Volume 11, Issue 1
Winter and Spring, 2023
pp. 185-198

Journal of Applied Linguistics and Applied Literature: Dynamics and Advances

Interpersonal Skills in the Development of Translation Competence: A Model

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Abstract

The current dynamic, rapidly changing labour market is influenced by the constant development of new technologies, globalisation, the changing nature of the economy, and changed demands on employees. In this context, university graduates are expected to be flexible, dynamic, and able to adapt effectively to new, rapidly changing conditions in the labour market, changes in individual job positions, and the changes and challenges that 21st-century society is undergoing. These circumstances force universities to respond to the situation as employers point to the disconnect between students' university training and practice. According to them, students come unprepared to a contemporary working environment, their skills and knowledge not corresponding with the needs of practice. The field of study of philology is no exception in this regard. The position of the translator (in the near future) will be different, their tasks will be more diverse, and they will be required to have different competencies and skills. The translator will have to interact with other experts or participants in the translation process and will have to be a team player who is proficient in using IT. This paper focuses on the role of interpersonal skills in the development of translation competence. The first part defines key terms: knowledge, skills, and interpersonal skills; in the second one, a teaching model for specialised translation is introduced. This model also enables the monitoring of the development of interpersonal skills in the process of acquiring translation competence, while also revealing a change in the paradigm of teacher–student interaction.

Keywords: competences, CAT tools, interpersonal skills, teaching model for specialised translation, transferable skills

ARTICLE INFO

Research Article
Received: Wednesday, November 23, 2022
Accepted: Sunday, June 18. 2023
Published: Thursday, June 1, 2023
Available Online: Sunday, June 18. 2023
DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.22049/jalda.2023.28118.1493

Online ISSN: 2821-0204; Print ISSN: 28208986

Introduction

Today's dynamic and rapidly changing labour market is influenced by the constant development of new technologies, globalisation, the changing nature of the economy, and changing demands on employees. These changes are resulting in a global transformation of civilisation. This is an objectively observable process that affects every aspect of human life, bringing both positives and negatives to communities. The aforementioned turns also change thinking about education, emphasising the need to build a sustainable knowledge society. In this context, university graduates are expected to be flexible, dynamic, and able to adapt effectively to new, rapidly changing conditions of the labour market, to the changes in individual jobs, and to the transformations and challenges that society is going through in the 21st century. They are expected to contribute to a company's development by applying their technical skills and theoretical knowledge in practice. Ideal graduates, in order to meet the needs of today's companies, should be able to work in a team, know the principles of effective communication, exhibit a high level of critical thinking, have IT and problem-solving skills, and be able to work in an intercultural environment.

These circumstances force universities to react, as employers very often point to a disconnect between students' university training and practice. Students arrive unprepared, as the skills they have (not) acquired through university training do not correspond to the needs of practice. When we talk about the link between education and practice, i.e. the link between theory and practice, it should be remembered that reflecting on this link is not just a newly arisen necessity or a recent innovation. As early as the last century, American philosopher John Dewey (1938), a representative of the Chicago School of Pragmatism, a representative of reform pedagogy, advocated the importance of learning-by-doing. He urged the avoidance of learning dead facts, stressing the need to develop skills and impart knowledge that help students as human beings, professionals, and citizens. Steiner (1937), the Austrian (also referred to as German) philosopher, founder of anthroposophy, and founder of the first Waldorf school in Stuttgart in 1919, thought along similar lines, emphasising that the goal of education is to balance the intellect, the emotions, the heart, and practical skills to educate individuals who are then effective servants of society.

Demands on university graduates from practice and employers are natural and legitimate, but it is questionable to what extent university education must primarily meet the demands of practice and employers. In my opinion, higher-education institutions must reflect the requirements of practice, but this reflection also raises legitimate questions:

- To prepare graduates only for a particular industry or for a particular area of social practice?
- To prepare an independent-minded graduate with an adequate level of critical thinking and a high degree of creativity, able to further develop their skills in different areas of socio-economic practice with the help of teamwork?

