

Session IV

Transdisciplinary Translators?

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For the first time in the history of humanity, the majority of the skills acquired by a person at the beginning of his or her professional career will be obsolete by the end.

May this fact be depressing or challenging, it portrays the landscape in which translators learn and work. How are we to train translators in a highly technological world, where the business of accelerating, renewing, and circulating information strives on the proliferation of individualised ports with independent access to virtual networks? We are concerned with translator education in the realm of cyberculture and are here proposing a set of competences in which sustainable development and human capital are at stake.

Cyberculture in the knowledge society

Cybercultural anthropologist Pierre Lévy considers our digital world very optimistically because he firmly believes in its capacity to harbour collective intelligence through the exchange of knowledge. In other words, technology should be used to create social bonds and build on human capital. This humanistic project is potentialised by new modes of communication and access through networks. However, it is not realistic to speak of cyberculture without mentioning the negative effects of hypermodernity. With its exacerbation of the present, hypermodernity deregulates and individualises time, which is ruled by three phenomenon: the cult of the now stimulated by “neophilia” (or love of perpetual change), the hegemony of technical modernisation and performance, as well as the culture of speed. The psychological price that we are left to pay is general insecurity, since “the least predictable the future is, the more mobile, flexible, reactive, and constantly ready to change we have to be.” Cyberculture is part of the knowledge economy fueled by the constant flow of renewed services, ideas, and communications, where thinking, learning, and innovating are the main drives of success. Translation rates among the prime professions of the knowledge society, since it mediates the flow of information, transacting knowledge by insuring its momentum through linguistic transformations. Because they process information and generate knowledge, translators contribute substantially to informational capitalism. As teachers, we have a duty toward future translators in making sure they are intellectually, technologically, and socially compatible with this new economy, but also critical of its engulfing effects and apt to circumvent them.

An epistemological change

So how is cyberculture affecting the translator's profession? For one, production **time** has dramatically decreased with the power of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools. As well, the translator's **workspace** has paradoxically shrunk down to exiguous peer-conscious cubicles and stretched out to include gravitating freelance professionals and employees working on flex time from home. Lastly, translators have never relied so much on **machines** to get their work done in the history of their profession (a simple two-hour power shortage in any translation bureau will confirm this fact). The translator views and uses technology as an indispensable assistant to enhance performance (in quantity and uniformity), delegate repetitive tasks, increase memory, improve filing systems, and accelerate searches. Furthermore, through collective (or connective) intelligence, professional translators interact positively by pulling together and pooling their means using CAT tools, thus better able to handle higher work volumes and soulless delays. As working environments of interconnected translators become more and more interactive, knowledge is a dynamic construction rather than an individual possession and translating is no longer a loner task.

Another sign of today's times, the freelance translator embraces opportunities of independent work, personal growth, and self-management often to find herself bogged down by financial insecurity from uneven workflow and slow-footed payers, exhaustion through work overload and strenuous turnaround times, as well as being burdened by recurring technological upgrades and increasing professional isolation from working solo. Can translator educators overlook this reality, especially when a great proportion of translators aspire to e-work? Should university professors address these "hypermodern" concerns? The question has arisen differently in a broader context, leading policy makers in the Canadian province of Québec to launch an educational reform aimed at preparing elementary pupils for the 21st century so that they will be able to potentialise the positive forces of the knowledge economy. We are hoping that they will act in and even beyond the knowledge society, rather than react to it and retract from it.

Transversal competences

The transdisciplinary translators that I have in mind should practice and acquire the five following transversal competences throughout their training:

1. how to devise efficient working methods (organisational skills);
2. how to defend one's point of view (argumentative skills);
3. how to work in collaboration with others (cooperative skills);
4. how to potentialise technology (ergonomic skills);
5. how to discriminate good information from bad (critical skills).

