

TRANSLATOR TRAINING AND MODERN MARKET DEMANDS

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Abstract

The development of new information and communication technology influences an ever-changing professional reality that requires almost constant updating. Market demands must necessarily find their way into teaching practices, which can respond to the expectations created. The present day reality of the translation market, from a Spanish perspective, reveals deficiencies in translator training. It is not only in Spain that translation teachers will have to re-think existing translator training programmes in terms of present-day market demands to professionals. The present article presents a hands-on course involving concrete translation assignments in a simulated 'real-life' set-up, designed to familiarise students with their future working conditions. We call it the 'Professional Approach for Translator Training' and it is already implemented at the University of Granada. We hope that others elsewhere can use our ideas, although the specific aims of this programme are geared towards Spanish syllabi, especially since other universities plan to introduce new technology or have already done so (e.g. the University of Leeds, UK). The authors are members of the Aula.int team and are teachers of translation at the University of Granada, Spain.

Key words: Spain; translation teaching; information and communication technology; professional translation; labour market.

Introduction

The last half of the twentieth century was characterised by revolutions in information and communication technology that have influenced numerous professions, including translation. The new technology has made translators' work easier, but, in order to meet market needs, information and communication technology must occupy their rightful place in student training. (Archer 2002; Askehave 2000) The demanding professional translation market expects would-be professionals to have a broad knowledge of the subject matter of the text, to use a large number of computer tools proficiently, and to be versatile in the sense that they can master all elements in the translation process.

Since translation is multidisciplinary, translator training programmes must instil not only proficient language command in both source- and target languages, but also, equally important, must bring together knowledge and skills that belong to different disciplines, such as documentation, terminology, desktop publishing, as well as some knowledge of specialised texts. Students must learn this so that they can ultimately thrive collectively as members of a profession.

The point of reference for this article is the relationship between the training process and the profession. Therefore, we first examine the characteristics of today's translation market and analyse the issues that are addressed in modern translator training. We conclude by suggesting methods that can help teachers fill in gaps in present-day translator training, here, of course, with the main focus on Spain, but with ideas and elements that can inspire courses with (some of) the same aims in other countries.

The translation market

The impact of information and communication technology on the translation

market has given rise to some interesting debates and reflections (Pym 1998). The technology is relevant in the production, transmission, and distribution of information. Accordingly, translation teachers cannot ignore computer technology in the training of their students and in their own professional development. This is particularly obvious in today's translation market, which we briefly describe, and which can justly be called global, decentralised, specialised, dynamic, virtual, and demanding.

The global market

International and *global* are the terms that best define the markets and societies within which we live. Commercial initiatives have gone beyond geopolitical boundaries and nowadays any company bent on success in the marketplace must cross borders, advertise its products abroad and participate in international trade. This is not an option, but a means for survival. International trade is undergoing a constant increase with general economic growth (Ørsted 2001). As international communication has grown, translation by electronic and other means has become of vital importance to companies in industry, commerce, and so on. The volume of documents to be translated in order to reach target groups beyond national borders has multiplied manifold. We must also take into account the speed of the flow and the dissemination of information as a result of the developments in technology. In this context, Europeans must not overlook the fact that these days the European Union institutions play an important role. The constant expansion of the European Union – and the ensuing increase in the number of official languages (at present 20) – calls for consensus and adaptation of uniform guidelines, regulations, rules, etc. Globalisation and the so-called *Euro Area* are driving forces behind the increased demand for translations, as they promote international trade and tourism (one of the major industries in many countries, including Spain), and international relationships in general. In order to face this variety of demands and to handle the support tools available to translators, such as new systems of terminology and documentation management (Ørsted 2001), and resource use and maximisation, special attention is required in the training of future translators.

A decentralised market

As a result of new technologies and the increasingly blurred economic borders, the translation services required by a company, an institution, or a client are not confined by geographical boundaries. Physical distance is no obstacle to the successful conclusion of a translation assignment. The market is now decentralised, as we are now dealing with both national and international markets (Pym 1998). This is advantageous as it expands the field of the profession, yet it also poses problems. Translators find it ever more difficult to define their specialisation and, ultimately, their training. In professional environments, the subject matters of source texts are, in principle, infinite; work often involves unusual language combinations; and the computer tools necessary for developing translation work can be quite varied. In the final analysis, all

translators are competing with other translators from all over the world.

