality.
- Making syllabus consistent with students' needs, abilities and interests.
- Encouraging students to participate actively and effectively.
- Creating an environment for students' self- esteem and self-motivation.

One of the objectives of the study, already mentioned in the abstract, is to provide information about the factors behind the difficulties which students face in translation. Also, the study aims to figure out the gaps between the components of the curricula, and to suggest ways and means in order to bridge them. Generally speaking, students' expectations should be a key consideration, because these expectations can be directly affected by what they are exposed to. A radical change of the contents of the courses should take place as a means of creating an environment to achieve high quality training in translation. These changes will help students to improve their competence and performance in translation. The faculty and students should know that, for example, teaching writing skills is indispensable for the sake of translation, and teaching speaking skills is also vital for the sake of interpreting and so on. This understanding can be considered as a means of motivating students, and at the same time keeping the faculty ready to link his/her presentation with students' career. Translation, as it is known, is the transmittal of written text from one language into another. Therefore, translation must take into account constraints that include context, grammar rules of the two languages (source and target), their writing conventions, and their idioms. That is to say, there will be no translation without the presence of two languages, so the faculty should remind the students that their native language skills should be compared with other languages for the sake of their profession. The study tries to draw attention to understand and investigate where we stand and what is the next step towards the great objective of preparing future professional translators.

Literature review:

Translation competence is undeniably central to successful translation teaching and training. Translation courses should be successfully constructed in the presence of an adequate understanding of what one needs to know in order to translate well and effectively. Ericson (1996) has rightly pointed out that the development of translation expertise may require or be assisted by the professional training provided by schools, studying the feedback, repetition opportunities and correction of errors can help to develop competence of translation. Shreve (1997) states that:

"The feedback is integrated into an effortful attempt to improve performance. Definitely, error correction can become part of editing and revising processes in a translation work flow. As for repetition, it implies that text selection in programs of deliberate practice will have to provide not just for progressive improvement by introducing new and more difficult material, but opportunities for repetition of material as well." (P.127)

A translation expert knows translation and all of its sub-competences better and at deeper levels than anyone else. If we view the translation task as a complex problem-solving and decision-making activity (Darwish, 1998), then what evolves over the course of the development of translation expertise could be seen as an increased capacity to recognize and represent the problems of translation and an increased ability to effectively resolve those problems. The product-oriented approach in translation doesn't deny the importance of error correction, so

quality assessment and error correction are widely discussed in articles on translation training. There are three basic principles to be traced throughout this discussion:

1. The principle of systematic feedback
2. The principle of student-centred corrections, and
3. The principle of a humanistic approach to students' errors.

One of the common characteristics of these articles is that all the researchers and experts in the field like to give a mere systematic feedback on student's translations. Dollerup (1994) gives a detailed description of his feedback. According to him, it consists of three components, "corrections in the translations which the students have handed in oral discussion in the class covering adequate as well as inadequate renditions", and "feedback from assessing strengths and weaknesses with each student"(P. 125). The central idea in the student-centred approach was developed by Sainz Bello (1994). The approach to translation teaching means two things. It entails, at first, a human rights based approach to correction of translations where students have the right to know the evaluation system used to evaluate their translation and the person judging their work. Secondly, it involves, as Sainz Bello puts it, a "non-aggressive way of giving students feedback on their errors"(1994:128). The humanistic approach to the study of translation errors is described by Seguinot (1989). According to Seguinot (1989), "errors can give interesting insights into the normal processes of translation, and make possible better predictions about what kind of errors are likely to occur in translation"(P.74). There are errors which arise because the translator doesn't understand the source language or cannot manipulate the target language well enough, while other errors are normal a by-product of the translation process and are normal in learning to translate (1989:80).

