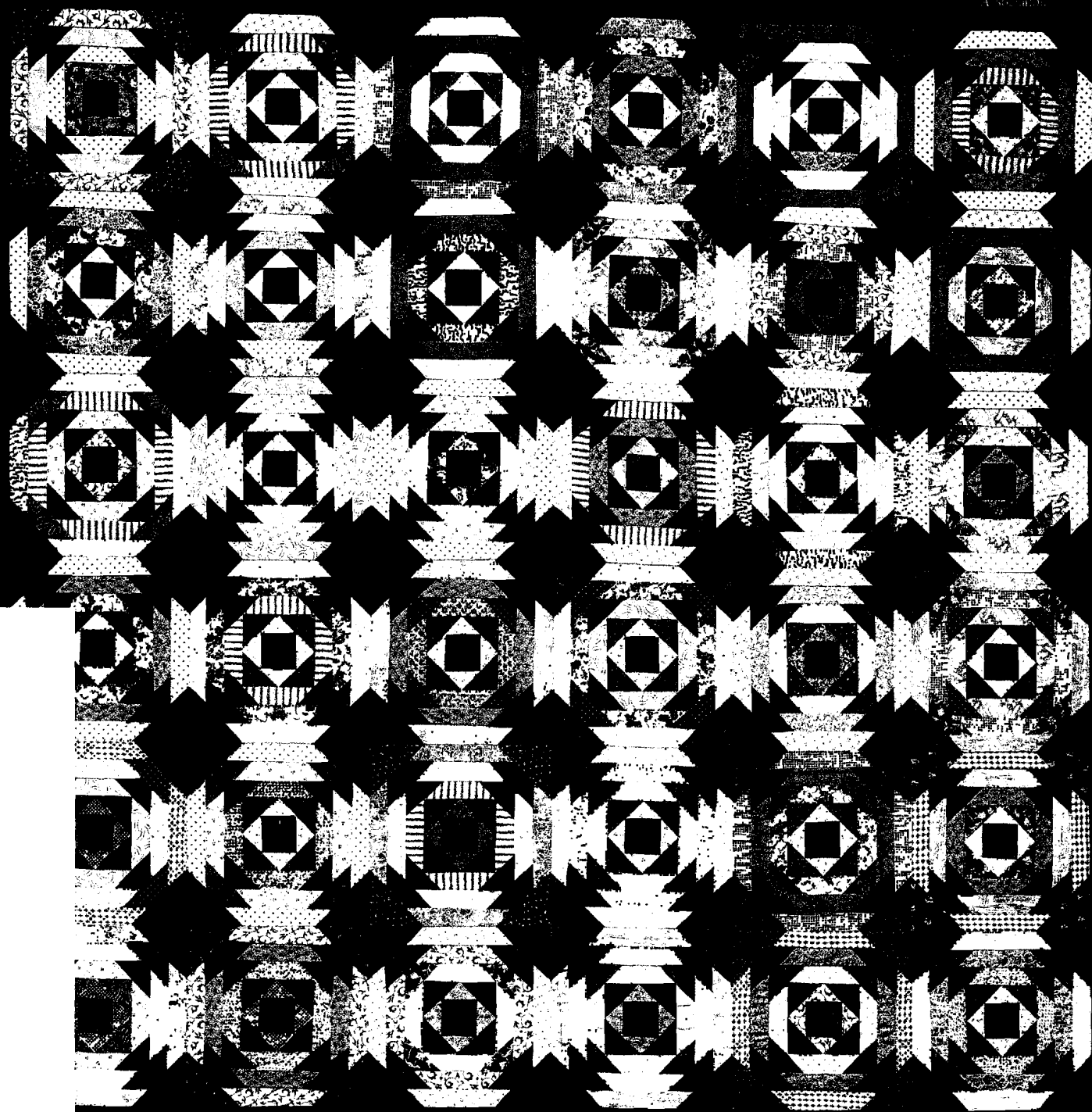


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Translation Pedagogy and Assessment: Adopting ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking

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The University of North Carolina at Charlotte offers an undergraduate Certificate in Translating (CT, created in 1979), a Graduate Certificate in Translating and Translation Studies (GCTTS, created in 2003), and a Master of Arts in Spanish with a track in Translating and Translation Studies (TTS, a 24-credit hour track created in 2002). The CT and TTS tracks offer courses in translation history, theory, and practice: history and theory provide students with contexts, strategies, and a discourse for their hands-on engagement in the art/craft/science of translating. An important pedagogical consideration at both the undergraduate and graduate levels concerns itself with translation as a profession, and, therefore, with introducing students to: 1) professional organizations such as ATA, the Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters (CATI, our local ATA chapter), and the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA); and 2) the assessment criteria and standards used by ATA for its certification examinations.