A specialised market

Along with market decentralisation, technology also indirectly influences the text types with which translators work. There is, of course, an ever present demand for financial, commercial, and industrial text, but the advances in telecommunications and software, among others, also account for a considerable and increasing volume of translation. Even a brief look at the current market reveals that material related to software and websites is now often translated by professionals. The adaptation to different languages and cultures, 'localisation', involves much more than a simple translation of the contents, menus, on-line assistance, and manuals: if we consider an ordinary website, we see that the content consists of text and images; if it is to appeal to audiences in other countries, it is necessary to translate and adapt both to each foreign language and culture in which the client wants to address potential audiences. It is, in other words, necessary to produce a network of interconnected 'global and international' as well as national websites, which local audiences will read as fluently as if they were written by mother tongue authors in the target language, since readers will react negatively that websites contain *translationese* or, simply, poor translations (cf. Corte 2002). Such localisation generates novel ways of working, new special skills, and, therefore, new training needs. The technological specialisation of the market is not limited to emerging fields only. Therefore, new technological tools should have an impact on more traditional areas of translation teaching in terms of the changes they introduce in professional work. Nowadays, it is unthinkable to be a professional translator, be it for publishing houses or in order to make bids for subcontracts for the European Union, without having access to Translation Memories and desktop publishing software. Without these, there is no profit to be earned in translation work.

A dynamic market

In today's changing society, it is difficult to characterise the translation market unambiguously. It is hard to predict which sectors will demand most translations even in the medium-term future, since the translations called for are often closely related to the latest technology, such as mobile phone systems, or to technical innovations, as in the car industry. Translators are forced to 'learn and train' in new fields, often all alone, and they must always be up-to-date in terms of new advances.

A virtual market

The Internet and the information and communication technology revolutions have altered the working environments of translators, including the relationship between translators and clients, both as mediators and as end users. Previously, translators were available in and provided their services in a specific geographical area. There are no longer such limitations; in fact, most translation services are offered and supplied through the Internet. For many freelance translators, this is their main and sometimes only means for attracting clients. Some agencies prefer to exist exclusively in virtual reality,

whereas others have 'physical' premises in order to coordinate the work of their translation teams, but even so, these teams often service 'virtual' or *on-line* clients. Most business relationships are established via the Internet by means of the translator's or agency's portal or by means of the many directories that offer postings to freelancers free of charge. Such contacts allow fluent, economical, and efficient communication.

A demanding market

The technological tools and utilities that are now available to translators, on the one hand, have made some work easier, but these resources have also added new problems. The translation market sets increasingly unrealistic and short deadlines and delivery dates, and the daily volume of translation is growing at an incredible rate. Except for a privileged few who can afford to reject translation briefs, most professional translators have to accept these conditions or they will suffer: clients have become more strict about the 'quality' of translations or, rather, about their own 'criteria for quality', which restricts the 'freedom' of translators. Nowadays, computer tools applied to translation and text processing allow clients to develop their own glossaries, terminology databases, and Translation Memories. Although access to these bases for specific (or a series of) assignments for the same client enables translators to achieve a higher degree of terminological and phraseological precision and consistency and, therefore, a higher level of quality and productivity (Theologitis 1998), bases from specific firms may cause 'errors' that persist over time, either because the terminology databases are not revised often enough or out of negligence regarding updating. Ultimately, translators must respect the strict rules set by clients concerning style and quality guarantees, because if they are not observed, this may lead to rejection of the translation by agency revisers or by the clients themselves.

