



How to achieve innovative, inclusive and fit-for-market specialised translator training? – Report on eTransFair workshop during the 21st Conference on Language for Specific Purposes 2017

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Introduction

During the 21st [Conference on Language for Specific Purposes \(LSP\) in 2017, eTransFair](#) – a research project addressing the modernisation of specialised translator training – held a workshop on sharing good practices in specialised translator training. The focus was on the question of how to make sure that translator training is innovative, inclusive and prepares students for the market.

The group format stimulated intense discussions and exchange of ideas. It addressed current practices in specialised translator training and the preparation of prospective specialised translators for the requirements of the market.

Topics of the workshop

At the beginning of the [LSP workshop](#), the participants selected the topics that should be addressed during the workshop. They decided to focus on the three topics:

- skills of professional translators,
- training content and material as well as
- assessment in the field of specialised translator training.

These three topics formed the basis for discussion among all workshop participants.

Although the topics of skills, translator training and training material as well as assessment are intertwined, they are addressed separately in this paper. However, higher education institutions and teachers offering specialised translator training should always consider the bigger picture of training when designing an entire translation course and its elements.

Participants

Among the workshop participants were teachers in the field of specialised translation, researchers and translators. Although the number of participants was quite small, their background was diverse and they drew on a wealth of experience of teaching, translation and research. The majority teach courses in bachelor's and master's programmes. Among the countries represented in this workshop were France, the Czech Republic, Germany, Norway and Austria.

Outcomes

Competences

For the difference between skills and competences please refer to the glossary (available soon on the eTransFair website). When talking about skills and competences, the EMT (European Master's in Translation) [competence list](#) provides a useful guideline. The EMT specifies 48 [competences for professional translators, experts in multilingual and multimedia communication](#). The list contains competences in six areas. They encompass the following:

- translation service provision competence
- language competence
- intercultural competence
- information mining competence
- thematic competence
- technological competence.

The workshop participants emphasised that the training of future translators should pay special attention to **project-based learning** and **information mining**. Information mining should include the evaluation of resources, i.e. students should be able to assess whether their resources are reliable. One example given was that students should be able to assess whether the search results obtained from Linguee could be re-used in a given translation without further verification.

Translation competence

The participating teachers would welcome a competence model. They said that the development of the students' performance and competences over the course of their studies is an important aspect of translation assessment. For example, assessment should consider competence development of bilingual students after 3 to 4 years of training.

Further discussion revealed that, on the one hand, translation competence encompasses general skills and, on the other hand, translation-related-skills. **General skills** comprise transferable skills, including management skills and evaluation skills. The general skills that translators should have are closely related to factual knowledge and common sense. Acquisition of these general skills during translator training is especially important because several specialised translation graduates do not stay in the field they chose for their studies, but obtain positions beyond their training. Therefore, the acquisition of transferable skills allows them to adapt to different tasks and even open up a (new) market for them.

The participants argued that translation-related skills are linked to **language proficiency** (bilingualism and multilingualism) and **writing skills**. Language competence and the students' comprehension of their working languages bear considerable relevance to specialised translator training. Students should have the ability to express themselves (fluently and accurately) in all their working languages in order to understand and be understood by others.

Writing skills are crucial because students have to know how to use the correct register and style in the text (genre) to be translated. Related to writing skills and language proficiency is **metalinguistic awareness**, i.e. students should be able to reflect on their use of language. The example given by the participants was that students should know how to work on a phrase or sentence and know the semantic difference.

Translator training and translation curricula

Areas of translator training

The participants agreed that translation alone combines three areas:

- knowledge of (at least) two languages,
- cultural knowledge,
- factual knowledge: The question raised in the workshop was whether translation education institutions should impart this knowledge or whether it should be a prerequisite (to understand texts about specific topics in a given language). Partly, the institutions represented in this workshop offer thematic courses within their translation curricula to impart domain-specific knowledge. This way, students can select courses that provide an introduction to special domains such as economics or political institutions. Factual knowledge also means that students are able to link the content of the translation to the real world and understand the bigger picture, i.e. see the external context of the translated text. This means that students should always ask themselves whether their texts are logical and coherent. However, CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool segmentation is seen as an obstacle in this respect because sentence-level text segmentation impedes understanding and coherence.