Evaluation and outcomes assessment are thorny issues in American higher education and in our professional lives. They are time-consuming activities that are often difficult to map out clearly because of the types of questions they deal with, such as what is being measured, how, when, and why. But good faith engagement in assessment is a critical component of any pedagogical undertaking. Those involved with coherent curricular design would do well to carefully envision the desired learning outcomes that will later be measured so that accountability and continuous improvement are factored into a pedagogical cycle or flow (for example, Envisioned Outcomes→Course or

Program Design→Instruction→Outcomes Assessment→Modification and Improvement→New Cycle).

Course grades remain the most characteristic form of outcomes assessment in academia. As we all know, grades can be a source of considerable confusion and consternation because:

- Different instructors can be quite idiosyncratic in how they arrive at their A's, B's, and C's. For instance,

“...When we teach courses and workshops in translation, assessment is a key feedback and quality control element...”

two instructors may give two different grades (one higher, one lower) for the same assignment.

- Students may ask that a grade be explained. However, instructors are often hard-pressed to do so, perhaps because their own criteria and standards have not been clearly thought out and/or articulated. This leads to a justification along the lines of “this is my [subjective] impression of the grade you have earned...”
- Students may earn good grades in class, but then fare poorly on external evaluation instruments such as standardized national examinations (i.e., the “in-class” and “out-of-class” assessment criteria and standards are not well aligned).
- Training and academic programs may lack coherence and consistency

in how they evaluate students (there is no culture of inter-rater reliability). These programs may themselves be idiosyncratic and misaligned with national standards, discourse, and practice.

In my translation workshops at UNC Charlotte, I have adopted ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking as the preferred method of evaluation or grading. The framework provides a ready-made, standardized, time-tested, and professionally recognized model for conducting theory-based, systematic, coherent, and consistent evaluations of student translations. The adoption of ATA's standards and criteria has several other benefits as well, among them:

- Linking students' classroom work, feedback, and discussion to the external professional context in the U.S., as represented by ATA;
- Providing students and instructors with a protocol and common language for translation assessment that is aligned with the criteria, standards, and discourse of our national certifying association. This serves to foster a culture of inter-rater reliability wherein we can “be on the same page” when discussing what is right or wrong about a translation;
- Preparing students more thoroughly to take ATA's certification exam by familiarizing them with the national standards and criteria before they sit for the exam; and
- Aligning the programmatic discourse of our colleges and universities with established national standards.