Translator training

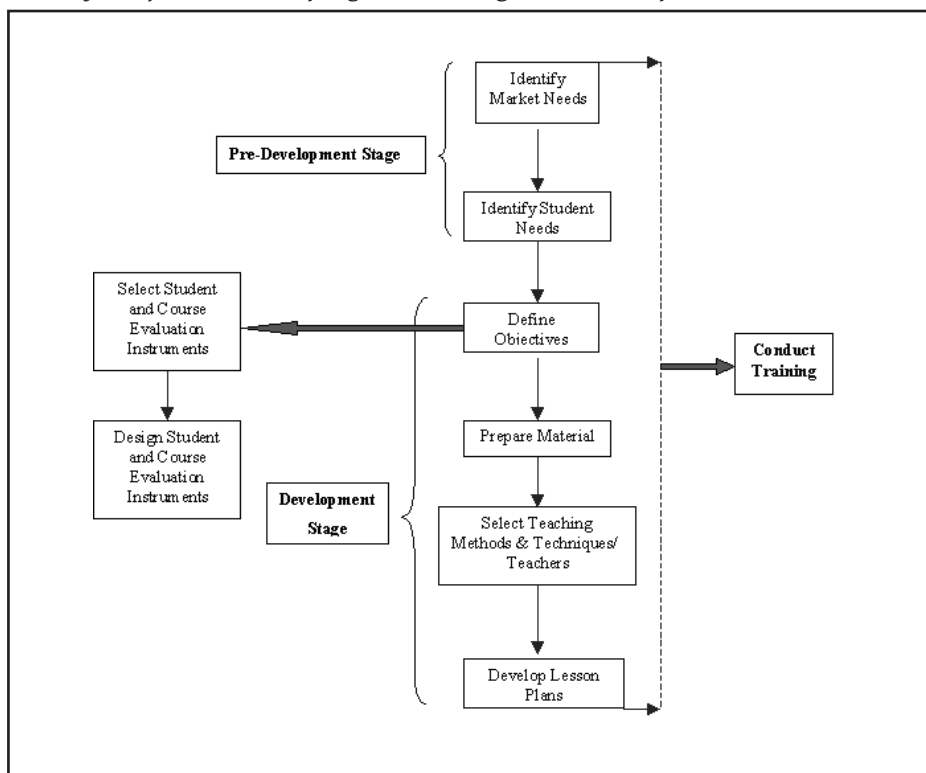
In Spain – as well as in many other countries – translator training has not received the attention it deserves until fairly recently (Gabr 2001): traditionally, translators received unsystematic training based on, e.g. methods of trial-and-error, arbitrary teaching methods, translation activities connected primarily with foreign language acquisition, or on the study of a foreign language and culture (Caminade and Pym 1998). To some extent this has changed. In recent years, the kind of training that focused on purely linguistic aspects has been supplemented with translation theory and processes, other instrumental skills that are useful for language professionals (such as documentation techniques, terminology, use of tools, computer resources, etc.), and areas of specialisation for translators, such as economics, medicine, and law.

All the above components are well-known to professional translators, who consider them important. Morry Sofer (1999) states that translators must develop search and research techniques and must be able to obtain basic reference sources in order to produce a quality translation. If translators do not have a good command of such techniques, they cannot translate texts concerning some specialist subjects and fields. Nevertheless, in our present-day *informational society* (Ortoll 2003), in which the generation and transmission of

information is a major source of productivity, translation programmes must design training strategies that can develop professional informational skills. The Internet and the proliferation of electronic information resources make it imperative that translators have an expert knowledge of the use of information to be able to cope with 'information overloads'. In addition, they must be able to locate information as well as apply adequate criteria for assessing the quality of the information found. The use of other skills, such as desktop publishing, stems from the needs of non-intermediary clients.

Before they start any course in translation, students must have basic knowledge of the Internet and the use of e-mail. However, the links between translators and computer tools are much stronger, so in order to work with and produce digital material, students must learn to stay constantly up-to-date with new computer technology. Therefore, students must become familiarised with all electronic and computer tools available and used in professional work (Gouadec 2000). The main concern in today's translator training programmes is the need to offer students these skills in combination with an acceptable degree of specialisation. We should not aim at training students in highly specialised market profiles, as these may change – or even disappear – by the time our students enter the labour market: students tend to decide on their area of interest at the end of their studies, if at all. In fact, most have little idea within which translation sector they will eventually be employed (Gouadec 2000).