- To prepare graduates by limiting their education to certain basic competences required by the present?
- In today's rapidly evolving world of technology, is it even possible to prepare an explicitly narrowly specialised graduate according to the dictates of practice?

So what is the role of the university, then? In my opinion, a university should prepare a translation graduate who is comprehensively equipped for working life, not narrowly specialised, because the makeup of national economies, for example, can – and certainly will – change, not to mention changes at the global level. How then will a highly specialised professional, without the ability to think freely and creatively, be able to switch to another area of socio-economic practice and find employment? In a way, globalisation is getting out of hand, and it is therefore difficult to predict the future and trends of the development not only of society but also of national economies.

These considerations also apply to students in humanities-oriented fields of study. I will consider the study field[1] of philology, more specifically the specialisation of translation and interpreting. From the foregoing it follows that it is impossible to predict exactly what competences, skills, and knowledge will be needed in the near future, even for graduates of a philology degree programme specialising in translation and interpreting. Currently, we see different types of markets with many different profiles and, as a result, different needs. Is it not then the role of the university to develop, first and foremost, the talent and creativity of students, their ability to communicate and work in a team (as teamwork is considered a key competence for the 21st century), and their ability to self-reflect and evaluate others, i.e. to cultivate, in particular, the interpersonal skills of graduates? Let us not forget humanity, which universities should cultivate as well. In addition, it appears that developing students' creativity has taken a back seat in recent times. We do not pay enough attention to it, because practice requires us to educate mainly with the help of technology and within the framework of technology. However, let us be honest and admit that technology largely deprives human beings of skills such as the aforementioned creativity, humanity, and the ability to communicate, especially in an intercultural environment.

Technological development, market needs, and employers' needs equally influence humanities-oriented fields of study, in our case the field of study of philology, specialisation translation and interpreting, which also has to respond flexibly to the needs of employers. In the near future, the position of the translator will be different, their tasks will be more varied and, in this context, different competences and skills will be required. As I have already stated, the translation market is also changing. This market will no longer need a translator who works only with source and target texts and uses only dictionaries and acquired knowledge in their work. They will need to interact with other professionals or participants in the translation process, and they will need to be a team player who is proficient in the use of IT. It is likely, if not certain, that their role will also include post-editing of texts produced by their human or technological colleagues.

Educational Consequences

University training of translators must reflect these realities. The aforementioned technological developments force us to change the ways in which knowledge is transferred in the education process. This also entails changes to the interaction between teacher and student. It should not be forgotten that every educational context is still strongly influenced by the educational traditions that have been shaped in its given geographical context. The national education systems of the EU member states are also based on the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (adopted in 2008 and revised in 2017), which in Slovakia is reflected in the National Qualifications Framework. In Slovakia, the National System of Occupations (NSO), defined by Act No. 5/2004 Employment Services, is a nationwide, unified information system for describing the standard labour market requirements for individual jobs. The NSO specifies the requirements for professional skills and practical experience necessary to perform work activities on the labour market. At its core is the Register of Occupations, created from the National Occupational Standards, which describes employers' requirements for skilled job performance (https://www.sustavapovolani.sk/o_portali). The requirements for a quality management system in translation services are, in turn, specified in the International Standard ISO 17100. The European Union's priorities for the higher education of translators are defined by the European Master's in Translation, which is intended to enable those who have completed such training to become more employable in the labour market.

Theoretical Framework

Since the focus of this article is the development of soft skills in the process of training future translators, it is necessary for the sake of further considerations to define my understanding of the term *skill*. The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (European Commission, 2008) considers knowledge, competences, and skills as learning outcomes. The notions of competence (from Lat. *competenia*) and skill are often defined variously by scholars in Slovakia and elsewhere, and some consider them to be synonymous. I will therefore try to formulate their definition for the purposes of this article.