Feedback is an essential part of effective translation training. It helps students understand the subject being studied and gives them clear guidance on how to improve their performance. According to Bellon, J.J., Bellon, E.C. & Blank (1991), "academic feedback is more strongly and consistently related to achievement than any other teaching behaviour...this relationship is consistent regardless of grade, socioeconomic status, race, or school setting."(P. 258) Feedback can improve a student's confidence, self-awareness and enthusiasm for learning and practicing translation. Effective feedback during the semester can aid the transition to quality translation and enhance learning and improve assessment performance. Useful and constructive feedback is the only way to learn and develop personally and professionally. As we consider the big picture, it is worth noting that feedback from students doesn't just come in one form. There are many ways that we can receive information in order to develop our students' competence and performance in translation. As a teacher, preceptor or trainer one has to use the skill of receiving feedback openly and using it constructively to achieve the goals. The utility of feedback doesn't only improve translation quality, but can also explain what is wrong in the inputs and outputs of translation. Feedback consists of warnings about translation difficulties that students face, including grammar errors, lexical errors and other language errors. Such exercise can also help teachers to correct the errors of inputs and outputs to improve the quality of translation. Feedback from students is an essential element letting the teacher and students to know where they stand and where to go next in terms of achieving the stated goals. Students' feedback helps them to evaluate their own performance and at the same time gives some indications for the teacher to reduce the errors associated with the inputs and outputs.

Students' feedback translation:

The students were requested to read the sentences and short texts carefully and then to translate them into the target language. The sentences and short texts were selected mainly to investigate to what extent the students were able to utilize their experience and the information they had gained from the previous courses in linguistics and language skills.

Formative feedback Statements:

1. " هنالك ثلاثة مواضيع مهمة جدا مع ثلاث نصائح اكثر اهمية "

"There are three very important topics with three more important advices"

Eighty percent of the students came up with following translation.

"There are three topics very important with three advices more important"

The above example explores some errors and mistakes regarding grammatical and adjectives placement. The adjectives in Arabic follow the noun, and they precede it in English language.

2. " تقريبا لكل شخص سيارته الخاصة "

"Almost every person has his own car"

Seventy-five percent of the students translated the above sentence as follows. "Every person almost has car" while twenty percent of the students translate the sentence as "every person almost has personal car"

There were different errors and mistakes in the translation due to the lack of knowledge in some grammatical aspects, word order and choosing the suitable word according to context.

3. " سوف اساعد هذا الرجل لأنه يستحق ذلك "

"I will help this man because he deserve it"

Eighty-five percent of the students' translation was incorrect, because they translated this sentence as:-

"I will help this man who deserve that".

The sentences and short texts are in Arabic and English languages. The following sentence was written in English as a source language and students were requested to translate it into Arabic language.

Most of the students, if not all of them, had a real problem in using conjunctions in English to link two sentences. The students as translators need to know how and where to use coordinating, subordinating and adverb conjunctions to link sentences and paragraphs in order to achieve cohesion and coherence in their translation.

4. "The soldiers stood under a big tree when it was raining."

" وقف الجنود تحت شجرة كبيرة عندما كانت تمطر "

Seventy-percent of the students gave their answers as follows:

"الجنود وقفوا تحت الشجرة الكبيرة عندما امطرت"

Fifteen percent of the students had their translation as "وقف الجندي تحت الشجرة لأنها امطرت".

The above translation indicates that some of the students did not know the differences and similarities between Arabic and English languages structures. It is also clear that the present continuous tense creates a problem for Arabic native speakers. That is obvious in using "copula"

5. واذ يضع في اعتباره مقاصد ومبادئ ميثاق الامم المتحدة ومسئولية مجلس الامن الاساسية بموجب الميثاق.
عن حفظ السلام والامن الدوليين

"Bearing in mind the purposes and principles of the charter of the United Nations and the primary responsibility of the Security Council under the Charter for the maintenance of international peace and security"

The above is the model answer, but eighty-eight percent of the students came with the following translation. "Considering the aims and principles of the charter of united nations foundation responsibility of security council about the charter to have international peace and security".