Figure 1:
Cycle of translation programme design and development (Gabr 2001)



As shown in Figure 1, Gabr (2001) uses a framework inspired by professional translation in order to set up a translator training programme. The first step is to identify market needs, followed by determination of students' needs. Only then can course goals and materials be developed. Our approach, which we call the "Professional Approach to Translator Training", is based on these last-mentioned ideas and is therefore a hands-on course using concrete translations in a simulated or 'mock' professional setting.

A Professional Approach to Translator Training

From the moment translators receive a translation brief until the delivery of the final product, they must carry out a series of tasks that can be divided into four stages:

- documentation, both in the source and the target languages;
- terminology;
- translation;
- revision, edition, and desktop publishing.

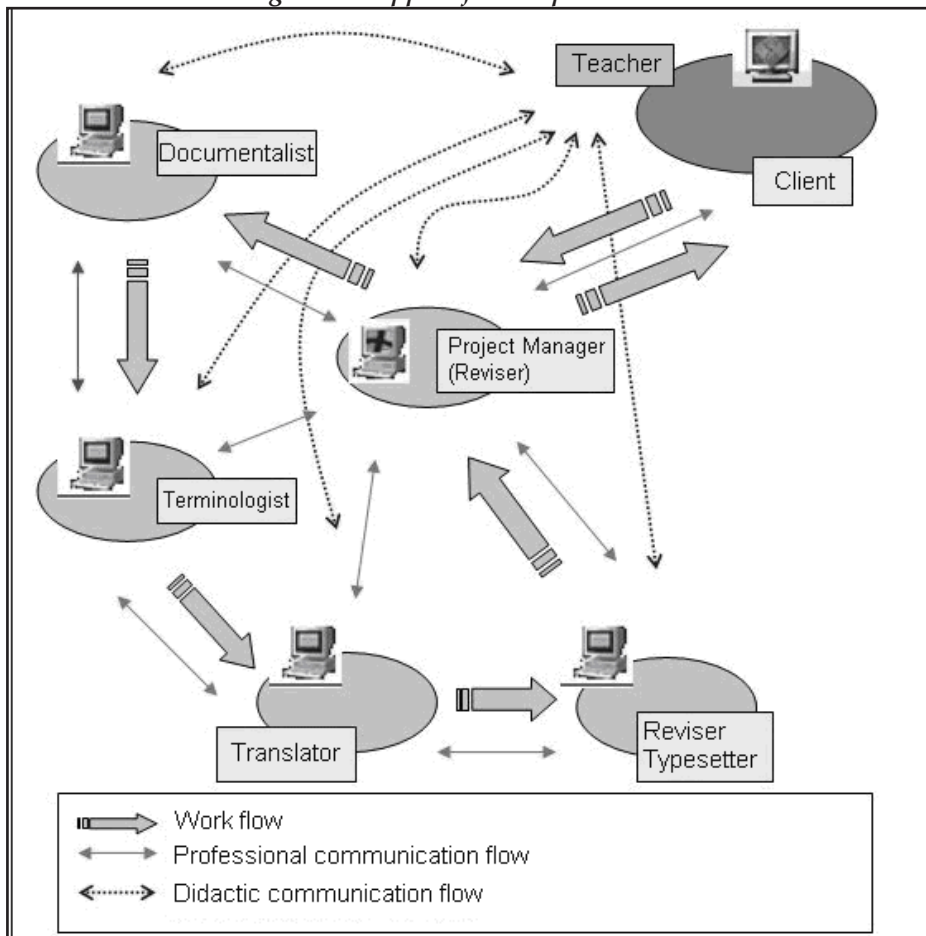
Depending on the environment and on the size of the organisations they work for, translators must be able to handle any of these, spanning from the whole process to only one part of it (e.g., revision). Nonetheless, in order to be successful in an agency, changing demands make it advisable that translators, notably neophytes, should be skilled in and ready to work on any stage in the translation process. The boom in translation agencies, which is seen in many countries all over the world, has led to greater competition and therefore the need for translators to be versatile is growing. The differences in the assignments given to agencies (and consequently their profits) will be determined not only by the quality of their translation products but also by the range of services they offer potential clients. There is little doubt that agencies are best served with having staffs with specialists in various fields: information scientists, terminologists, translators, and specialists in editing and desktop publishing. Nonetheless, small- and medium-sized agencies (which still constitute the majority of those in the market) prefer to have a team of versatile translators, as this helps cut costs. Large-scale translation assignments involve so many resources and media that one and the same translation assignment may become a prolonged and complex process comprising any number of specialists and requiring supervision by, e.g., a 'project manager'.