Table 1: ATA Framework for Standard Error Marking

Code #	Criteria and Description of Each Error
1	Incomplete Passage: A substantially unfinished passage is not graded. Missing titles, headings, or sentences within a passage may be marked as one or more errors of omission, depending on how much is omitted.
2	Illegible: It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that the graders can clearly understand what is written. Candidates are instructed to use pen or dark pencil and to write firmly enough to produce legible photocopies. Deletions, insertions, and revisions are acceptable if they do not make the intent unclear.
3	Misunderstanding of Original Text: This category applies when the grader can see—usually by back-translating the target-language text—that the error arises from misreading a word, for example, or misinterpreting the syntax of a sentence. In other words, the result is wrong because the translation was based on a misunderstood source text.
4	Mistranslation into Target Language: The meaning of the original text is not conveyed properly in the target language. For example, a term in the translated text might be much more general (<i>scientists</i> instead of <i>researchers</i> ; <i>protein</i> instead of <i>albumin</i>) or more specific (<i>stallion</i> instead of <i>horse</i>) than the original term. Mistranslations can also involve the choice of prepositions, the use of definite and indefinite articles, and the choice of verb tense and mood.
5	Addition or Omission: Something is inserted that is not clearly expressed in the original text, or something essential to the meaning is left out. The tendency to insert “clarifying” material should generally be resisted. It is permissible to shorten the ponderous modes of expression that are common in some source texts, so long as the meaning does not suffer.
6	Terminology, Word Choice: This error often involves terms used in various technical, legal, and financial contexts, where words often have very specific meanings. In more general texts, the candidate might not have selected the most appropriate word among several that have similar (but not identical) meanings.
7	Register: Language level, degree of formality should be preserved in the translation; examples of errors include using everyday words instead of medical terms (<i>spit</i> instead of <i>saliva</i>), making a legal document sound journalistic, <i>tú/usted</i> , anachronisms, and culturally inappropriate expressions.
8	Too Freely Translated: Candidates are asked to translate the meaning and intent of the source text, not to rewrite or improve upon it. The grader will carefully compare the translation to the source text. If a “creative” rendition changes the meaning, an error will be marked. If recasting a sentence—i.e., altering the order of its major elements—destroys the flow, changes the emphasis, or obscures the author's intent, an error may be marked.
9	Too Literal, Word-for-Word: Translations that follow the source text exactly may result in awkward, often incorrect renditions. Translate literally when it works, but not at the expense of clarity and natural syntax.
10	False Cognate: In some language pairs, this is the most common type of error. Examples from English and Spanish: officials (<i>funcionarios</i>) translated as <i>oficiales</i> ; application [form] (<i>solicitud</i>) translated as <i>aplicación</i> ; <i>actualmente</i> (<i>presently, currently, nowadays</i>) translated as <i>actually</i> .
11	Indecision, Giving More than One Option: Graders will not choose the right word for you. Even if both options are correct, an error will be marked. More points are deducted if one or both options are incorrect. Do not use asterisks, footnotes, brackets, or other hedging devices. Do not add clarifications unless readers from the target language will surely miss the meaning without them.
12	Inconsistency, Same Term Translated Differently: In general, a term that is used consistently in the source text should be translated consistently into the target language. Conversely, if the source text uses different words for the same idea interchangeably, the candidate should try to come up with a similar variety in the target language.
13	Ambiguity: If the meaning is clear in the source text but ambiguous in the translation, an error may be marked. The reader should not have to puzzle out the meaning.
14	Grammar: Grammatical errors include lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect verb forms, incorrect case of nouns, pronouns, or adjectives, and use of an adjective where an adverb is needed.

Table 1: ATA Framework for Standard Error Marking (Continued)

Code #	Criteria and Description of Each Error
15	Syntax (Phrase/Clause/Sentence Structure): The arrangement of words or other elements of a sentence should conform to the rules of the target language. Errors in this category include sentence fragments, improper modification, lack of parallelism, and unnatural word order. If incorrect syntax changes or obscures the meaning, the error is more serious.
16	Punctuation: The conventions of the target language should be followed, including those governing the use of quotation marks, commas, semicolons, and colons. Incorrect or unclear paragraphing is counted as an error.
17	Spelling: There is less tolerance of spelling errors in some languages than others, for reasons that derive from the language itself as well as from the national culture. In all languages, a spelling error that causes confusion about the intended meaning is more serious (e.g., principle/principal, systemic/systematic, peddle/pedal, dear/deer, bear/bare, sight/site, tasa/taza, vasto/basto). Context is a factor as well.
18	Accents and Other Diacritical Marks: The conventions of the target language should be followed consistently. If incorrect or missing diacritical marks obscure the meaning, the error is more serious.
19	Case (Upper/Lower): The conventions of the target language should be followed. Examples: <i>Cien años de soledad</i> (correct Spanish title) vs. <i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i> (correct English title).
20	Word Form: The root of the word is correct, but the wrong form is used. Example in English: The product has been tampered with and is no longer safety.
21	Usage: Correct and idiomatic usage of the target language is expected. Errors include the use of the wrong preposition or misuse of a grammatical form. Examples: take vs. make a walk, married to vs. married with, etc.
22	Style: If the source text is characterized by a distinctive manner of expression—flowery, staccato, conversational, instructional—this should be reflected in the translation. Awkward or clumsy renditions that obscure the meaning may also be penalized.
NOTE: Avoid the claim of words “not in dictionary”: You are expected to determine meaning from context, to recognize irregular verb forms, root-word derivations, compound words, proper names, and close cognates.	

I use ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking in a pre- and post-translation assessment process, with translator self-evaluation materials that I prepare, distribute, and explain to students. I am not an ATA certification exam grader, but I base my evaluations of student translations on the point marking system and standards used by ATA, which any instructor can adopt and adapt. Although the translation assignments for my graduate classes may run from short passages to texts exceeding 3,000 words, I remind students that ATA's exam will require them to translate texts that average 250 words in length. Therefore, I often randomly select a 250-300-word passage within a longer translation assignment and base

the grade on this selection. This requires students to focus on maintaining consistent quality throughout their assignment, since they do not know which common part of it will be selected for grading. The students must do their best work at all times, which is what translation in the real world requires. The assessment process involves the following.