Knowledge is defined by the European Commission as "the result of the acquisition of theoretical or factual information through learning" (European Commission, 2008). According to Klieme (2004), knowledge at a higher level develops into skills. Thus, knowledge can be considered as the starting point for skills development, while skills are the practical outcomes of learning (European Commission, 2008). In my view, knowledge is the result of both conscious and unconscious learning as well as the starting point for further development of an individual in many ways.

Competence is defined as "the demonstrated ability to apply knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities in work or learning situations, in the context of professional and personal development" (European Commission, 2008, p. 13). Thus, in summary, we can say that competence is associated with responsibility and autonomy. I understand this as a definition in a broad sense, but in

relation to translation there are a number of definitions of translation competence, which in this context we understand as a competence in a narrower sense. Since the subject of my interest is a skill, I will limit myself to the definition of translation competence according to the EMT (2009)[2] (European Master's in Translation) standards, which state that a translator is required to have the following competences:

- ✓ competence to provide translation services
- ✓ linguistic competence
- ✓ intercultural competence
- ✓ information competence
- ✓ technological competence
- ✓ thematic competence

For more detailed definitions of translation competence see Bell, 1991; Gromová, 2003; Hutková, 2019; Kiraly, 1995; Koželová, 2018; Neubert, 2000; Nida, 1964; Pacte, 1997; Pym, 2003; Wilss, 1982.

Skills are generally divided into soft skills, also known as interpersonal skills, and hard skills. According to some authors (e.g. Kolář & Nehyba, 2010), soft skills are part of emotional intelligence, while others consider them cognitive and practical, defining them as the ability to apply knowledge to performing tasks and solving problems (European Commission, 2008). We are born with these skills and can refine and develop them throughout our lives (Mühleisen & Oberhuber, 2008). They are unmeasurable and characteristic of each individual.

To generalise, we could say that soft skills are related to the ability to communicate, work together, resolve conflicts, organise, make decisions, etc. They are complementary to professional, i.e. hard skills.

Recently, there have also been reflections and discussions of transferable skills. These skills are transferable across many sectors and occupations (mostly) within the economy. They are important for people's wider employability in the labour market. In the global labour market, hard skills are considered to consist of technical and administrative skills related to the sector in which an organisation operates or directly to the given occupation. As a rule, they are easily observable, measurable, and acquired naturally; when new such skills are acquired, there is no need to unlearn skills already learned. We can therefore also describe them as vocational or professional skills. Soft skills, on the other hand, are skills that are also needed in everyday life (not only in the world of work) and are harder to measure and observe (European Commission, 2008).

The list of soft skills (and their naming) varies from author to author; the German scholars Gabriele Peters-Kühlinger and Friedel John, for example, give the following list: communication skills, self-esteem and empathy, teamwork skills, ability to accept criticism and criticise effectively, analytical and critical thinking,

trustworthiness, discipline, self-control, curiosity, the ability to manage conflicts, and the ability to assert oneself.

My attention has been drawn to a list of soft skills compiled by ANTEA CONSULTING, s.r.o., a consultancy firm, because they correspond to my ideas of the soft skills that a translator should possess. The firm lists the following top ten soft skills: communication and presentation skills, teamwork, stress management, time management, conflict management, flexibility and proactivity, positive thinking and positive attitude, responsibility, self-motivation, and assertiveness.

The model of interpersonal skills development in the process of acquiring translation competence

From the foregoing, it follows that the content and organisation of instruction in translation and interpreting study programmes should be defined to reflect basic translation competence, as well as the requirements of the translation market and the labour market as such, and thus to produce as many prerequisites as possible for graduates to find employment.