This new reality is clearly seen in organisations in which the translation processes are so complex and reach such high levels that no one single person can keep an overview of them, let alone cope with them. This is true, for example, for the Language Service of the European Parliament, where the process involves more than five stages (Theologitis 1998). Nevertheless, nowadays we also find project managers in small- and medium-sized agencies. They coordinate all the projects with which the agency is working. They may also carry out revisions and act as mediators between clients and freelance translators. Consequently, project managers have become a cornerstone for work in many translation agencies and services.

This analysis of market characteristics and present-day training conditions

makes it easier to see the shortcomings in current syllabi, as we try to prepare students for the rapidly changing market. This is why we provide the Professional Approach to Translator Training. Its first practical application is an innovative teaching project named 'Aula.int, an online translation classroom', which we developed at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting, at the University of Granada (<http://aulaint.ugr.es>) (Olvera et al., 2003; Olvera et al., 2004). The main goal of the Professional Approach to Translator Training is to introduce translation students to the professional market and help them get acquainted with working conditions in the real labour market by means of a simulated translation agency. Gabr (2001) focuses on the need to put knowledge into practice, instead of focusing only on theoretical contents, and the need to make students aware of how translation is practiced in 'the real world'. This is the main goal of our course, which presents a new teaching method designed to meet one of the most important objectives in translation teaching: familiarising students with the working world and the reality of professional translators.

Figure 2:
A Professional Approach to Translator Training application
using Basic Support for Cooperative Work



The Professional Approach to Translator Training is now applied in several translation courses involving Spanish in combination with English, French, Portuguese, Italian, and Russian. Students are divided into groups, each one in charge of managing a specific translation brief different from that of the other teams. As shown in Figure 2, a team comprises five students. Then each of them must select a role as, for example, an information scientist, terminologist, reviser and typesetter, or project manager. Every time they get a new translation brief, team members adopt a different role, so that eventually every student has tried to carry out different tasks. The teachers must carefully supervise the development and progress in the projects during the work on the translation assignments. By having worked in these teams in the course of their university training, students gain an insight into each stage of the translation process and its role within the translation process as a whole. Thanks to this approach, they can also understand the interaction between different courses and their importance within the syllabus, e.g., 'documentation', 'terminology', 'revision', and 'typesetting', as well as courses directly concerned with translation between the languages they study.

The application of the Professional Approach to Translator Training is also intended to train individuals for "teleworking". Although there is more than one definition for teleworking, as Sullivan (2003) indicates, there is growing consensus on considering telework a decentralised work that relies on information and communication technologies. Amparo Alcina states that "familiarising translation students with a virtual environment helps them to acquire the professional skills that will be demanded in the future, since in the current information society a translator's work demands the automation of most tasks, the use of teleworking and, on many occasions, distance team working" (2002: 170). Professional relationships are established by electronic means and this strengthens teleworking skills as well as the communicative abilities that are inherently needed in the medium. In this way, we also intend to supplement the traditional tutorial support provided by teachers by offering personal contact for assisting in solving problems and answering the questions that arise in every project.