1. Pre-translation: ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking (Table 1). We carefully review ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking, available on the association's website (www.atanet.org/bin/view.pl/12438.html). This document summarizes and explains the 22 criteria for errors. I

have selected the examples in English and Spanish (the two languages we will be working between) and coded the criteria numerically. The numeric coding is only used to identify each criterion, and does not serve as an indicator of the seriousness of the translation error committed. Students quickly learn that 1 = Incomplete Passage, 5 = Addition or Omission, 7 = Register, 9 = Too Literal/Word-for-Word, 14 = Grammar, etc. I have found that the numeric coding, which is no more difficult for the instructor or student to learn than memorizing two phone numbers, makes it easier to follow the instructor's indications of errors on the actual pages of the translations submitted. This is ➡

Table 2: Translator Self-Evaluation Instrument: Log of Errors for All Assignments (Documents Translated)

TL: E=English, S=Spanish		E	E	E	E	E	E	S	S	S	S	S	S	Total #
Translation Assignment # and Date		1 9/03	3 9/17	5 9/30	7 10/15	9 10/29	11 11/14	2 9/10	4 9/24	6 10/07	8 10/21	10 11/07	12 11/21	
Code #	Criteria Description/# Errors	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#	#
1	Incomplete Passage	1	2	1				2	2	1				9
2	Illegible													
3	Misunderstanding of Original Text	2	3	2	1	1		1	2	1				13
4	Mistranslation into TL	2	1		1		1	3	4	3	2	3	1	21
5	Addition or Omission	4	4	3	2	4	1	2	2	1	2	1		26
6	Terminology, Word Choice	1	1		1	2		2	3	3	2	4	2	21
7	Register	1		1		1		2	1	1	2	2	1	12
8	Too Freely Translated	4	4	4	3	4	2	1	1		1	1	1	26
9	Too Literal, Word-for-Word	1	1	2	1	1	1	4	5	4	3	4	3	30
10	False Cognate	2	2	1	1			3	3	2	3	3	1	21
11	Ind., Giving More Than One Option	2	1					3	3	2	2	1		14
12	Inconsis., Same Term Trans. Diff.	2	2	1				1	1	1	1			9
13	Ambiguity	1	1	1		1		2	2	1	2	1		12
14	Grammar	1	1	2	1	1		5	6	7	4	3	2	33
15	Syntax	2	2	1	2	1		3	3	2	3	1	1	21
16	Punctuation	2	1	1		1		2	3	2	2	1		15
17	Spelling	2	1	2	1	1		3	3	2	2	1	2	20
18	Accents and Other Diacrit. Marks							7	9	7	8	5	3	39
19	Case (UPPER/lower)	1	2	2	1	1	1	3	3	2	3	2	2	23
20	Word Form		1		1			2	1	2	3	2	1	13
21	Usage	1		1		1		3	4	4	3	2	1	20
22	Style	1	1	1				2	3	2	3	2	2	17
Total Errors		33	31	26	16	20	6	56	64	50	51	39	23	415
ATA Error Pts. Accumulated		55	40	17	15	9	6	78	63	38	18	17	12	368
Grades (Final Grade at End)		C	C	B	B	A	A	C	C	C	B	B	B	B

because the numbers use less space and are easier to read than error types indicated with handwritten words.

2. Post-translation: Translator Self-

Evaluation Instrument: Log of All Assignments (Documents Translated) (Table 2). Students record their errors for each translation assignment according to the frequency of each ATA

error type or criterion. Since my students translate both from Spanish into English and English into Spanish, they may document the differences in error frequency when the target language