Seventy percent of the students gave the following answer;

"Concerning the intention and principles of the charter of the united nations base responsibility of the security council according to the charter of getting international peace and security"

Most of the students depend on the dictionary to select the equivalent word regardless to the context. Actually, the word reveals its meaning in the context in which it occurs. The above translation indicates that some of the students were unable to understand the text because their stock of vocabulary was very weak. The students preferred to translate from English into Arabic because they thought that translation was just a work of dictionary. These English texts will not help them to memorize English words, but translation from Arabic language into English language will definitely help them to memorize a lot of new words in English. During the feedback discussion they said that in some translation courses they were only exposed to English language texts all the semester. Preventing students from using Arabic texts in translation would mean preventing them from learning new words in English. That is to say, when students read the source text in their native language, they are going to understand and comprehend the text and deliberately they are going to look for the appropriate word according to the context.

6. "The globalization, which depends on economic, business and information technology factors, becomes the power that controls the world dynamics."

The model translation of the above sentence comes as follows:

"العولمة، والتي تعتمد علي العوامل الاقتصادية والتجارية وتقنية المعلومات، اصبحت القوة التي تتحكم في الديناميكية العالمية"

Sixty-eight percent of the students translated this sentence as:

--"العولمة واعتمادها علي الجوانب الاقتصادية والاعمال وتكنولوجيا المعلومات التي تتحكم في العالم الديناميكي"

Twenty percent of the students came up with the following answer for the same sentence.

"أصبحت العولمة التي تعتمد علي الاقتصاد والتجارة وتقنية المعلومات القوة التي تسيطر علي الحركة العالمية"

The above translation also indicates that, the students had some problems in vocabulary, replacement of adjectives with the head word and using relative clauses.

Moreover, the instrument of the study includes the following sentences.

" تأكيداً لما قيل مسبقاً، لقد دشّن الملك المشروعات الاستثمارية الجديدة".7

"Assuring of what was said earlier, the king has inaugurated the new investment projects"

The students' translation of this statement comes as follows:

Seventy-six percent of the students translated the sentence as

"confirm to what is said before, the king inaugurated the investment new projects"

Sixteen percent of the students said; "To make sure of what is early said, the king inaugurated the new projects of investment"

The translation of this statement indicates the lack of knowledge in grammatical aspects and vocabulary choice.

8. " يجب أن نستثمر الفرص حين تأتي "

"We must seize the opportunities when they come"

Seventy-two percent of the students gave the following translation, "we must invest the chance when it came"

Twenty-two percent of the students translate the sentence as, "we must take the chances while they come"

The above translation also indicates that most of the students had a real problem concerning the structure differences between the source and target languages.

9. " My brother loves football matches. He always watches it on TV, because it is his hobby since his childhood. As a result, my brother became a professional international football player."

Sixty percent of the students translated the above text as follows:

"أخي يحب مباريات كرة القدم وشاهدها في التلفزيون منذ طفولته حتي صار محترف كرة قدم دولي"

Twenty-five percent of the students gave the following translation for the same text:

" يحب اخي كرة القدم ويشاهدها في التلفاز كهواية من طفولته وكانت النتيجة ان صار لاعب كرة دولي محترف"

Translation of the above English text indicates that students depend on the dictionary meaning more than the context meaning. There are lexical errors and grammar errors.

The last text of the formative feedback is the following one.

10. " بداية دعني أصحح الوضع قبل المناقشة لكي نصل الي اتفاق لا رجعة فيه. أعتقد أن تصحيح الوضع ضروري قبل المناقشة. لأنه يتيح مجالا أفضل للأسئلة والاجابات التي تقود الي الاتفاق المنشود"

Eighty-six percent of the students translate the text as follows:

"At start let me correct the location before the discussion to reach endless agreement. Correcting the location is necessary before discussion because it gives better chance for questions and answers lead to wanted agreement."

The above translation explains the problems which students faced in translation from Arabic into English. That is because their vocabulary was very weak, and they were unable to know the equivalent tense in English as well as using the accurate conjunctions and punctuations.

