



# On the Significance of Communicative Competence in Translation Test in China

Shuhao Zhang

Faculty of Foreign Studies, Beijing Language and Culture University, 15 Xueyuan Road,  
Haidian District, 100083 Beijing, China

Patrickz13@vip.qq.com

**Abstract.** This paper critically examines the concept of communicative translation competence within the context of translation assessment evolution. It delineates the transition from conventional text-centric evaluation methods to a more integrated assessment framework that encapsulates linguistic, cultural, and pragmatic proficiencies. The discourse advocates for an inclusive assessment model that mirrors the complex realities of translation tasks, incorporating insights from contemporary research. The treatise posits that translation assessments should extend beyond mere bilingual text conversion to encompass a translator's adeptness in managing intricate communicative environments. This proposed model seeks to synchronize translation evaluation practices with the practical exigencies of the field, thereby cultivating translators proficient in mediating linguistic and cultural nuances.

**Keywords:** Translation test, communicative competence, cultural effects

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Translation testing has become a crucial part of translation studies due to the rapid development of translation studies, the establishment of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees in translation in domestic universities, and the Ministry of Personnel of the People's Republic of China's translation qualification examination. Researchers are now exploring methods to increase objective test questions, enhance subjective test questions, and increase context transparency. Mu<sup>5</sup> suggested that testing translation competence involves dividing competence into evaluable factors or attempting to reflect it in the proposition through actual translation operations. However, academicians primarily focus on simplified texts, which may lead to discrepancies between test conditions, methods, and decomposition items and translation reality, resulting in questionable reliability and validity of results. This paper discusses the application of translation testing in a communicative context and its essential behavioral characteristics, based on communicative translation theory.

## **2 TRANSLATION TEST AND ITS REQUIREMENTS**

### **2.1 Current situation of Translation Test in China**

Domestic translation examinations can be categorized as aptitude tests and professional translation tests. Language tests, such as college entrance examinations for English subjects, college English level four or six, postgraduate entrance examination, professional title English examination, etc., are inevitably included in the translation ability examination and account for a significant portion of the total score. Since the CET (College English Test) Band 4 and 6 was administered in Dec. 2013, the translation section has shifted from sentence translation to paragraph translation. The word count has increased. Translation difficulty has increased as the content switches from general categories to Chinese history, culture, economy, and society. Clearly, the translation examination is an essential criterion for evaluating candidates' English proficiency. Professional translation examinations are more specific, and their subject matter is more specialized, such as translation professional course examination for qualification certificate, etc. Since 2003, the Ministry of Personnel has implemented the translation qualification examination, "China Accreditation Test for Translators and Interpreters" in select cities. It is divided into triple-level examinations according to interpretation or translation. It is now promoted nationwide as an entry-level test into the translation industry. This examination evaluates professional titles in the translation industry. Translation examinations have evolved into professional examinations.

### **2.2 Emphasis on communicative translation examination**

Translation is a interlingual communication activity. Its purpose is to maximize consumers' acceptability of the source and target languages. Therefore, translation is a process of transformation at the level of language symbols and transmitted information content. Newmark proposes the concepts of semantic translation and communicative translation, arguing that texts with various functions should employ diverse translation strategies. The form of translation depends on the translation's purpose, text type, and intended audience. The definitive text emphasizes semantic translation, whereas informative and vocative texts emphasize communicative translation<sup>6</sup>. The translation industry must cultivate talent with practical skills, and translation education curriculum design and employment focus are also pragmatic. Therefore, translation examinations should emphasize communicative translation and proficiency. The following two pairs of concepts must be distinguished based on this premise: (1) communicative translation and simple text translation; (2) translation competence and foreign language competence.

### **2.3 Determine the type of translation skills**

Translation tests must assess more than mere bilingual text conversion; they should measure comprehensive skills including language, cultural, aesthetic, translation, and logical abilities, essential for contextual translation<sup>1</sup>. Effective translation, crucial for

social communication and multicultural growth, demands timely and impactful execution. Language proficiency in translation tests evaluates subjects' grasp and application of language, focusing on grammar, vocabulary, and discourse coherence—key aspects of traditional exams<sup>8</sup>. Cultural competence gauges understanding of source and target cultures and professional knowledge across disciplines, while aesthetic ability discerns between varying text translations.