"Transversal" is taken to mean not belonging to any discipline in particular and emphasises the movement required to slide and borrow from one set of disciplinary competences to the next depending on the situation at hand. The recurrence of the prefix "trans" suggests that the translator is an agent of the kinetic kind: mobile and limber, therefore compatible with the knowledge economy. In order to develop transversal competences, we suggest bringing to the classroom real-life situations, such as having the group act as a translation firm that has been asked to translate an annual report. This kind of project fosters a positive experience of real team work, where students must and can rely on one another, share the work to be done, argue constructively amongst themselves, care for a collective goal, put technology to good use, evaluate each other's work, and ultimately accomplish more than they could ever consider individually. Through working in a collectively intelligent environment such as the classroom today, students will acquire the basis for working in a connectively intelligent network tomorrow. In the end, training translators should cristalise Pierre Lévy's idea of collective intelligence, in that it is "*universally distributed intelligence*, constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills. [...] No one knows everything, everyone knows something, all knowledge resides in humanity."

Speaking Language to Law: The Case of Europe

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After studying philosophy and law in Germany, Simone GLANERT moved to France where she trained as a French jurist. Having specialized in comparative legal studies at the Sorbonne, she is now completing her Ph.D. on the matter of the translatability of law. Simone GLANERT has recently presented her work in Brussels, Cambridge, and Montreal.

Over the last decades, the determination to tame political strife coupled with economic considerations concerning the globalization of world markets have prompted an ever-larger group of Western European countries to unite in the quest for a supranational order. As it was realized that neither politics nor economics could be neatly detached from other spheres of social action, the question of further legal integration in the form of a common law of Europe eventually arose. Today, the European Union is witness to a seemingly endless series of initiatives seeking to unify (or “harmonize”) entire sectors of the law. The most spectacular such enterprise is, of course, that seeking to replace all national civil codes with a European civil code—an initiative warmly applauded by European institutional bodies. This willed interaction of laws entails an interaction of languages. Yet, the defenders of uniformization of law ignore the linguistic stakes in a way that can only summon the traductologist. Given her epistemological assumptions, the latter is however led to a reaction that the lawyer will readily find subversive. Sensitive to the fact that law is carried by language, the traductologist will want to explain to the lawyer how her uniformization agenda accounts neither for language’s *persistence* nor for its *transience*.

Within the scope of uniformization of law, national laws, embodied in a tradition and embedded in a culture, are progressively being replaced by a single “European” law. However, the violent introduction of a new legal terminology in order to ensure a commonality of law—and thus a common legal thought—runs into serious difficulties. Indeed, the specificity of linguistic forms persists as the uniform law finds itself necessarily translated back into the various national languages. First, given the normative character of the legal text, each linguistic version is meant to render exactly the same idea. But, as the traductologist well knows, two or more languages cannot signify *identically*. Thus, irrespective of any purported uniformization of law, each national language continues to signify according to its own structures. Second, once the uniform text has been translated back into the national language, this language becomes the object of an interpretation by the national judge—a practice that reinforces the national language’s claim to continued, local, existence. Given the unavoidable transformations of the source text, as it is rendered into the numerous European languages and interpreted at local level, it is no longer appropriate to speak in terms of a “uniform”, i.e. one and the same, law for Europe.

If linguistic diversity thus inevitably endures, the fact is that it has already been repressed in other important respects. First, the uniform law, rather than being created *ex nihilo*, is grounded in national legislation, case-law, and scholarship on the basis of studies undertaken by jurists originating from all member states within the European Union. The recourse to English as a working language, for practical and financial reasons, compels most of the participants to operate in a foreign language and thus to relinquish their native language. English, reduced to a purely utilitarian function, becomes a means of communication. The local language, on the contrary, partaking in a specific tradition and a particular culture, fades away before English. Second, local languages are made to efface themselves as they are replaced by a language—English—that can

only inadequately substitute for them. Indeed, although the English language acts as the “working” representative of local languages, it can only conduct its mission in a deficient manner. The obligatory passage through the working language leads the laws as expressed in the national languages to undergo significant and irreversible mutations given that English cannot accommodate their specificity. For both of these reasons, local language shows itself to be vulnerable.

