

XVI. Translation Competence

Competence as a general term can be defined as the inherent capacity for doing something. Linguistically, it means the knowledge people have about their language which they acquire through long years and different stages. Theoretically speaking this linguistic competence is perfect. It sharply differs from performance which to acclaimed linguist Noam Chomsky means the actual use of language in concrete situations. But while our linguistic competence is perfect our performance is imperfect. We may err due to different reasons like fatigue, hastiness, lapses of tongue and interruption by "impolite people". The proof for our perfect competence can be realized by our ability to correct our errors as soon as we know of them or being drawn attention to.

In addition to "linguistic", the term competence can be qualified by adjectives such as social and cultural. The social competence implies our ability to use our language in harmony with the norms and customs of the given society. In Arabic societies there are many social constraints on our use of language. Here are some of such constraints:

1. Sit awkwardly and speak straight.
2. For every occasion, there is a suitable topic.
3. Your tongue is your horse. If you keep it well, it keeps you well. If you offend it, it offends you.

4. Never mention the defects of other people with your tongue. You are full of defects, and people have their own tongues.

Interculturally, our competence is to be consistent with proper behaviours and conducts internationally. The success of intercultural competence is measured by our ability to communicate with people from other cultures both effectively and appropriately. The cultural appropriateness of our language is well-expressed in Arabic by the saying "Ye stranger, be polite" and in English by saying "When in Rome, do as the Romans do".

Translation competence should be defined as our ability to transfer a text or utterance in language A into a text or utterance in language B. There is more in this competence other than our linguistic repertoire. If we capitalize fully on our linguistic repertoire, we will soon discover its incapability once put in difficult or completely novel situations. There is more in translation than our knowledge of words or the linking of words into sentences. Translation demands that the person equipped with the essential linguistic knowledge has the power to transform, replace, change and create anew something that has been expressed in another language. Linguistic knowledge alone does not avail. It has been found that second generation bilinguals translating for their patient mothers and fathers who do not know English aggravate the health problems of their beloved parents, and that is why some American states prevented

children from acting as translators and interpreters. On a final word, translation competence comprises of linguistic competence, the power to transform, replace, change and create and cultural competence.

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Reading Guidelines:

Understanding a text requires you to listen open-mindedly to what the writer is saying. Never let your biases and prejudices obstruct your understanding even though you may not agree with the writer.

Q.I Give the exact meaning of the following words first in English and second in Arabic: inherent, capacity, acquire, acclaimed, concrete, fatigue, in harmony with, norms, constraints, defects, repertoire, capitalize, novel, avail, aggravate.

Q.II Derive as many words as you can from the following words: competence, perfect, imperfect, performance, actual, realized, qualified, occasion, offend, defects, capitalized, equipped.

Q.III Give the opposites of the words below and use them in good English sentences of your own: general, long, fatigue, qualified , in harmony with, suitable, appropriateness, ability, novel, essential, bilinguals, aggravate.

Q.IV Answer the following questions briefly:

1. How is linguistic competence defined, and how is it different from performance?
2. Who is Noam Chomsky? How does he define performance? Which of his books was translated at the University of Basra and by whom?
3. Give examples about lapses of tongue. What is the proof about the perfection of our linguistic competence?
4. Do you follow the social constraints on your use of your language? Give more examples of such constraints.
5. What is cultural competence? Can you give more examples of cultural constraints on language use?
7. What is more in translation than the linguistic and cultural competencies?
8. Give examples of the deficiency of our linguistic competence in translational acts and situations.
9. Why were second generation bilinguals prevented from translating for their patient parents?

Q. **V** Discuss paragraph 3 on (inter)cultural competence and translate it into plain Arabic.

Research Activity:

Discuss in detail (inter)cultural competence and give as many examples as you can from actual Arabic into English translation demonstrating cultural incompetency.

Quote of the Day:

**In translation language facility is not enough;
blood and sweat are the secret.**

Samuel Putnam