### **3 IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATIVE TRANSLATION PROFICIENCY**

#### **3.1 Concept and theoretical basis**

Competence in communicative translation has been discovered long ago. The term "communicative competence" has been used in second language acquisition for a long time. Hymes<sup>3</sup> says it is the capacity to speak or not in any way, on any occasion, in any manner. Later, linguists classified them into grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, textual competence, and strategic competence<sup>8</sup>. Communicative translation competence has existed in Western translation theories for some time. Kiraly<sup>4</sup> defines it as "the ability to actively participate in communicative translation tasks and communicate appropriately." It includes taking into account the original text, translation assignments, and translation participants to produce translations that meet the requirements and context of the target language. Studies of this field in China have expanded the scope of translation competence beyond mere textual analysis, encompassing communicative aspects. Wen<sup>9</sup> identifies three core competencies: linguistic, strategic, and self-assessment. Translation assessments should evaluate abilities in text conversion, cognitive processing, and strategic application, informing test design.

Translation tests gauge linguistic structuring and pragmatic abilities, assessing language interpretation and expression across languages. Translator pragmatism hinges on register and style appropriateness. Strategy competence in translation involves analyzing briefs, managing stakeholder relationships, and flexibly employing suitable methods. Translation serves as a tool for social interaction and cultural growth, necessitating efficient, timely, and effective execution<sup>2</sup>.

#### **3.2 Application of Communicative Abilities**

Translation tests are not merely assessments of linguistic knowledge; but also evaluations of communicative abilities. Nord<sup>7</sup> suggests that translation errors in tests point out cognitive and communicative differences and such tests should provide sufficient information to assess a candidate's ability to transform language within specific communicative contexts. The research conducted by Mu<sup>5</sup> further underscores the importance of a testee's ability to understand, analyze, and creatively transform language in the design of translation tests in China. The establishment of the authentic rating standards of translation and support from Xu and Deng<sup>10</sup> reflect the trend towards a more comprehensive evaluation of translators' overall abilities. These developments demand not

only a solid linguistic foundation from candidates but also the flexibility to apply language skills, and understand and adapt to different cultural and social backgrounds, demonstrating a high level of cognitive ability.

## 4 ASSESSMENT OF EXAM RESULTS

Translation test results should be evaluated from a linguistic and cultural perspective. This is significant because translation tests may be affected by cultural context. For example, the same phrase in two different languages may have different meanings depending on the culture in which they are spoken.

### 4.1 Language assessment

In communicative translation, linguistic evaluation plays a crucial role in ensuring the accuracy and fluency of the final translated text. It is essential to consider various factors such as phonetic, lexical, and grammatical elements to produce a high-quality translation that closely mirrors the original source text.

First, by maintaining a similar phonetic cadence in the translation, the overall flow and tone of the original message can be preserved. This is especially important in cases where the source text contains poetic or lyrical elements that contribute to its overall impact and meaning.

Next, lexical accuracy is also a key aspect of communicative translation. This requires a deep understanding of the cultural nuances and contextual usage of words in both the source and target languages.

Furthermore, grammatical accuracy is essential for producing a translation that is not only faithful to the original text but also clear and easy to understand. The translator must possess a strong command of the grammar rules of both languages to avoid such errors and maintain the integrity of the translation.

Overall, communicative translation requires a thorough linguistic evaluation that considers phonetic, lexical, and grammatical factors to produce a coherent and accurate text. By paying attention to these key elements, translators can ensure that the final translation remains faithful to the source text while also effectively conveying its intended meaning to the target audience.

### 4.2 Cultural Assessment

Culture is intricately intertwined with language, and any translation endeavor must take cultural nuances into account. While there are shared elements across cultures that facilitate communication among diverse backgrounds, language differences—shaped by historical context and ethnic influences—inevitably lead to variations, especially in texts deeply rooted in local culture, which may defy direct translation. In social contexts, translators should employ communicative strategies to bridge these gaps effectively. In the contemporary globalized landscape of China, translation assessment demands specialization. Specifically, it should emphasize the practicality and efficacy of

communicative translation. Evaluations should encompass linguistic competence, artistic sensibility, aesthetic awareness, translation skills, and logical acumen—within a well-defined social framework. Furthermore, the assessment should critically appraise the fidelity of the translation to both language and cultural contexts.