As the researcher has mentioned earlier, I have taught translation courses in different fields of studies. The feedback of students' translation explains exactly the aspects of the language which creates some problems for students in translation from the source language into target language. It is very clear that the students' translation feedback gives many indications such as the real problems which the students face in:-

- Choosing an appropriate word according to the context.
- Using the vocabulary according to the structure of the target language
- Memorizing different vocabulary items
- Using conjunctions (coordinating, subordinating or adverb conjunctions)
- Considering the standards of textuality (cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability... etc.)
- Weakness in language skills (writing, grammar, vocabulary ...etc.)
- Understanding differences and similarities between English language structure and Arabic language structure.
- Using prepositions in both languages.
- Writing summary.
- Using linking words according to the structure of the target language.
- Using the tense accurately according to the structure of both source and target languages.

The above form of assessment indicates that students have problems of Lexis; such as deletion, inadequate lexicon, multiple meaning, connotation, and collocation. Also, they have problems of grammar and syntax such as word order, gender and reference, wrong analysis of input, tense and aspect, preposition, punctuation, definite articles, conjunctions and coordinators. The feedback assessment indications show the real problems which students face in translation, but in this paper I am not going to discuss these problems. These indications direct my attention to address the grey areas where the main influential factors lie. The paper tries to discuss these influential factors in order to arrive at a clear solution to the translation problems.

The students' translation feedback leads me directly to what I call the grey areas, where the main factors behind the weaknesses of students translation lie. One of these factors is the great gap between what takes place inside the classrooms and the actual needs of student translator. That is to say, the contents of language skill courses are mainly selected and designed to educate an academic student through the subject matter of these courses. Some of the students say that we have already studied these courses at the secondary school and at the preparatory year, so this saying, in addition to its impact on their attention and motivation, it indicates that:-

- Students, deep down, consider the subject matter of these courses is just a repetition of what they have studied earlier.
 - The subject matter of these courses has nothing to do with the qualification of tomorrow's professional translator.
 - The contents of these courses are mainly selected to educate an academic student regardless to his future career, teacher or employee...etc
 - The content of each course is not at all linked or connected or related to translation, although the subject matter of each course is closely related to translation or interpreting.
 - The contents of these courses (writing, reading, speaking, listening and vocabulary) do not meet the translator's needs, abilities or interests.
 - Lack of motivation is created due to the great gap between the subject matter of the language skills courses and student's needs.

According to Nunan (1988), the proper strategy in choosing a syllabus should start with what is called a fact finding stage to answer the main questions such as;

- Who is the learner?
- Who is the teacher, trainer or instructor?
- What is the suitable subject matter and methodology?
- What are the compatible materials?
- When and where the content will be implemented?

The learner is a student translator who needs to be trained in order to be able to translate accurately and professionally after graduation. Therefore, the teacher is a professional trainer who is supposed to avoid lecturing and all teacher-centered approaches. The trainer in this case, should be a facilitator, conductor and friend to motivate the students. As I mentioned earlier, practical translation should be presented in all language skills contents. For example, in teaching writing skills, students and their trainer should know that translation is actually the work of writing or speaking. That is to say, writing skills are the major work of translation. Translation depends on correct words according to the context, punctuation which even change the meaning, using conjunctions, summary and word order. The teacher or the trainer should clarify the relationship between writing skills and translator's qualification to help students to understand that learning writing skills is mainly to qualify them as translators not only for exam scores.

Also, to qualify for speaking and listening skills, it is pertinent to have an interpreter for simultaneous, bilateral and consecutive interpreting. Therefore, we need to make radical changes in our syllabus if we really want to produce a professional excellent future translator. As I mentioned earlier, there is a big gap between language skill contents and the requirements of a translator's qualification, as there is also a gap between the three components of the syllabus, language skills, linguistics courses and translation skills. The gap between the components of the syllabus is also a deterrent behind the difficulties which students face in translation. The feedback from students indicates that students do not utilize what they have studied in speaking skills course, because they completely fail to speak fluently in simultaneous and consecutive interpreting. Teachers should follow a certain strategy to reflect the subject matter of this course back to translation. First, they have to select language functions and forms to be the subject matter of the course such as greetings, invitations, apology and communication, etc. Students as translators should understand that one function of the language can be expressed through different forms of the language. Students will practice one function in different forms of the language, so, this practice will prepare them to do the oral interpretation. The teacher is actually a trainer, who should ask students to ensure that the course is mainly taught to prepare them for oral interpretation. Second, the contents of the course should be presented in different tenses in order to give some grammatical, lexical forms as well as some notions and expressions to help students to express themselves accurately and fluently.