For a long time, I have been thinking (along with my former PhD students Marianna Bachledová, Zuzana Angelovičová (Kraviarová), Matej Laš) about a model of teaching translation which would allow students to develop, in parallel, translation competence and the technical sub-competence of using CAT tools, while also reflecting the requirements of practice and modelling real translation practice in the education process. Gradually, while using this model, I have realised that it also allows us to develop students' soft skills, including teamwork, which is considered a key competency for the 21st century. Thanks to this model, I have also become aware of a changed paradigm of teacher–student interaction. Consequently, I have also started to deliberately target the development of soft skills in translation instruction as well as investigate the resulting changes to teacher–student interaction. The focus is on the development of the following soft skills: communication, teamwork, conflict resolution skills, assessment of team members, acceptance of evaluation, criticism, justification of evaluation, analytical thinking, critical thinking, decision making and organisation, self-esteem, empathy, discipline, self-control, curiosity, and the ability to assert oneself.

The model is focused on the translation of specialised texts, as such texts are prevalent in current translation production, constituting the sole activity of "as many as 70.3% of practicing translators in Slovakia" as of 2015 (Djovčoš & Šveda, 2017, p. 76).

To write about translation and translator training is impossible without acknowledging that the translation process is a creative process, one where the translator is the creative author of a final product – a translation. This basic theoretical axiom is also fully applicable to the translation of a specialised text, despite it being different from a literary text in its nature and function(s). Specialised texts are, too, the results of creative processes, and it is therefore necessary to treat them accordingly.

Courses in translation of specialised texts are compulsory for first- and second-year students of master's programme[3]. They build on previous translation courses (including topics such as the methodology of translation, the history of translation studies, the specifics of literary and specialised translation, and the Slovak language – as the training of interpreters and translators focuses on both target and source languages) in the bachelor's programme. Language training focused on the native language, Slovak, provides students with the possibility of employment as editors, copyeditors, or copyeditors of translations. This range of positions attests to the versatility of translation and interpreting graduates as well as their preparedness for professional life. The aim of our study programme is to provide graduates with both practical and theoretical skills – rather than just foreign language experts, our graduates should be autonomous subjects with cultural literacy. It needs to be said that our students are also provided with courses in literary translation. Many universities have dropped their literary translation courses, rationalising that the market does not need such translators. However, our university is not considering taking such steps, and we continue to educate students in this area. Despite the much greater demand for specialised (i.e. non-literary) translations, one should not limit oneself solely to the translation of specialised texts – education in literary translation is necessary, too, because it serves many beneficial functions, such as broadening students' horizons and developing their creativity and intercultural competence.

Our model for specialised translation courses has two main goals. On one hand, we strive to meet the demands of practice by simulating translation practice and the trade in the education process. On the other hand, we aim to develop students' soft skills. In our courses, they experience various functions within a translation workflow – a useful experience, as our graduates are often employed at translation agencies.

Our specialised translation courses are divided into two seminars: Specialised Translation 1 and Specialised Translation 2. Each seminar is 80 minutes long and takes place once per week. Specialised Translation 1 takes place in the spring semester and is offered to first-year students of the master's programme. It proceeds as follows: first, students are acquainted with the term "specialised translation" and the particularities of specialised texts, after which they learn the typology of specialised texts and the terminology used to describe them, with particular emphasis on the special features of Slovak and foreign-language terminology. The curriculum also includes the history and development of specialised translation in Slovakia. When translating particular specialised texts, students make use of intra- and extratextual text analysis à la Christiane Nord[4], having already been acquainted with her model during their bachelor's studies (of course, there are other theoretical tools used to analyse texts; nevertheless, we prefer Nord's intra- and extratextual analysis). They are taught to mine and verify terminology, also using their knowledge acquired from the bachelor's-level course Specialised Terminology and learning to anticipate translation problems related to specialised texts. In addition, they learn to use CAT tools[5]. During the course, two CAT tools are used – MemoQ and Trados. Instruction in Specialised Translation 1 and 2 is carried out in a computer classroom where 20 PCs with MemoQ and Trados licenses are provided to students. Each student works on a single computer.