Components of translator training

Forms of learning: Imparting knowledge and project-based training

Translation theory has to be an integral part of any translation curriculum. The knowledge of translation theories allows students to (develop the ability to) reflect on what they are doing. Among the translation theories taught at the participating institutions are Skopos theory, Newmark, Venuti, Nida, etc.

Project-based training for translation students is provided by the majority of the participating institutions. Examples of project-based training are (real) translation assignments completed by students in class. The client can be a department at the university. This translation assignment might include the translation of 20,000 words within three days. Before the students work on the assignment, they might have to prepare a terminological database. For example, one university has a terminological database compiled by students over a period of five years.



From the teachers' perspective, project-based learning (at one of the represented universities) encompasses:

1. Preparations for the translation, including the creation of a terminological database.
2. Translation done with CAT tools. Students can find all the information on the translation assignment in a Google Drive folder, including the procedure they have to follow.
3. Revision of the translation including self-revision and cross-revision (i.e. students revise each others work).

Other forms or components of project-based learning in various translation curricula include:

- organising a team
- working on and with terminology
- translating (with CAT tools)
- revising translations
- commenting on the work (of others).

Basically, students enrolled on translation programmes at the participating institutions have to adopt four different roles when working on translation projects:

- project manager
- terminologist
- translator
- reviser.

Internships

All the institutions represented require their students to take internships in translation agencies, some of them even in the first semester of their studies. This placement should show students how a translation agency works and allow them to familiarise themselves with a real working environment. However, the participating teachers explained that students sometimes encounter difficulties when searching for a work placement in a translation agency because translation agencies hardly employ in-house translators. Project managers are often the only employees in translation agencies. If students cannot find a work placement, they also have the opportunity to translate a certain number of pages during a translation course instead.

Employability of translation graduates

The participants argued that, currently, translation programmes do not produce “work-ready” graduates. On the one hand, there are some differences between the translation assignments that students get in class and those they receive from real clients. One reason is that on the market translators hardly get a translation job indicating the origin of the text or the purpose and audience of the translation. The requirement of meeting deadlines is also important in this respect because late submission of coursework does not have the same consequences as late submission of a translation to a client. However, in translation courses students are also required to prepare an estimate of costs and issue an invoice. This way of simulating real translation processes in translation agencies should make the translation courses and translation projects more market-oriented.

The participants confirm that a translation degree is not enough to guarantee graduates a good future career in the translation sector and that the translation classroom does not prepare graduates properly for the market. Nevertheless, translation curricula should include translation theory because it is a prerequisite to reflect on the translation process and its products.

Specialised translation training content and courses

Two main pillars of translator training in the represented universities are translation theory and practical specialised translation courses. Translation technology, e.g. CAT tool courses, also play an increasingly important role in translator training.

Translation theory:

The participants stated that translation theory taught in courses focuses on the translation of literary texts. They recommended that these theories should be adapted for specialised translation. An example given was that domestication and foreignisation also play a role in the translation of legal documents. The participants claimed that Christiane Nord's approach and the Skopos theory contain elements that can also be applied to specialised translator training.

Difference between general translation and specialised translation:

The specialised translation curricula at the represented universities included both general translation and specialised translation. General translation rather refers to the teaching of translation theory. In specialised translation, translation theory (drawn from general translation studies) is (only) used to comment on a given translation. From the perspective of the participants, it is also crucial to invent new examples and find new ways to provide an overview of theories, despite the explanations and examples in textbooks.

Domain knowledge:

Specialised translation courses comprise both translation courses and (domain-specific) courses in law, economics, science, etc. Translation courses focus on the translation of specialised texts such as legal documents, annual reports or marketing material. In domain-specific courses, the content and knowledge of the domain are paramount and not the act or process of translation itself. They give students the opportunity to acquire knowledge of a discipline. Understanding the basic concepts of a discipline is key for translation. In addition to broadening student knowledge, information search and use of comparable texts play a major role in specialised translation. Examples of the need for information search and corpora in specialised translation include the necessity of adhering to textual conventions, e.g. adapt the translation (style, phraseology, etc.) to the genre at hand.