As for vocabulary course, which is very essential for translators, this researcher believes the first strategy has to be that teaching vocabulary should be in short contexts. It is applied with the intention mainly for the students to understand that the real meaning of words is not in the dictionary, but in the context where the word has been written. Second, the subject matter of the course should concentrate on the vocabulary which the translator really needs to know such as synonyms, antonyms, collocations and acronyms, etc. Language skills, linguistics and translation skills, the three components of the curricula, should be linked together to perform the unity of the syllabus which are mainly selected and designed to qualify an excellent translator. For example, in teaching language skills to students who are supposed to work as teachers after graduation, all the subject matters of the courses, in one way or another, have to be deeply related to teaching profession. However, in teaching or training students who are supposed to be translators after graduation, all the courses subject matters should be related to translation. To this point, the titles of the courses should be connected to translation, for example, speaking skills and translation, listening skills and translation, writing skills and translation and so on. The feedback discussion with students indicates that students are not satisfied with the graduation project work. This course, as in many universities, is called translation practice, which takes the whole last semester of level 10. During this semester students find themselves in a real translation environment outside the college. That is to say, students are distributed to different organizations, institutions, firms, ministries and companies. This translation practice provides various benefits for students and at the end of this practice students will

- be self- confident
- be responsible.
- be sociable and build close relationships.
- increase their vocabulary and being fluent communicators.
- work hard to prove that they are qualified and hardworking translators.

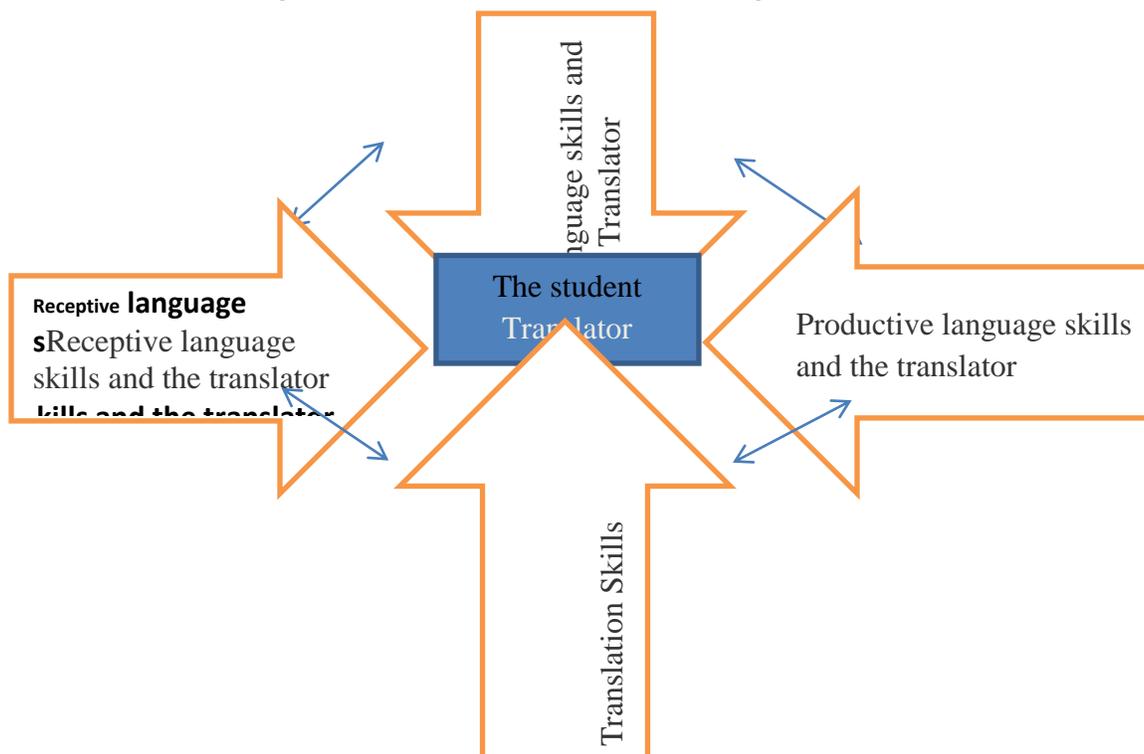
- find opportunities to be employed after graduation.
- feel that he is doing worthwhile work.
- reflect the social face of the college.

