

Chapter 12

Introducing a Student Self-Evaluation Grid for Translation Assignments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will report the results of a study introducing a student self-evaluation grid for translation assignments, based on previous work by Marc Orlando. The grid described here was developed with and for second-year students of English Translation at the University of Helsinki during the autumn terms of 2015 and 2016. This process and the results are described in the light of a pilot study conducted with the students. Based on student feedback, the grid seems to provide a structured framework for evaluating both one's translation process and the translation product, but there are also areas to be developed in this system.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will report the results of a study introducing a student self-evaluation grid for translation assignments. In the English Translation programme at the University of Helsinki, the students' overall performance in translation courses is assessed using a system based on teacher feedback, peer evaluation, and self-evaluation both during and at the end of each English into Finnish translation course (see Eskelinen & Pakkala-Weckström, 2016 for a detailed description of the system). All in all, this system seems to have worked reasonably well from the point of view of both students and instructors, but nonetheless, the self-evaluation dimension could benefit from some improvement. The method used to enhance student self-evaluation has been a translation commentary for each assignment (see e.g. Fox, 2002; García Álvarez, 2007; Orlando, 2011), combined with a portfolio including a reflective end-of-course self-evaluation (see e.g. Galán Mañas, 2016; Johnson, 2003; Kelly, 2005; Linnankylä, 2001).

Nevertheless, there seems to be a demand for a more focused means for evaluating one's own performance. For example, for some students writing a free commentary after each translation seems to be a

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burden; they may find it difficult to retrospectively analyse their translation processes (see Eskelinen & Pakkala-Weckström, 2016, p. 327). Furthermore, a translation commentary tends to concentrate on the translation process, and does not necessarily include the evaluation of the product, i.e. the translation itself. Ideally, in order to develop both their translating and overall studying skills, the students should be able to evaluate both, which is what the self-evaluation grid introduced in this chapter aims at. Thus, the main motivation behind this current project has been to assist the students in their self-evaluation by giving them a structured frame of reference to discover the strengths and weaknesses of both their processes and products.

However, while the emphasis has been on raising the students' awareness, the pilot study presented here also clearly suggested that this kind of self-evaluation system designed for students can also benefit instructors in the assessment process. Grading the students' final portfolios becomes both easier and more transparent when the students themselves have laid the groundwork on their strong and weak points and progress during the course.

SELF-EVALUATION AS A TOOL IN TRANSLATOR TRAINING

Assessment regulates learning; therefore, regardless of the method used, assessment should always be constructively aligned, i.e. based on the intended learning outcomes (e.g. Biggs & Tang, 2011, p. 11; Bloxham, 2015, p. 109; Huertas Barros & Vine, 2018a; Kiraly, 2003). According to Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997), "assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates" (p. 7). Therefore, from the point of view of instructors, who also tend to be in charge of course and syllabus design, assessment methods are crucial in many ways. Kearney suggests that the following questions be asked when making decisions about assessment in Higher Education:

- Why do we assess?
- For whose benefit do we assess?
- Are these achieved through current practices? (2013, p. 876)

One of the points to be considered is agency, i.e. who assesses (see also Brown 2015, p.110)? Traditionally, all assessment is carried out by instructors, although self- and peer-assessment have also gained ground in the past decades (see e.g. Sluijsmans, Dochy, & Moerkerke, 1999). According to Brown, Bull and Pendlebury (1997), "self-assessment is central to life-long learning and the development of professional competence" (p. 178). Biggs and Tang (2011) also stress the connection of self-assessment with professional life: "Making judgements about whether a performance or a product meets the given criteria is vital for effective professional action in any field" (p. 217). Self-assessment can also teach students autonomy, reflection of their own work, and give them responsibility for their own learning (see Race, 2014, p. 93).

There is a wide range of approaches to assessing translations in translator training (see e.g. Galán-Mañas & Hurtado Albir, 2015; Garant & Garant, 2001; Huertas Barros & Vine, 2018a; Kelly, 2005; Martínez Melis & Hurtado Albir, 2001; Orlando, 2011, 2012). The focus in these studies tends to lie mainly on instructor-centred evaluation; in this study, the idea is to shift some of this agency to the students to benefit both students and instructors.

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