

Research Article

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The quest for the ideal business translator profile in the Romanian context

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Abstract: An ideal translator profile is a crucial issue for both translation providers, who want to deliver impeccable performance, and translation beneficiaries, whose purpose is to obtain flawless services. In the context of Romanian higher education, two distinct educational profiles of providers are distinguished in the business translation market: graduates of Philology, who have been trained in translation (3-year BA and 2-year MA programmes in Translation Studies), and graduates of Faculties of Economics or Business who have undertaken 3-year and/or 2-year MA study programmes in a foreign language. Showing the results of a study conducted with groups of third year Bachelor students of the University of Craiova, Romania (students in Translation Studies and students in the Finance and Banking English-taught programme), across a 3-year period (2015–2017), our research aims at providing answers to the following questions: To what extent does each of these two profiles match the ideal one of a business translator? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each of the two training profiles? What specific actions can and should be taken for each of the two target groups in terms of university training?

Keywords: translator profile, business translation, translators' training, quality assurance

1 Introduction

The ‘ideal’ business translator profile has long been a Holy Grail for the industry. Translation companies would definitely like to have the certainty or at least a strong likelihood that they are paying for high quality, when hiring a professional with a specific background, without having to go through additional quality check and selection processes. In fact, across all industries, it is customary practice to offer higher starting salaries to graduates from prestigious schools (Payscale, 2023). When employing or contracting a translator, companies are actually paying for his/her competences and skills and for the confidence that she/he will put them to good use, so as to deliver top-notch translations within optimal deadlines. It follows that an ideal business translator profile is best defined by a specific range of competences and skills, and, although translation is a profession where people constantly improve their competences through lifelong learning, university training plays a major part in the final outcome.

Translational competences and skills have been reviewed by a significant number of scholars so far. According to Shreve (2002), “translation competence” “has come to represent a motley set of academic understandings about what one has to know (and by implication what one has to be learn or be taught) to become a translator” (Shreve 2002, 154), and Hatim and Mason (1997, 204–6) propose a linguistics-based three-fold competence: ST processing, transfer, TT processing. Pym (2021, online) observes that “competence” has become a multicomponent term, and it “grows and grows and there is no reason why it can’t stop growing,” while

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Malmkjær (2009) underlines the wide variety of features included within translation competence, pointing out that, in some previous definitions of translation competence – referring to target-language knowledge, text-type knowledge, source-language knowledge, subject area ('real-world') knowledge, contrastive knowledge, then decoding and encoding skills summarized as 'communicative competence' (covering grammar, sociolinguistics and discourse) – "virtually everything that any kind of linguistics wanted to talk about was tossed into the soup" (Malmkjær 2009, 124).

Recent reviews of translator competence also focus on transversal competences, such as research, IT and interpersonal skills, and equally encompass a client-oriented approach. Thus, the findings of Havumetsä's PhD thesis (2012) suggest that translators are expected to be experienced, to master the terminology of special fields and to have language and translation skills, while the survey carried out by Lafeber (2012) found that translators in intergovernmental organizations need, besides language skills, research, computer, analytical and interpersonal skills, as well as extensive general knowledge and specialized subject knowledge. Although some studies, such as Hubscher-Davidson's (2018), support the idea that practical translating experience can take place without possessing a translation qualification, arguing that a great number of highly acclaimed translators, who have professional experience and/or degrees in other areas, do not hold a translation qualification, it is unanimously accepted that "rigorous translator training is worthwhile in this ever-changing and dynamic era" (Fung-ming Liu 2023, 11).

At a European level, the Optimale Survey, conducted back in 2012 with the participation of over 680 respondents, investigated the way translation service providers perceive translator competences in the workplace, focusing on 34 competence-related items grouped into 5 aspects: qualifications and experience (6 items), translation competence (12 items), technological competence (8 items), project management (5 items), and marketing competence (3 items) (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency 2013). The European Master's in Translation (EMT) translator competence framework (European Commission 2017) emphasizes the importance of translator education and training, stating that students should gain both a deep understanding of the involved processes and the ability to perform and provide translation service in line with the highest professional and ethical standards, along five main areas of competence: language and culture, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal and service provision. Against this background, it goes without saying that translator training logically plays a major role in the development of competence.