In addition to the help provided by our website, students are encouraged to cooperate on their tasks and publish their results on the cooperative work platform "Basic Support for Cooperative Work", which is used for a range of purposes at Spanish universities. This approach also promotes self-learning, as it focuses on learner-based rather than teacher-based models. This is in line with the convergence process of the European Union project termed "European Space for Higher Education". Students can always access tutors, but they are responsible for meeting the standards and needs of the next link in the production chain. The use of virtual media as teaching materials - *e-learning* - allows us not only to adjust the teaching of students in a way that prepares them for the labour market, but also to reduce animosity that some students have towards traditional lectures conducted by teachers. According to Anthony Pym (2001), the ideal combination would be to supplement traditional lectures with multimedia activities. In short, our Professional Approach to Translator Training Application puts what is taught in traditional lectures into concrete and practical translation work.

Unlike other projects designed to supplement tutorial support (Alcina 2002), the Professional Approach to Translator Training has been created to ensure better overall translator training and to minimise tutorial support in translation briefs, since it is already given in other courses in the syllabus. This is the situation that best reflects the professional market: in principle, freelance translators do not have other professionals revise and control their work step by step. When freelancers need revisers, they most often contact an agency or the client in order to solve specific problems; or they merely send the final product and indicate in an attachment, or in the translation itself, the problems encountered and how they solved them. A virtual environment also favours this kind of translation brief. The use of collaborative work-tools allows students to address problems or questions that may arise in the course of a translation assignment both with their peers and with teachers (Alcina 2002). Group members remain in contact during this process and can get additional information and feedback if they wish so.

This hands-on, practical approach also strengthens an additional aspect that is important for professional translators: active participation in a team. Several teachers have stressed the importance of being able to work both individually and as a member of a large team in order to produce high-quality translation. Roberto Mayoral (2000) goes even further and emphasises the ability to work with other translators and professionals in related fields, as well as with experts in the subject field of a given translation. The Professional Approach to Translator Training and its application in Aula.int present students with translation as a complex process that involves not only linguistic transfer but also many other skills and tasks. Professional skills in translation go beyond linguistic competence. Today's translation market is affected by, among other things, the development of new technologies and their application. Anthony Pym (2002) has drawn attention to students' dissatisfaction with not 'translating' and instead devoting their time to associated tasks (although communication remains a key issue), such as advanced search techniques on the Internet, the selection of relevant information, website localisation, the potential of Translation Memories, etc., in other words, components and elements that take up much time and effort in present-day translation work. Pym's students preferred to make lists of false friends and linguistic problems etc., although Pym also stresses that once the students enter the labour market, they realise that technical knowledge is a crucial element in both the work of a translator and the translation process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we believe that through the application of the Professional Approach to Translator Training and its way of introducing 'real-life work' in our training programme, we can achieve a number of the basic goals of teaching which Patrick Zabalbeascoa (2000) deems essential in translation teaching:

- student motivation and commitment to the learning process.
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- specification of priorities, and ordering of objectives, methodology and materials; adapting them to student needs and abilities, both individually and collectively; and the design and production of specific material and activities.
- an eclectic and flexible approach oriented towards a planned progression.
- a proper balance between theory and practice, along with an emphasis on the practical application of theory.
- a proper balance between simulated 'real' activities and specific monitored activities in order to improve skills.
- a progression towards independent student work both inside and outside the classroom.
- the maximum exploitation of pedagogical contexts and the media available.
- an awareness of the importance and function of each course in institutional, social, and professional contexts.

The Professional Approach to Translator Training also encourages immediate evaluation of the student's progress in practical translation work, since teachers can assess the final product as well as all other stages in the process – a method that is essentially communicative, holistic, and interdisciplinary. Teaching methods can be improved when more importance is attached to the processes involved in translation and teaching deals specifically with those processes. Our approach not only takes these principles into account, but also makes students aware of the relationships between the courses that are part of the four-year degree programme in Translation and Interpreting and that were made part of the syllabus because of these relationships. The ultimate objective of a teaching programme is to improve students' translation abilities and skills in order to make them succeed on the labour market. At the same time, they must never lose sight of the fact that a degree programme is not the end of the road, but merely a step in the right direction of continued learning, both intellectually and professionally.

Note

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