Moreover, this real practice will help students to overcome all the feeling of being students and they will begin to improve their own personality. The college receives a complete report from the authority, whether it is a company or organization, about the student both personally and professionally. In addition to that, students should be divided into small groups and each group should have a tutor from the faculty to visit them once a week. All the courses should be converted to serve students in their future profession as translators.

The suggested Curricula:

The subject matter of each course should be determined and selected according to the results of what is called the fact finding stage which answers the most important questions such as; who is the learner?, who is the teacher ?, what are the compatible materials to be used and when and where the course will be implemented? The fact finding stage has to appear essentially before setting up the syllabus. The answer of the fact finding stage need necessarily to be congruous with the syllabus which meet the learners needs, abilities and interests, because this stage offers complete information about the whole educational environment in which the syllabus will be implemented. The syllabus should be spiral in order to make the subject matter of each course connected and integrated to achieve the stated goal which, in our case, is to qualify a professional future translator. Also, all course contents should be directed mainly, whether in language skills, Linguistics or translation skills, to develop the competence and performance of a future translator and not an academic student.

Table 1 Directing the whole curricula towards the target (student translator).



The table 1 ensures that all the components of the curricula should work consistently to achieve the desired goal. All the course contents are selected and designed to meet the translator's needs, abilities and interests. The faculty is actually a trainer who should enrich the subject matter of the course to ensure that he is staying on the right track to improve the translator's competence and performance in translation. The components of the curricula prepare the student psychologically and professionally that all the courses are targeting him as a future translator. This curriculum overcomes the previous shortcomings of the old syllabus because it:-

- will be selected and prepared as a result of the fact finding stage, which gives all the needed information about the student, the trainer and the materials.
- prepares students as professional translators not as just academic students.
- will help the trainer to enrich and supplement his own subject matter to ensure the students' improvement in translation skills.
- bridges the gaps between the curricula components as well as the gaps between the course contents and student translator actual needs.
- helps students to overcome the problems with the source texts and language problems, because translation is inherently a difficult activity with additional problems which make the process even more difficult.

When the student translator is the target, it means all the courses are mainly designed to qualify a translator. The faculty should understand that these language skills are selected to develop the competence and performance of student translator not an academic student. This understanding should be also reflected to students to develop their language skills for the sake of their career. There are some questions and statements should be presented in each session or lecture such as:-

- The relation between speaking skill and interpreting.
- Why writing skills are important for translation?
- How to utilize these skills in your profession.
- In what ways, do writing skills help you as translator?
- What is the most important skill that can help you as communicator and interpreter?
- What skills are required to be a good translator?
- What is the main strategy to increase your vocabulary?
- As translator, how are you going to benefit from reading skills?

There are different ways through which the faculty can link the subject matter with the students' future profession. The subject matter of each course should be related to students needs in order to bridge the gaps between the course contents and the students' qualification requirements. Moreover, the selection and designing of the syllabus according to the fact finding stage, will bridge the gaps between the components of curricula.

The three components of the curricula; language skills (speaking, writing, reading, listening and vocabulary), applied linguistics and translation skills should work out in consistence and harmony to qualify a professional translator.

Finally, it is imperative and important to note here that this paper is the outcome of students' translation feedback over a number of years in addition to the open discussions with students after the correction of their tasks and assignments. The indications of students'

translation feedback lead me to touch the grey areas where we figure out and explore the major factors which influence the difficulties that face students in translation.

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