On account of those two admittedly paradoxical sets of arguments, the traductologist shows that the lawyer largely underestimates the impact of language on the ongoing process of uniformization of laws in Europe. Undoubtedly, the traductologist’s reaction to the uniformization agenda stands in contrast to the translator’s traditional image, which is that of a servant or mediator. But the translator has been invisible long enough and should now be disposed to criticize those normative texts that imply a linguistic diversity and yet postulate the univocity of meaning. Through her work, the traductologist emphasizes the immense value of interdisciplinarity, which alone permits a more sensitive understanding of the implications of uniformization of law. In the lawyer’s view, this interdisciplinarity will however be apprehended as *indisciplined*. This is because the traductologist’s brand of interdisciplinarity will be seen to generate disorder within law as it demonstrates that the seamless legal order to which the partisans of uniformization of law so fervently aspire is effectively doomed.

Categorization of Translation Voids in English – Arabic - English Translation

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Introduction

The task of a translator is almost always a demanding one since the indirect communication s/he aims to achieve is not at all a simple process. Some degree, however small, of communication loss is expected with the absence of the message originator be it the writer, in most cases, or the speaker in other cases. The translator in such cases struggles to keep more than the basic semantic element present in the text or discourse s/he into his rendering. This seemingly basic and direct task requires that the translator identifies herself or himself with the writer and his/ her intended message where the direct meaning is only part of the mission.

With the above points in mind, it seems rather necessary to consider the translator’s job from a practical viewpoint to see how his translation can be evaluated and rather improved.

The difficulties the translator faces are varied. S/he will have to handle many aspects of the source including differences between the two languages in question together with their cultures i.e. the kind of text or discourse and its style, or even historical and geographical peculiarities in the text to name a few. A prominent feature of the translator’s tiring job is his struggle to find the

proper host form for the source key words, at times or to coin a new one if necessary since many forms resist being rendered in a native receptor equivalent. In such cases sometimes the translator has to coin a new word to meet the unfamiliar source form. S/he may find an alternative to this by writing this unfamiliar form in the receptor's alphabet. The examples of such coined or introduced forms into Arabic are numerous and one may cite here example words such as **goal** **جول** in the field of football. Later, another more native Arabic form (*hadaf* - هدف) has been introduced, but its use is limited to rather formal and sometimes different contexts. Other interesting examples of English forms translated into Arabic are words like *tank* which is sometimes a military vehicle and other times a container for liquids. Arabic translators being aware of this contextual difference have the word *dababah* دبابة for the military vehicle but *tank* تنك when referring to the container. Also, we have the English word bomb (n.) which seemed to meet a lexical gap in Arabic and for this gap Arabic translators used a word which sounds carry the noise of the bomb i.e. *qunbulah* قنبلة. Finally the word aggressive was once the subject of a strange decision by an Arabic speaker to translate it as *labat* لبط where the context was of a job advertisement and the person required was to be aggressive. The Arabic form *labat* again is an example cover for the lack of a direct equivalent in similar contexts; it means in colloquial Egyptian Arabic someone who is troublemaker. These examples show the difficulty translators face when the source form requires a little and sometimes a lot more than just a counterpart or a substitute.

In the following account a general overview of this difficulty will be introduced in the frame of the terms used in the literature and the treatment of different writers of the perplexity of such terms. The terms of translation voids or gaps will be compared with concepts such as lack of translation equivalent and reaching the point of untranslatables. Categorization of such cases on the bases of language or culture causes (see Catford 1965) will be further analyzed to see how other factors may contribute to the creation of such untranslatables on one side and voids or gaps on the other.