## 5 CONCLUSION

Scholarly advancements have yielded methodologies for assessing translation and cognitive expansion aptitudes, encompassing evaluative judgment and interactive tasks. Language assessments necessitate alignment with authentic language application, mandating the use of genuine, sourced materials without alteration to reflect real-world usage. In devising translation examinations, it is crucial to construct an advanced micro-context to furnish essential background knowledge, enabling examinees to deduce meaning from lexical, syntactic, and textual relationships. Contemporary academic translation assessments are evolving towards communicative paradigms, recognizing the process as both equivalence and transformation of texts.

Elevating contextual complexity is prudent for appraising specific translation competencies, thereby bolstering intercultural comprehension and serving as a benchmark for translation across languages in China, aiding both domestic and international Chinese language translation research, and informing the exchange of linguistic expertise.

One of the key requirements of language assessments today is the need for authenticity. This means that the materials used in assessments must be genuine and sourced from real-world contexts, without any alterations. By using authentic materials, test-takers are able to demonstrate their ability to apply their language skills in practical, everyday situations. In the Chinese context, where the richness of the language and the depth of cultural heritage pose unique challenges for translators, the need for advanced assessment tools is particularly acute. By elevating the contextual complexity of translation examinations, scholars can more accurately gauge the specific competencies required for successful translation across languages. This not only serves to enhance intercultural comprehension but also provides a valuable benchmark for evaluating the quality of translations in the Chinese language.

By increasing the complexity of the contexts in which translations are assessed, we can better evaluate specific translation competencies and enhance intercultural understanding. This not only benefits the field of translation studies in China but also contributes to the exchange of linguistic expertise on a global scale.

In conclusion, the advancements in scholarly research on translation assessment have led to a more nuanced understanding of the skills and competencies required for effective translation. By embracing the complexity of language use and promoting authenticity in assessments, we can continue to enhance the quality of translation studies and contribute to the advancement of linguistic expertise on a global scale.

## REFERENCES

1. Colina, S. (2003). Towards an Empirically-based Translation Pedagogy. *American Translators Association Scholarly Monograph Series*, Routledge, 29-59. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ata.xii.04col>.
2. House, J. (2019) Translation as a Prime Player in Intercultural Communication. *Applied Linguistics*, 41: 10–29. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amz007>
3. Hymes, D.H. (1972) On Communicative Competence In: J.B. Pride and J. Holmes (eds) *Sociolinguistics. Selected Readings*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 269-293.(Part 1) [www.homes.uni-bielefeld.de/sgramley/Hymes-1.pdf](http://www.homes.uni-bielefeld.de/sgramley/Hymes-1.pdf)
4. Kiraly, D. (1990). A Role for Communicative Competence and the Acquisition-learning Distinction in Translator Training. In: Schäffner, C. (Ed.), *Second Language Acquisition – Foreign Language Learning, Multilingual Matters*, 207: 215. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100010913>
5. Lei, M. (2006). Translation Competence and Translation Testing. *Shanghai Journal of Translators*, Shanghai. 2: 43–47. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.1672-9358.2006.02.010>
6. Newmark, P. (2001). *Approaches to Translation*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, Shanghai. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100005222>
7. Nord, C. (2005). *Text analysis in translation: Theory, Methodology, and Didactic Application of a Model for Translation-oriented Text Analysis*. Rodopi, Leiden. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004500914>
8. Savignon, S. J. (1997). *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice: Texts and Contexts in Second Language Learning*. McGraw-Hill Humanities, Social Sciences and World Languages. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED227696>
9. Wen, J. (2004). On the Value and Functions of Translation Curriculum. *Chinese Translators Journal*, 25: 45-48. doi:CNKI:SUN:ZGFY.0.2004-03-014.
10. Xu, Y., Deng, Y. (2023). Examining the Content Validity of Translation Task in Large-Scale Language Tests: A Case of CET. *Journal of Lanzhou University (Social Sciences)*, 44: 26-37. <https://doi.org/10.16482/j.sdwy37-1026.2023-03-004>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