Despite offering domain-specific courses, specialised translation programmes cannot educate students to become domain experts, e.g. specialists in law. Each discipline, e.g. law may have a plethora of different sub-domains and translation programmes cannot cater for training in each sub-domain.

Specialised translation courses:

In specialised translation courses, students translate domain-specific texts such as annual reports, contracts, judgements and economic texts. However, translation is not limited to legal and economic texts. Students also translate texts from the arts and humanities, medicine, architecture and other domains. Teachers use a variety of texts in specialised translation courses that should be translated by the students, but basically they use texts that provide an introduction to a subject area. This means that teachers aim at choosing texts according to market demands. Although newspaper articles provide an introduction to a subject area they are hardly translated in specialised translation courses. The participants did not consider newspaper articles to be specialised texts. However, analysing and translating them might still serve didactic purposes in the field of specialised translation with regard to compilation of information, localisation for different audiences and terminology work.



In these courses, teachers sometimes brief their students on the assignment and students might have to prepare the relevant terminology beforehand. After the students have finished their translations, the teachers compile and discuss the most frequent mistakes in the translations that have been submitted by students. Alternatively, students revise each other's work in pairs or in groups. Thus, the quality assessment of the translation (either done by teachers or fellow students) plays a central role in these courses.

Teachers:

The participants agreed that teachers of specialised translation courses should be actual translators.

(New) content to be taught:

The workshop participants emphasised that **revision** including post-editing should also be part of translator training. Students should know that there are different types of revision and not only translation from scratch. **Post-editing** of machine-translated texts should be part of translation curricula because it has to be learned separately. The teachers argued that in the field of post-editing, students should learn how to complete post-editing tasks in a time-saving way.

CAT (computer-assisted translation) tool courses:

The software used in CAT tool courses mentioned by the participants are SDL Trados, Memsource, memoQ, SDL Passolo, etc. In these courses, students working on the translation projects work collaboratively, as these are collaborative translation and localisation projects.

Translation, localisation, transcreation:

When talking about the content of specialised translator training, the participants also addressed the question of whether translation, localisation and transcreation are different areas or whether they are only different terms for the same concept (of translation). Whereas translation and localisation are regarded as separate areas and are also taught separately at the participating institutions, transcreation is a rather untaught topic because there is a lack of people who are willing to teach it. However, there is a market need for it because some companies have their own transcreation departments. The discussion about the difference between translation, localisation and transcreation resulted in the conclusion that we should differentiate between:

- sticking to the original (the source text) or
- going to the core of the text, e.g. in order to sell a product. In this case, linguists and marketing experts work together to adapt advertisements for a new target audience from a different culture.

Assessment

For assessment of a student's performance, the workshop participants use different approaches.

Peer revision or revision by teachers

Teachers use peer revision among the students or assess the performance of a student themselves. However, a teacher's (final) assessment is more important and the most reliable type of assessment.

Elements of assessment

When assessing a student's translation, teachers place special emphasis on the quality of the language used in the texts. The quality of a translation might be assessed by fellow students or by the teachers, depending on the relevance for grading. As mentioned before, teachers make a compilation of mistakes. The assessment of mistakes (either by teachers or by students) also depends on the language aspect, e.g. that the punctuation or grammar is correct. Depending on the translation assignment, the participating teachers also attach great importance to stylistic and linguistic conventions (according to the text genres) used in the translated material.

Formative and summative assessment

As mentioned before, the final assessment done by a teacher is crucial. In addition to a teacher's **final assessment and grading**, teachers also give constant feedback. Constant feedback includes the discussion of common translation (mistakes) in class on the one hand and individual personal feedback given to students on the other. When discussing the translations done by students in class, teachers use anonymised examples from students as basis for discussion. In contrast to this summative feedback, **personal feedback** is not given in class, but (often) as a teacher's written feedback on translations done by students. This written feedback might be a correction of mistakes or questions about the translation process and decisions, e.g. "Why did you do this? ... Did you consider XY?" In some cases, teachers do not provide corrections at all, but mention what the students should do instead, e.g. "you need to rephrase it". This means that the teachers do not redo the translations (for learning purposes) because students have to think about better solutions.