Different Terms; Voids, Gaps or Lack of Equivalent

Why do translators sometimes describe the difficulty in rendering some source language word or expression as a void, gap, or lack of equivalent? What is an equivalent which absence can manifest in a void or a gap? And why is equivalent considered as a target to be achieved during the process of translation? To answer such basic questions, one should consider the approach of some to translate a text literally i.e. word for word while others will be content with offering the message regardless of the wording of the source (sense for sense). This will mean, on several occasions that a translator will be haunted by the denotative meaning of individual words of the source text in the strictest possible way or will try the more sensible; i.e. the connotative meaning of such words. Most writers on the subject emphasize that any one word or lexical form can have any meaning where the context is the overriding factor in deciding on such meaning, see Newmark (1995). Certain texts resist having their lexemes abandoned such as scientific and to some extent legal texts. On the other hand, translators and writers are not in agreement on how to describe the lack of a receptor language word, idiom, or any linguistic and sometimes cultural form to substitute a word, a phrase, an idiom or an expression. The range of such absence is described in the literature using different terms and labels. Untranslatables on the part of the source and voids and gaps on the part of the receptor are used with the term equivalence standing between the two extremes to describe a linguistic notion or a semantic label being sought in the translation process. Since the term equivalence has received more attention than both translation voids and translation gaps, it is worth reviewing before addressing the other two terms. The notions of untranslatables and untranslatability will be briefly investigated.

Translating and Interpreting in the Inter-Governmental Setting: Traditional Models and New Challenges

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The skills required of linguistic practitioners working in the inter-governmental arena are fairly well defined, and the strengths and weaknesses of traditional educational models and methods used to develop those skills are fairly well understood. But, although a blueprint has been drawn, the building has not yet been built. With some noteworthy exceptions, most academic structures and curricula today do not fully prepare translators and interpreters for international professional life in the 21st Century and inter-governmental organizations are having difficulty finding and recruiting enough qualified linguists or maintaining training programs to fill the educational gaps.

In considering how interpreters should be trained, a good place to begin is by looking at what will be expected of them in working life. Regular users of interpretation nowadays have become “sophisticated consumers”, demanding a consistently high level of performance, while apparently also recognizing the value of the service they demand. In a survey of over 200 users of interpretation services commissioned in 1993-1994 by the International Association of Conference Interpreters, one of the most interesting findings was the following: “Conference participants...realize that the broad educational and cultural background for which interpreters are envied does not come ready-made but has to be worked on continuously.”

The same survey found that users were aware of “the fact that interpretation is not a mere translation of the spoken word but is an act of cultural mediation, conveying the intellectual and emotional content of the original.

These findings point to a clear expectation among regular users of professional-level conference interpretation: they expect interpreters to have both the necessary cultural background and the necessary training in interpretation skills. For a profession that was long undervalued, this is good news.

However, Higher-Education interpreter training programs often fall short in one or the other of these two areas, failing to give the student a broad enough general background or failing to teach the specific skills and techniques that interpreters need to provide sustained quality of performance. That is perhaps symptomatic of a more general trend: “...the frequently observed disconnection of higher education courses from changing needs in the economic, social and political environments.” That disconnection, described in just those terms by the EU Thematic Network Project in the Area of Languages, is seen as grounds for the EU to pursue “a re-orientation in higher education language studies” which “requires continuous consultation and co-operation between Higher Education institutions and other stakeholders.”

Today, such a re-orientation is needed not only by the EU but also by other international organizations, because the volume of communication and the number of languages used in multilateral relations and multilingual communications are expanding. The EU Directorate of Interpretation (DG-SCIC) has available 700 to 800 interpreters for 50 to 60 meetings per day, ranging from a two-language encounter requiring only one interpreter to simultaneous interpretation into and out of 20 languages, requiring at least 60 interpreters. For each new language the EU adds, approximately 40 full-time interpreters must be added. At United Nations Headquarters, approximately 130 staff interpreters are available to service meetings conducted in 6 official languages. Throughout the UN system, worldwide, there were approximately 6,000 meetings with interpretation planned for the 2004-2005 biennium.