As shown in the excerpts below (of which the earliest dates back to 2009), in terms of academic background and professional experience, when hiring specialized translators, EU institutions have distinguished, for at least 14 years, between translators who have an educational background in the relevant field and translation experience (but are not necessarily academically trained as translators) and graduates of translation studies with translation experience in the relevant field. The following excerpt from the specifications of a tender in the field of aeronautics launched by the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the European Union shows that a different amount of experience is required (as standard pages) depending on the applicant's university degree:

Each translator involved in the project must comply with the minimum level of qualification and experience requirements described below:

Either Profile 1:

A university degree or equivalent qualification, evidenced by a degree in aeronautical engineering PLUS translation experience into the target language for which the bid is made equivalent to at least 1000 standard pages [...]

Or Profile 2:

A university level degree or equivalent qualification in translation PLUS specialization evidenced by a diploma in aeronautical engineering PLUS translation experience into the target language for which the bid is made equivalent to at least 1000 standard pages ... of which at least 500 pages in the field of aviation [...]

Or Profile 3:

A university level degree or equivalent qualification in any discipline PLUS translation experience into the target language for which the bid is made equivalent to at least 1000 standard pages ... in the field of aviation [...].

(Tender in the field of aviation/aeronautics, CdT, 2009)

A later translation tender in the field of finance and banking points out that both graduates of the relevant field and translation studies or language graduates can be accepted, with experience requirements being stated separately:

Each translator involved in the project must comply with the minimum level of qualification described below:

Either Profile 1:

A university degree or equivalent qualification in one of the following areas: finance, accounting, banking, auditing, economics and financial statistics.

Or Profile 2:

A university degree or equivalent qualification in translation or languages

(Financial and banking translations, CdT, 2018, https://cdt.europa.eu/sites/default/files/tenders-forms/fin17_specifications.pdf)

Based on the aforementioned requirements and on the study programmes available within the Romanian academic system, two future business translator profiles can be outlined in terms of educational background. One profile is represented by graduates of Philology, trained in translation or in language studies (3-year BA and 2-year MA programmes in Translation Studies or Foreign Languages, sometimes combined, when, for instance, holders of a BA in Foreign Languages move on to an MA in Translation Studies). The second consists of graduates of Faculties of Economics or Business, who take up translation. According to interviews we conducted during 2019–2020 with 14 translation companies across the country, the first profile is the most common, while the second is not very frequent. The representatives of the surveyed translation companies pointed that, on average, 95% of their contractors are translation studies or language graduates.

2 Methods

Based on the aforementioned framework, this research aims at providing some useful insight into the business translator profiles present in the Romanian market, as well as a range of proposals on the actions that might be taken in terms of university training. The two previously mentioned business translator profiles are materialized as follows at the level of the study programmes of the University of Craiova. On the one hand, the graduates of the Faculty of Letters, in the field of Philology, acquire training in specialized translation (business, legal, medical, technical) during their 3-year BA and 2-year MA programmes in Translation Studies; on the other hand, in terms of overall course load, most of their training is philological. This is the profile of translators who work for translation companies in Craiova, according to the answers provided by representatives of seven translation companies in town. The second profile would consist of graduates of the BA and MA fully English-taught programmes of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, who, of course, have no philological training and are unaware of the possibility to work as translators.

Our research was developed during the winter and summer semesters of the 2017–2018 academic year and included two components:

- Assigning a translation of the same business text (provided in Appendix 1) to 60 students with the first profile (students of the Faculty of Letters) and to 60 students with the second profile (students of English-taught programmes of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration), with a two-fold purpose: to

draw a parallel between the two profiles in terms of translation quality and to see whether there is some untapped potential that could be capitalized among students with the second profile.