Table 3: Translator Self-Evaluation Instrument: Error Summary and Distribution

Code #	Criteria Description	#Total Errors	Frequency when TL ENG	% This Error	Frequency when TL SPAN	% This Error
1	Incomplete Passage	9	4	44%	5	56%
2	Illegible	0	0	0%	0	0%
3	Misunderstanding of Original Text	13	9	69%	4	31%
4	Mistranslation into TL	21	5	24%	16	76%
5	Addition or Omission	26	18	69%	8	31%
6	Terminology, Word Choice	21	5	24%	16	76%
7	Register	12	3	25%	9	75%
8	Too Freely Translated	26	21	81%	5	19%
9	Too Literal, Word-for-Word	30	7	23%	23	77%
10	False Cognate	21	6	29%	15	71%
11	Indecision, Giving More Than One Option	14	3	21%	11	79%
12	Inconsistency, Same Term Translated Differently	9	5	51%	4	44%
13	Ambiguity	12	4	34%	8	66%
14	Grammar	33	6	18%	26	82%
15	Syntax	21	8	38%	13	62%
16	Punctuation	15	5	34%	10	66%
17	Spelling	20	7	35%	13	65%
18	Accents and Other Diacritical Marks	39	0	0%	39	100%
19	Case (UPPER/lower)	23	8	35%	15	65%
20	Word Form	13	2	15%	11	85%
21	Usage	20	3	15%	17	85%
22	Style	17	3	18%	14	82%
Total Errors		415	132	32%	282	68%

SELF-EVALUATION COMMENTS (USE SPACE AS NEEDED FOR A THOROUGH ANALYSIS): It is clear that I commit fewer errors when translating into English, my native language, than when I translate into Spanish, my second language. When the TL is in English, I need to focus more on not being too free with my translations. I sometimes become overly creative and start wanting to improve on the original—I get carried away with my writing. This leads to too many additions—I want to clarify things, embellish them. Also, for TL-English I need to read the SL-Spanish texts more carefully, making sure that I have fully understood them before I do my translations and submit them. I am finding out that, at times, I don't know as much Spanish as I thought I did. Etc.

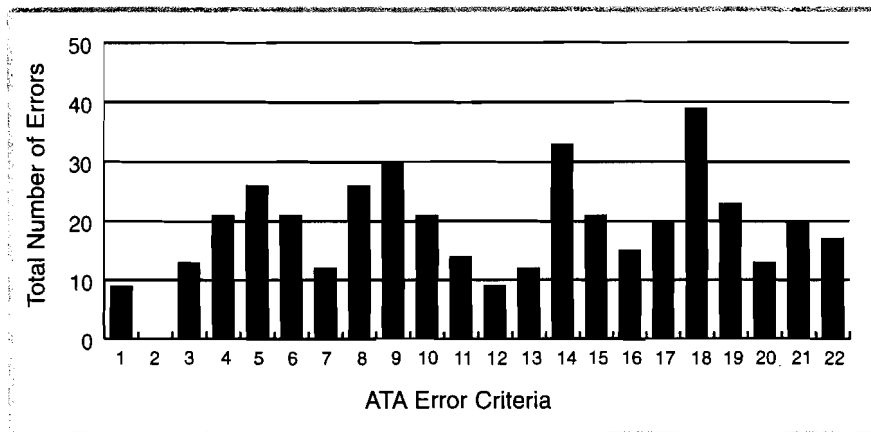
(TL) is English vs. Spanish. The following example is an illustrative composite based on hypothetical data for a graduate student whose first or native language is English. The 12 assignments are weighted equally so that the final

grade is the average of the 12 individual grades. An explanation of the grades assigned is provided at the end of this article.

3. Post-translation: Translator Self-

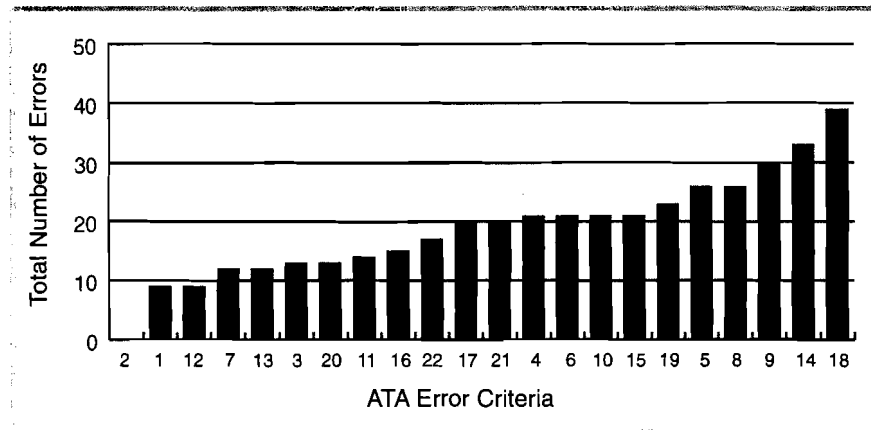
Evaluation Instrument: Error Summary and Distribution (Table 3). Here, students further analyze and compare the error frequency of TL-English vs. TL-Spanish assignments (#2 above broken down).