How are language services on that scale managed? One assumption thus far has been that the services must be primarily in-house: “An internal service is essential if suitable interpreting is always to be available at short notice and if overall quality and confidentiality are to be guaranteed”. This assumption generally still holds true and tends to ensure that there will continue to be a substantial number of “real jobs” for intergovernmental interpreters, even though the optimal mix between in-house and free-lance interpreters is increasingly viewed as being about 50/50.

A second basic assumption thus far has been that an organization’s official languages will be treated equally, i.e. given fully symmetrical coverage. In the UN, the governing legislative mandates make it clear that operating in the multilingual mode is done not only for practicality or convenience but as of right. In 1995, General Assembly Resolution 50/11 on Multilingualism declared that “...the universality of the United Nations *and its corollary, multilingualism*, entail for each State Member of the Organization, irrespective of the official language in which it expresses itself, *the right and the duty to make itself understood and to understand others...*” In 1999 this was followed by a Report of the Secretary General providing for detailed measures to implement multilingualism within the UN Secretariat. In 2000, a further General Assembly resolution provided for the appointment of a senior Secretariat official as coordinator of questions relating to multilingualism throughout the Secretariat. In 2001, a more comprehensive report of the Secretary General analyzed several issues involved in implementing the principle of equal treatment of languages while making the best use of available resources.

Similarly, by a decision of the EU’s General Affairs Council on 13 June 2005, the EU has now expanded the number of official languages that may be used in the EU Council and possibly other EU institutions to include not just the 20 official EU languages, but all languages whose status is recognized by a member country’s constitution. This will make it possible for some statements to be made, for example, in the four languages of the autonomous regions of Spain.

Against this background of steady growth in the volume of work and the number of languages, it became apparent that intergovernmental organizations stood to gain a great deal from co-ordinating their efforts at defining the language professions, setting consistent standards and pursuing joint training initiatives. In July 2001 in Geneva, an open-ended Working Group on training was set up with the mandate of reporting to IAMLADP 2002 in Vienna on training of language staff in five key areas: translation, conference interpreting, editing, précis-writing and proof-reading. Input was received from International Organisations, members of IAMLADP and universities. The Working Group completed its mandate and reported to IAMLADP in 2002. A number of points emerged from the findings, such as the shortage of qualified staff, the need for life-long learning, the lack of recognition of their role and work, the gap between employers’ needs and university training and the need to adapt to new technologies in the workplace.

Teaching Translation Technology to Translators: Pawns and Knights of the New Millennium

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Curricular review is a necessary phase in the history of academic programs and a sign of healthy development. Yet continuous and steady improvement always proves to be a challenge; even more so when a discipline faces a paradigm shift such as translation has faced in the last decade.

Indeed, in Kuhnian terms, translation started to morph towards the mid 1990s, suffering a series of anomalies against a background of a much consolidated field. Translation went from being a select, human scale, slow paced industry, based on paper communications to extending its services exponentially to new users, surpassing human capacity, producing at speeds never conceived before. The originator of such shift: technology. Technology has changed the way we do translation as a business and as an intellectual process.

Technology skills are no longer an exotic plus that can get a professional an extra benefit or a higher rate; they are a prerequisite to get the job. In this context, traditional translation programs, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, have been including in their curricula technology-related courses covering translation memory, terminology, localization, and project management tools. These courses are usually designed to fill the gap in procedural technical knowledge that translators need to enter the marketplace.

Institutionally, the academic questions about curricular review include the *suitability*, the *specificity*, the *validity*, and the *effectiveness* of the new offerings. Pedagogically, a debate between a *technological classroom* versus *independent technology courses* is on.

Graduates of translation programs are entering an industry with varied needs and demands. Translators are more than language professionals, they can be conceived more as language communicators than language experts. They do use and may also produce language knowledge, but that is only one of their skills.