The organisation of Specialised Translation 2 differs not just from typical seminars, but also from Specialised Translation 1. While in Specialised Translation 1 students learn to use CAT tools and improve their technical competence and reflective interpretation skills, the structure of Specialised Translation 2 is based on that of a translation agency. Students work on translation projects. Over the course of a semester (13 weeks), students work on three different translation projects, each consisting of a single translation. Students (approximately 15–20 per group) are assigned job positions in translation teams. Each translation team has five job positions. The project manager (PM) draws up a timetable taking into consideration the time demands for the individual positions within the team and the deadline set by the teacher. Then the PM acquaints the teacher with their plan, divides the text into several parts for translation (depending on the number of translators in the team) and coordinates the separate activities of the translation process. A key role is also played by terminologists. The terminologists analyse the original text, conduct an intra- and extratextual analysis, compile glossaries in Excel, and search for parallel texts with a similar topic published in the target language. During the whole process, the terminologists have to be ready to explain any term to the rest of the team. After terminologists come translators. They study the intra- and extratextual analyses, import the glossaries into MemoQ, and begin to translate. They then export the translated text as a bilingual file (including both the original and the translation) and send it back to the project manager. The PM then sends this file to the editors, who import it and compare the translation with the original text. The edited text is then sent to the copyeditor. The copyeditor checks the whole document, corrects any grammatical or stylistic errors, and checks the formatting. If serious errors are found – errors that cannot be corrected by the copyeditor – the PM is notified and sends the text for revision back to whomever is responsible for the error. After the copyediting phase is complete, the PM checks a random part of the text as part of the quality control process. The team members can only communicate via the PM. Upon completing a task, they must always send the results to the PM, who has to document their progress.

At the end of the project, all team members have to write a team evaluation report and send it to the PM, who evaluates the teamwork and any issues that came up in the process, gives advice on how to improve the process, writes down what they have learned, and assesses their general satisfaction with other team members. The PM then assembles the project as instructed (document name, team makeup, intra- and extratextual analyses à la Nord, glossaries, translated text, and evaluation reports from each team member) and sends the complete set of documents to the teacher. Only then does the teacher begin to assess the work of the individual team members and the overall translation quality. The number of students in each position depends on the given translation team – the only conditions are that there be only one PM and one copyeditor, and that there be an equal number of translators and editors.

Such a model simulates real working conditions in translation agencies, which is to say in real translation practice. Throughout the process students use MemoQ, which they are trained to work with in Specialised Translation 1. The course aims to improve their analysing skills (which are also trained early on in the bachelor's programme) and their work with terminological databases and parallel texts; upon

completing the course, they are able to apply various translation strategies and assess translation quality as well as the performance of each team member. The course also aims to improve their ability to work in a team. In each project, students change their job positions, eventually becoming acquainted with each one.

Advantages and disadvantages of the model

The advantage of this model is that it simulates real work experience in a translation agency (the model was created in cooperation with Slovak translation agencies). The whole process is carried out with the help of the CAT tool MemoQ, thus developing students' skills at working with such tools. A significant benefit of the model is that in parallel with the training of translation competence, soft skills are also developed: communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, evaluation of team members, acceptance of evaluation, criticism, justification of evaluation, analytical thinking, critical thinking, decision making and organisation, healthy self-esteem, empathy, discipline, self-control, curiosity, and the ability to assert oneself.

We recognise that full mastery of these skills is not possible in one semester, but we are confident that beginning the process of their acquisition will help students become aware of and reflect on the demands and requirements of practice.

We recognise that achieving full mastery of these skills is not possible in a single semester, but we are confident that getting the process started will help students become aware of and reflect on the demands and requirements of practice.

The disadvantage of the model is that one semester is too short for students to complete all the positions in a team. Another disadvantage is the fact that not all students are team players, as there are those who prefer to work independently. They participate in teamwork, but it does not fulfil them; unable to trust the quality of the previous position's output, they instead work out and verify everything on their own, which can cause deadlines to be missed.