The majority of the participants said that the final grade consists of a student's partial achievements during a semester and a final exam. A teacher's grading decision thus relies on the review of a student's work throughout the semester and a **final exam**. The final exam can be either a home exam or a school exam. Whether a home exam is allowed or not is not only at the discretion of the teacher but also of the department. Some of these final exams are open-book exams or exams that even allow the use of the Internet, including Google Translate. Previously, at some universities, students complained about the situation if they were only allowed to use printed dictionaries and no electronic resources during exams and assignments. These resources are part of any translator's working environment. The participating teachers also confirmed that developing the ability to use these resources is an important aspect in translator training (see above: information mining). Furthermore, professional translators use all these resources in their everyday professional life. Since students should be prepared for the professional career as a translator, translator training should simulate the real world and its requirements. Therefore, translation students are basically allowed to use the Internet for assignments and exams. However, in some cases there are restrictions on Internet use during exams. One participant even said that students are no longer allowed to use the Internet for final exams, especially Google Translate, due to the advancement of neural machine translation.

Student reflection and translation theory:

For some assessments, teachers also require students to discuss their translation strategy applied to the translation at hand or in the translation process. Through this reflection, students should learn that there are different strategies for the translation of particular texts and parts of a text. For example, students have to decide whether to use a documentary or instrumental translation strategy and reflect on this decision. The teachers then assess the student's level of reflection.



There are also some research projects that require students to use the software TransLog. This tool helps them to reflect on what they were doing during the translation and the revision process.

Interestingly enough, many students were surprised when they saw what they actually did in the translation process. There was a divergence between what they thought they were doing and what they actually did. The biggest divergence was between the perceived production time and the actual production time, i.e. the time needed for translation.

Reflection is important in professional development. It is also regarded as a transferable skill. The participants reported that the knowledge that students gained during theoretical education, e.g. knowledge of translation theories, required them to restructure their skill set.

The expertise model by Ericsson ([Ericsson's Theory of Expertise](#)) is used in some cases to assess professional translation competence vs. bilingual competence.

Peer revision:

The participants' experience shows that it is hard for students to assess the solutions found by others. However, peer revision enables them to work with each other and help develop their interpersonal skills. Therefore, the participating teachers think that it is necessary that students learn how to give peer feedback and revise each other's work.

Formative or summative assessment:

The participating teachers acknowledge that they use both formative and summative assessment in their courses. They have a holistic approach, i.e. they want to make sure that the translated text is acceptable and also accepted in the market.

This holistic approach includes:

- interpretation of the source text
- terminology
- phraseology
- grammar.

Conclusion

Competences, content and assessment are major areas of interest within the field of specialised translator education. The outcomes of a group discussion with teachers, translators and researchers during a workshop on language for specific purposes provide incentives for modernising specialised translator training.

The findings show that the European Master's in Translation competence list suggests that translation competence encompasses both general skills and translation-related-skills. The two main pillars of specialised translator training are translation theory and practical specialised translation courses. Translation theory is a prerequisite to reflect on the translation process. Project-based learning requires students to collaboratively complete (real) translation assignments, thus broadening their transferable skills and enhancing their employability. However, a translation degree does not guarantee a translation career.

For assessment, teachers focus on the linguistic quality of the translations. Although a teacher's final assessment is crucial, teachers also give constant feedback and use peer revision. Some teachers use Ericsson's expertise model to assess professional translation competence.



It was suggested that the training of prospective specialised translators should focus on project-based learning to prepare students for the market. This includes teaching translation technology and (new) content such as post-editing as well as doing work placements. Almost all universities require students to take a compulsory work placement (at a translation agency or related profession) to enhance their graduates' employability.

Transversal or transferable skills are taught indirectly via project-based training, i.e. students work collaboratively on semi-real translation assignments including forming a team, doing project management, etc. This suggests that project-based learning is key. Students work in groups and adopt different roles (project manager, translator, reviser, terminologist). To simulate a real-life working environment of a translator, they also have to work with CAT tools, electronic resources and adhere to certain process steps, e.g. invoicing.

The ability to reflect on one's product and decisions is also a transversal skill. Therefore, there is no translator training without translation theory. Translation theory also helps to reflect on processes and products. This means that in addition to completing simulated translation assignments, students have to reflect on their translations in specialised translation courses.