Among the competencies that translators use *language competency* is no doubt essential. But other skills sets are just as relevant. Following the research of PACTE Group, the other skill sets necessary in professional translation include *cultural*, *translation*, *professional*, and *strategic* competencies. Technological knowledge is usually considered a professional skill, and, in most cases, it can be described as *procedural*, i.e., the knowledge of specific sequences of steps to be performed in particular tools.

Technological literacy, however, involves more than a mere procedural knowledge of select applications, and expands over all of the translator competencies, almost as a meta-competence (along with language) by which translators acquire, structure, and put to use all of the other competencies. Technological literacy involves an understanding of the purpose, functions and mechanisms of the tools.

Let's take a step back and address the question of which tools we are talking about, or **what translation technology is**. Translation technology consists of a vast array of tools that support the translation process from beginning to end. From the point of view of the translation process, we can think of the sequence of stages in a project and classify the tools accordingly.

In simple terms, translation projects have initiation, planning, production, monitoring, and completion stages. In the initiation, planning, and completion stages, the salient tools used include: *communications tools* (email, Internet, databases, and networking tools), *management tools* (project management, marketing, accounting and budgeting tools) and *globalization, internationalization and localization tools* (for content and format handling; for instance, aligners merge source and target text in a searchable database for later research or reuse, and DTP tools turn text into ready deliverables).

During the production and monitoring stages, the salient tools used include *writing tools* (text processors, IMEs, spell and grammar checkers), *research tools* (digital and electronic sourcing and documentation, such as dictionaries, databases, and glossaries; indexers, which are full-text searcher for text queries; and concordancers, which retrieve instances of text in a monolingual or multilingual corpus), *terminology tools* (for term extraction, and record creation, storage, and retrieval), and *integration and automation tools*, (translation memory tools and machine translation).

Now, let's go back to the question of how to provide technological literacy to students, striking a balance between theory and practice, and what it means to teach technology theory. Torres del Rey points out that just as translation students do not learn generative grammar, but rather applied discourse and textual analysis, they should be taught technology theory as it becomes meaningful and applicable to their professional practice (Torres del Rey, 2005).

As pointed out before, translation programs have incorporated technology as separate or independent courses, rather than integrate technology into the teaching of other courses. Although a technological classroom might seem ideal, a number of issues arise: student readiness --level and disparity of student computer literacy-- and institutional readiness --the knowledge and availability of faculty, tools acquisition, and technical support, especially difficult to obtain in programs offering several language combinations, or language combinations including Asian, European, and exotic languages--.

By incorporating technology instruction into independent courses, it is possible to contain or mitigate those issues: students can be taught or asked to fulfill computer literacy requirements before enrolling into technology courses, a smaller number of specialized faculty is needed, and tools and support are limited to technical classes rather than extending across all language departments.

But perhaps the most relevant benefit is that students can devote their attention to acquiring a *mental representation* of the structure, functions, and integration of the technology as they apply it to the development and execution of their different translation competencies. In linguistic terms, students need a working knowledge of the signs, meanings, and grammatical rules the tools use.

Indeed, the elements, values, and combinatory possibilities of the tools are recurrent features across the technology spectrum. Between the knowledge of theoretical components of the technology (logic, programming languages, etc.) and the knowledge of their procedural application and results (sentence reuse, fuzzy matching, etc. and the menus and commands to obtain them), students need help to make a pedagogical leap. Such leap consists in creating working mental representations of the principles used in translation technology. As an example, students do not need to know the algorithms used in a particular tool to obtain a word count, but they need to understand what algorithms can do, how words behave as computational objects, and how all this relates to linguistic tasks.

Professional Education of 21st Century Translators and Interpreters

In conclusion, translation technology training can be incorporated into translation programs in meaningful ways without stirring the entire curricula, by implementing separate technology courses that should have a certain degree of interaction with other translation courses so that students can apply the technology to the building of all of their translation competencies. Also, technology training should address the questions of why technology is applied, what it can do for the translator, and how it works, without loosing the student to the intricacies of computer theory or to the ephemeral satisfaction of procedural demonstrations.