Chart 1: Error Analysis



This document contains a section for “Self-Evaluation Comments,” in which students provide a written analysis of their translation strengths and weaknesses toward the latter portion of the course. This allows them, *over time*, to identify patterns and areas in need of improvement, which encourages them to invest themselves in their own learning process and outcomes assessment. It also enhances efficiency, since students can then focus their improvement efforts on problem areas that they personally have clearly documented and understood.

Chart 2: Error Analysis: Ascending Order of Frequency by ATA Criterion



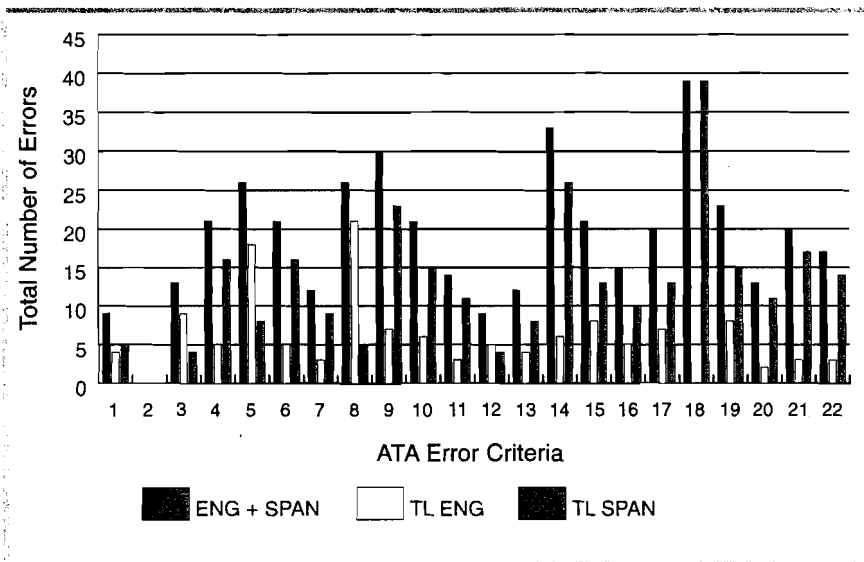
4. Post-translation: This consists of a series of summative graphs of student performance during the course, based on all the graded translation assignments they have submitted. These charts enable students to clearly visualize their strengths and weaknesses. The students use Microsoft Excel (or a program with similar capabilities) to generate their own evaluation graphics. (I wish to acknowledge my graduate student, Evan Erickson, for ideas he provided me with via his own self-evaluation graphs during the 2002 fall semester.) For example, Chart 1

Table 4

Max. Pts. Deducted	Meaning is NOT lost, changed, or obscured	Meaning IS lost, changed, or obscured	Max. Pts. Deducted
0	Error NOT apparent to attentive, linguistically knowledgeable reader	Error constitutes a subtle or slight imprecision of meaning	2
1	Error IS apparent to a casual, uncritical reader	Meaning is merely obscured	4
2	Error NOT an egregious violation of usage	Consequences of lost, changed, or obscured meaning are minimal	4
4	Error IS an egregious violation of usage	Consequences are not catastrophic	8
	NOTE: Per ATA guidelines, errors that do not result in misunderstanding typically incur just one error point.	Consequences are catastrophic to the meaning of the passage as a whole	16

ATA-REMINDER: Although the use of points may impart a certain impression of objectivity, it is in truth still subjective.