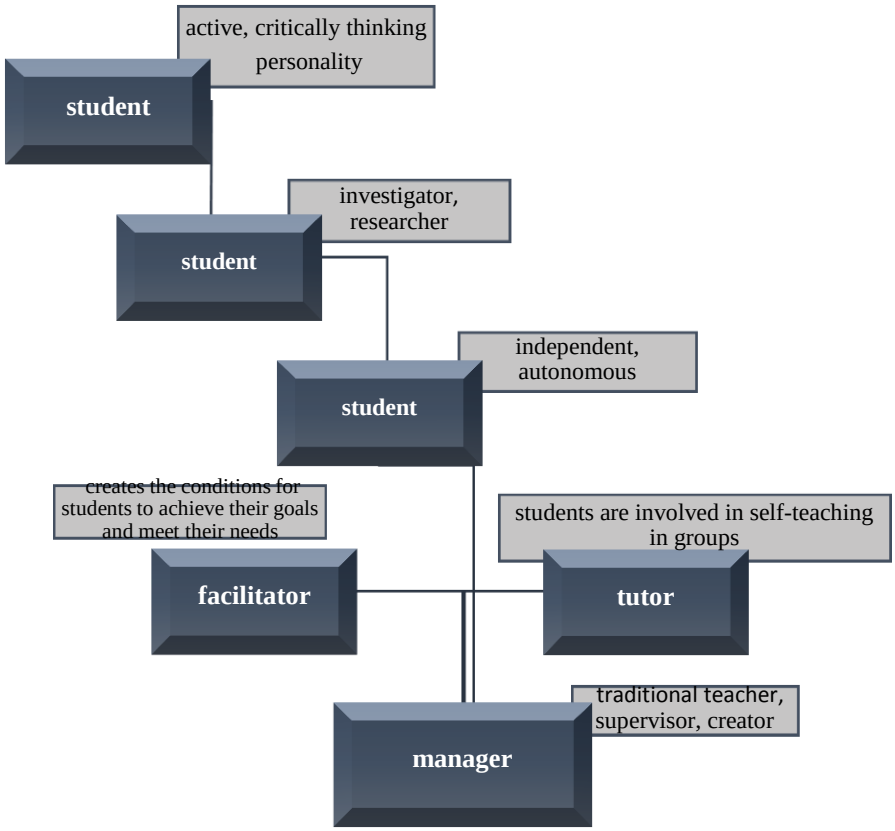
A changed paradigm of teacher–student interaction

The model of teaching and organisation described above disrupts the traditional relationship between teacher and students, as well as their roles in the education process. Here, the role of the teacher differs from the traditional teaching role in a traditional class. Their role goes beyond that of intermediary and controller. The role of the controller (Homolová, 2004, p. 47) is based solely on traditional teaching methods and the traditional role of the teacher. According to teaching methodologist Eva Homolová, the teacher in the role of controller is at the centre of students' attention – in the majority of cases, the teacher stands before them in a classroom and dictates the entire didactic process. In our model, the teacher acts more as a guide of the didactic process. They are its facilitator, organiser, and manager, while also acting as a tutor. As a facilitator, the teacher takes students' goals and individual needs and abilities into account and creates the conditions conducive to achieving such goals; they also provide students with motivation. In this role, the teacher leads students towards independence and autonomy (Homolová, 2004, p. 47). The role of the teacher as an organizer / manager is possibly their most important as well as most difficult role. Achieving the goals and completing the tasks of a lesson is only possible by means of effective organisation. In other words, students should be perfectly aware of what is expected of them (Homolová, 2004, p.

48). If the teacher takes the role of a tutor, students are deeply involved in the self-teaching process or work in teams, as in our case. On the basis of Homolová's classification of students' roles, students in these courses can be designated as student–investigator, researcher, or student–discoverers (Homolová, 2004).

