



FRAMEWORK FOR MARKING OF TRANSLATION ACCREDITATION EXAMINATIONS

[Adapted from the marking system used at the Institute of Linguists (London) and the ATA marking framework]

Introduction

There are five broad categories to be taken into account when marking accreditation examinations:

1. Accuracy of the translation
2. Choice of vocabulary, terminology and register
3. Cohesion, coherence and organisation
4. Grammar, spelling, punctuation; presentation
5. General

In most cases, the classification of an error as major or minor would depend on the seriousness of the effect of the error.

The categories above can be broken down further as follows:

1. Accuracy

- a. *Misinterpretation of the source text*: A word, phrase, sentence or passage may be completely misinterpreted, resulting in the false transfer of information.

Examples: Many words have a variety of meanings, depending on the context. A simple example is the German pronoun *sie*, which may mean she, you or they. Sometimes a word is mistaken for another word in the source language that has a very different meaning (*he wavered* misread as *he waved*). Sometimes a false cognate is used; for example, *ein Büschel Seegrass* is a *clump of seaweed*, not a *bushel of sea grass*. Often a phrase has an idiomatic meaning that is not obvious from the individual words; a literal translation in this case would be an error. Failure to connect the correct modifier with the word it modifies or to identify the subject and object properly can change the sentence profoundly. Failure to recognize the tenses of verbs is another source of error.

- b. *Mistranslation into the target language*: Failure to understand a word, phrase, grammatical construction, or nuance in the original text may result in an incorrect translation. Moreover, even if the source text is understood, translators may select an inappropriate word among several that have similar meanings, or use a word in the wrong context.

Examples: *Faux amis* are one example of what might occur here. The term in the translation should not be much more general (*scientists* instead of *researchers*, *protein* instead of *albumin*) or more specific (*stallion* instead of *horse*) than the original term. This type of error is also reflected in the choice of prepositions and the use of definite and indefinite articles. The translator must strive for the right turn of phrase.

- c. *Shifts*: There may be slight differences in meaning between the source and target texts. For example, the translator may choose a more general or more specific word, or fail to convey a significant nuance in the text, such as the writer's attitude, or the focus of the text.
- d. *Omission*: A section of the source text may be completely omitted in error. Please note that this does **not** mean that all words in the source text have to appear in the target text. It rather refers to the omission of information crucial to the sense of the source text. For example, missing titles, headings or sentences within a passage may be marked as one or more major errors of omission, depending on how much is omitted. 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.
- e. *Addition*: Translators occasionally feel the need to explain the text to the target reader, and add information that does not appear in the source text. **Whether or not this is appropriate depends on the translation brief.** The tendency to insert "clarifying" material should generally be resisted, but in some cases may be required in order to make the text accessible to the target audience. This would normally constitute a **minor** error.

2. Vocabulary, terminology and register

- a. *Register*: This refers to the level of formality of the text. Normally the register of each text should be of a similar level, **unless the brief requires otherwise**. For example a legal text should not be translated into a journalistic style, and care should be taken in the choice of familiar rather than polite forms of address (French *tu/vous*, German *du/Sie* etc.). Other errors would include using anachronistic or culturally inappropriate expressions. However, languages differ in the level of formality appropriate for different types of texts, and this should be taken into account in the marking.
- b. *Vocabulary and terminology*: The translator may select a word or term that is inappropriate for the type of text and the subject matter. Errors in the use of terminology usually occur as a result of an inadequate knowledge of the specialized terms used in technical texts and in legal and financial contexts, where words are often used in very specific meanings.

Examples: In an article about a nuclear reactor, for example, the German word *Brüter* should be translated as *breeder* rather than *incubator*.

- c. *Usage:* Correct and idiomatic usage of the target language is expected. Errors include use of the wrong preposition or misuse of a grammatical form. Errors of article usage in English are included here.

Examples: He is married to (*not with*) my sister. They were suspected of breaking (*not to break*) the rules. I am going to take (*not make*) a walk. He committed (*not performed*) a crime.

3. Cohesion, coherence and structure

This refers to the “naturalness” of the translation.

- a. The text may be translated too *literally*, resulting in a stilted and awkward translation, which often makes no sense.

Examples: An extreme example of such word-for-word translation: The from Berlin coming and now on platform 12 arriving express train...

- b. At the same time, the text should not be translated too *freely*. The meaning and intent of the source text should generally be preserved, unless the brief requires otherwise – candidates are not expected to rewrite it or improve upon it.

The marker will carefully compare the translation with 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 muddles the author's intent, an error may be marked.

- c. The translation should “make sense”, i.e. be *coherent*, without reference to the source text.

Obviously if the source text is not coherent, the target text will not be either. However, such texts would not normally be included in an accreditation exam.

- d. The *structure* of the source text should be maintained, i.e. all logical structural links should be transferred so that the *organisation* of the source text is not distorted. However, the text **must** be restructured and reorganised as required by target language norms, i.e. it must read naturally.

4. Grammar, spelling, punctuation and presentation

- a. *Grammatical errors* are unacceptable. These include lack of agreement between subject and verb, incorrect verb tenses or verb forms, incorrect cases or use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives etc. (depending on the grammatical categories of the target language) and using an adjective where an adverb is needed.

- b. *Spelling:* There should be no spelling errors in the translation. If translating in a South African context, American spelling should **not** be used. Some languages tolerate spelling variation more than others, but in all languages a spelling error that causes confusion about the intended meaning is a major error.

Examples: The student disagreed with the *principle / principal*. The specialists agreed that *systemic / systematic* treatment was required. The men set out early to *peddle / pedal* their bicycles through the town.

- c. *Punctuation:* Punctuation should follow the conventions of the target language, including those governing the use of accents and other diacritical marks, quotation marks, commas, semicolons and colons.

- d. *Presentation:* This includes typing errors, incorrect transfer of dates, numbers and other data, careless or slipshod formatting and proofreading, all of which are unacceptable and may be marked as errors.

5. General

- a. *Indecision:* Candidates should not give options in their translation. If both options are correct, presenting alternatives is a minor error; if one option is wrong, it is a major error.

- b. *Inconsistency:* A term that is used consistently in the source text should be translated consistently into the target language.

- c. *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.

A pass or a fail?

Deciding whether a candidate should pass or fail requires all the above factors to be taken into consideration. Dividing errors into major or minor errors and quantifying them helps give a good idea of the quality of the translation. A text may have no mistranslations or misinterpretations (normally considered as major errors) but be so literal, stilted, and awkward that it is not professionally acceptable. Alternatively, the translation may be near perfect but contain a number of typing, punctuation and spelling errors, which would also render it unacceptable.

The translation needs to be considered as a whole. The overriding criterion is whether or not the translation is professionally acceptable.

As a reminder, the following are the parameters for marking:

1. The candidate fails the exam if there are two or more major errors in the examination paper as a whole.
2. The candidate fails the exam if there is one (or more) major error and seven or more minor errors in any one question.
3. The candidate fails the exam even if there are no major errors but over 10 minor errors in any one question or over 20 minor errors in the examination paper as a whole.