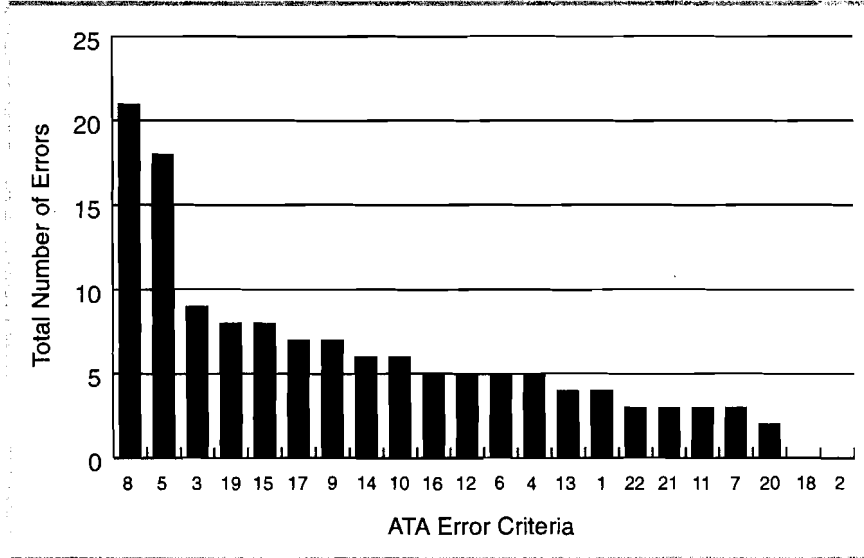
Chart 3: Error Analysis: Total, TL-ENG, TL-SPAN



Spanish. The problems are not the same for both languages, as can easily be seen in Chart 3, which affords us a different look at the same data.

When the TL is English, as presented in Chart 4, the major problem areas that become apparent are criteria #8, 5, 3, 19, and 15. The student sees that he or she should: be more wary of translating too freely (perhaps due to overconfidence when working into his or her native English); avoid the tendency to want to add text to the translation (clarifying or embellishing the original); fully understand the SL-text before translating it; pay more attention to the general stylistic conventions of writing in English; be sure that the syntax conforms to the norms of English usage and that any dramatic syntactic changes are warranted; etc.

Chart 4: TL-English Error Analysis



When the TL is Spanish, Chart 5 clearly indicates problems with criteria #18, 14, 9, 21, 4, 6, and so forth, in descending order of frequency. When translating into Spanish, which is his or her second (“learned”) language, the student should focus on using accents and other diacritical marks correctly, mastering grammatical expression, avoiding the tendency to be too literal in his or her renditions (perhaps due to lack of confidence when working into his or her “learned” Spanish), etc.

This same feedback may be presented by means of other graphics, such as line graphs or the pie graphic in Chart 6 on page 28, which gives the student yet another look at his or her strengths and weaknesses when translating into Spanish.

Now, returning to the issue of the grades assigned for each of the 12 translations submitted (see Table 2), the standard is the scale of 1, 2, 4, 8, or 16 error points implemented

gives the student an overview of which ATA criteria are generally the most problematic and in need of greater attention.

It becomes clearer which areas are problematic when the errors are rearranged in ascending/descending order of frequency. In this case, Chart

2 shows that this particular student translator needs to begin by focusing his or her attention on criteria #18, 14, 9, 8, 5, and 19.

Students benefit much more from the exercise as they begin to compare the strengths and weaknesses of their own translation into English vs.