Figure 1

The teacher–student relationship and the process of developing individual roles, forming an active, critically thinking personality (diagram by Vladimír Biloveský, based on Homolová's classification of student roles)



We do not consider our model to be fixed and static, because the translation market is constantly changing, and, similarly, each teacher is different, accentuating the individual skills in different ways and focusing on their development to varying degrees when teaching them.

Conclusion

So how can we summarise the considerations of translation competence? The model we have presented is such a superstructure, because, in parallel with the

development of the base (translation competence), it also develops interpersonal skills, comprehensively shapes the translator's personality, and develops their abilities according to the needs of the changing translation market of the 21st century. In addition to interpersonal skills, the model also develops market and (meta) critical competence (e.g. through the positions of project manager, editor, copyeditor).

One of the goals of university training of future translators is *homo translator* – a being capable of independent, creative, analytical, and critical thinking, technologically proficient and at the same time able to work in teams. This term has also been creatively elaborated by Slovak translatologist Jana Rakšányiová in her study *Homo translator* (Rakšányiová, 2012), in which she critically, and above all warningly, points out the phenomenon that, instead of the ideal, educated, relatively autonomous *homo translator*, the current translation market is dominated mainly by *homo oeconomicus*: "…the market distorts our naive ideas about the victory of education and wisdom over stupidity" (Rakšányiová, 2012, p. 45).

However, if we were to classify the work of a translator as a craft or service on the basis of the wide range of general, specific, professional, and linguistic competences required, we would have to conclude that it is an extremely demanding "intellectual craft", requiring, in addition to all the competences analysed as well as those not yet identified or described, a keen intellect and the whole range of interpersonal skills that a *homo translator* should possess.

In this study, I have not arrived at an exhaustive definition of translation competence and soft skills; this is obviously not entirely possible, since both translation competence and the translator are variable factors. In this regard, one is reminded of this remarkable quote: "The person and personality of a translator resembles in its entirety a mosaic, refined by years and practice, made up of many pebbles. The mosaic should be seen holistically as an aggregate of fragments, each of which has its own quality and justification" (Rakšányiová, 2002, p. 42).

The study of translation competence, the whole translation process, and the translator themselves as a creative being is a complex and dynamic process, as all the variables that enter into the individual processes are constantly evolving. This is why it is necessary to continue to deepen translational research, to improve didactic methods, and to seek new inspirations that should be directed towards improving the quality of translator training.

Notes

1 In Slovakia, higher-education programmes are categorised according to a system of fields of study (študijné odbory), issued in the form of a ministerial decree. A field of study is an area of knowledge that can be studied at one of the three levels of higher education. Fields of study are defined by their content, which are characterised more particularly by the areas and range of knowledge, skills, and competences that make up the graduate's profile.

2 The European Master's in Translation (EMT) was founded in 2006 as a joint project of the Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) and the European Commission (EC) with various European universities. In general, its goal is to (in accordance with EU priorities regarding university education) improve the quality of translator training and to create better conditions for the trade. The EMT is a certificate of quality granted by the European Commission to universities whose master's degree programmes meet the EMT's conditions and norms. The EC does not take into account the education of interpreters – it has separate directorates for interpreting and translation. Unfortunately, given the relatively small Slovak market, it would not make sense to separately train translators and interpreters. Some European universities have separate study programmes for translators and for interpreters. However, the EMT merely functions as a brand that can attract applicants and help graduates find a job. There is no financial or material aid included.

3 The programme is offered by the Department of British and American Studies, the Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

4 (Nord, 1991): EXTRATEXTUAL FACTORS (sender, intention, recipient, medium, place, time, text function); INTRATEXTUAL FACTORS (subject matter, content, presuppositions, text composition, non-verbal elements, sentence structure, suprasegmental features)

5 CAT tools – Computer-assisted translation, or computer-aided translation. The most widespread CAT tools are Trados, Wordfast, MemoQ, Déjà Vu, etc. Broadly speaking, such software uses a translation memory and terminology databases. According to Djovčoš and Šveda (2017), 66% of Slovak professional translators use computer-assisted tools.

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