Chart 5: TL-Spanish Error Analysis

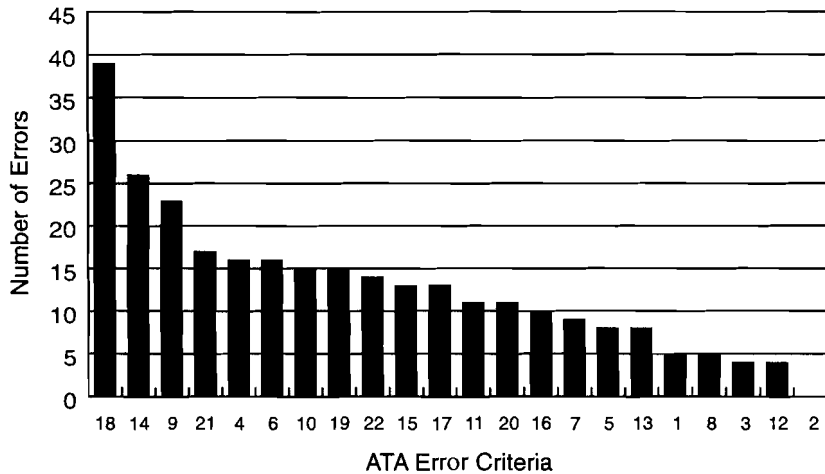
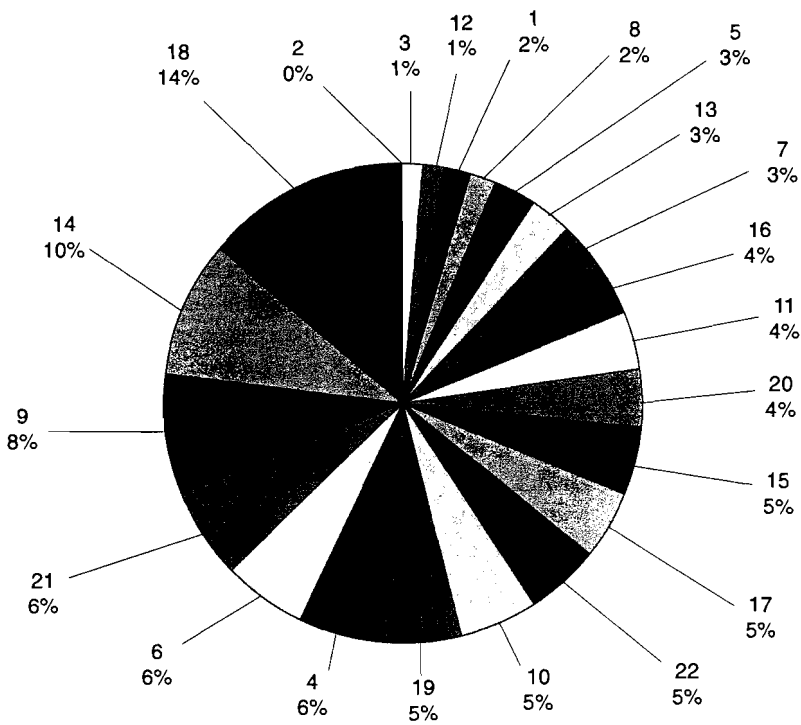


Chart 6: TL-Spanish Error Analysis



by ATA in November 2002 (see www.atanet.org/bin/view.pl/51165.html, ATA Certification). In order to arrive at a score or grade, I refer to the eval-

uation guide and flowchart published in the October 2002 issue of the *ATA Chronicle* (page 57), which I reformat and explain to my students

(see Table 4 on page 26) so that they fully understand the standards.

It is important to remember that the grade assigned in the bottom row of Table 2 calibrates the raw number of errors in terms of the seriousness of the consequences summarized in Table 4.¹ I will also award up to three quality points per assignment, in accordance with ATA practice, for particularly felicitous renditions. On ATA's examination, "a passage with a score of 18 or more points [deducted] receives a grade of Fail" (*ATA Chronicle*, page 57). Since my own grading scheme is based on a 10-point scale (A = 90-100, B = 80-89, C = below 80), and a failing grade for my graduate students is a grade of C, it is reasonable for me to assign a grade of A for an assignment with fewer than 9 ATA points accumulated, a grade of B for an accumulation of 10-17 points, and a grade of C for 18 or more points. In this manner, every time my students submit an assignment, they are becoming more familiar with the protocol and discourse of the formal ATA certification examination.

Conclusion

The ATA is committed to "developing and applying clear and consistent evaluation standards" for its certification examination (*ATA Chronicle*, page 57). When we teach courses and workshops in translation, assessment is a key feedback and quality control element for theory translated into practice. Clear and consistent feedback provides the best basis for informed and measurable improvement over time. Although the subjectivity of the instructor still characterizes the grading process, the adoption of a national norm places a control on idiosyncrasy and helps to

Continued on p. 45

Translation Pedagogy and Assessment: Adopting ATA's Framework for Standard Error Marking Continued from page 28

foster a culture of inter-rater reliability. This provides a sense of stability for the student, who can now understand what to expect from class to class within an academic program, and who knows that his or her course work is linked to a professional context. Adoption of ATA's criteria and standards can provide instructors with a national model for measuring and reporting outcomes in translation pedagogy—a pragmatic solution to a thorny issue in translator training—and in the process further serve students by acculturating them into the profession.

Notes

1. In the past, of course, I used the ATA evaluation standards in effect at that

time: A translated passage is marked as “fail” if it includes two or more major errors; one major and more than six minor errors; or no major errors and 20 or more minor errors.

References

- “Accreditation Forum: Grading Standards—A Glimpse Behind the Scenes.” *ATA Chronicle* XXXI.10 (October 2002), pages 57-58, 76.
- Bohannon, Celia. “New Policies to Take Effect in November 2002.” www.atanet.org (click on “Certification”).

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