- Conducting a focus group analysis with ten first-profile students and ten second-profile students, with a view to identifying the expectations of future business translators, as well as defining potential actions to be taken at the level of each group in terms of university training, so as to harness all available resources to provide higher translation quality.

3 Results and discussion

The translation quality analysis focused on detecting errors – classified into mistranslation (flawed transfer of meaning) and grammar errors – and drawing up a comparison between the two profiles. Tables 1 and 2 quantify and synthesize the mistranslations of students with the two profiles, grouped according to the likely source of the problem: misunderstanding of the source text (Table 1) or target language use (Table 2). As it can be seen, in the case of several specialized structures, such as *exposures to SMEs of credit institutions*, *capital charges* and *capital requirements*, students from the first group (Philology students) are prone to misunderstanding the source text and rather translating it literally, while students from the second group (Business students) clearly have a better grasp of the concepts, surely because they have learned about them during their university training. However, some less frequently used specialized phrases, like *capital relief* or *funding gap*, are problematic for students in both groups.

Table 1: Comparison between the two profiles in terms of translation errors due to misunderstanding of the source text

Problem	Source text	Wrong translation into Romanian and back translation	Profile 1 (%)	Profile 2 (%)
Incorrect understanding of a linguistic structure	<i>exposures to SMEs of credit institutions</i>	<i>expunerile la IMM-urile instituțiilor de credit</i> ‘exposures to the SMEs belonging to credit institutions’	21	1.6
	<i>capital relief</i>	<i>exonerarea de capital, ușurarea de capitalizare</i> ‘relief from capital’	43.3	46
	<i>funding gap</i>	<i>capitalizare redusă</i> ‘low capitalisation’ <i>deficit de finanțare</i> ‘funding deficit’ <i>lipsa finanțării</i> ‘lack of funding’	41.6	45
Incorrect understanding of a homonymous word	<i>capital charges</i>	<i>taxe capitale</i> ‘the essential taxes/fees’	43.3	26.6
	<i>capital requirements</i>	<i>acuzații capitale</i> ‘capital accusations’	60	5
	<i>flow of bank credit</i>	<i>cerințele capitale</i> ‘the essential requirements’ <i>transfer al creditelor bancare</i> ‘transfer of bank credit’ <i>circulația creditelor bancare</i> ‘circulation of bank credit’	20	30

Table 2: Comparison between the two profiles in terms of translation errors due to incorrect target language use

Problem	Source text	Wrong translation into Romanian and back translation	Profile 1 (%)	Profile 2 (%)
False friends	<i>proportionate</i>	<i>proportionat</i> ‘well proportioned’ instead of <i>proportional</i>	11.6	26.6
	<i>exposures</i>	<i>expoziții</i> ‘exhibitions’ instead of <i>expuneri</i>	6	3
	<i>sensitive</i>	<i>senzitive</i> instead of <i>sensibile</i>	8.3	31.6
Incorrect use of a word in the target language	<i>recovery</i>	<i>recuperare</i> instead of <i>redresare</i>	61.6	93
	<i>banking crisis</i>	<i>criza băncilor</i> ‘the crisis of banks’ instead of <i>criză bancară</i>	26.6	25

In terms of target language use, more errors are generally seen among the students with the second profile, who do not necessarily have linguistic training. Although they understand the concepts, they fail to express them using the proper Romanian terms (as in the case of *proportionate*, *sensitive* and *recovery*). However, the correct equivalent of *exposures* (*expuneri*) is used by more students with the second profile.

Table 3 gives an overview of the grammar errors made by students in the two groups. We have detected two cases of wrong use of gerunds instead of a relative clause, as the translation literally followed the pattern of the English structure. The pattern of the English structure, with the verb in singular (*the recovery and growth ... depends*) was also followed by 53% of the first group students and 71% of the second group students, even though the resulting Romanian phrase clearly showed a lack of subject/predicate agreement. In addition, when translating, several students simply reproduced the English prepositions into Romanian, without paying attention to the accuracy of the target text; this resulted in wrong structures such as *proportionale la* (instead of *cu*) *riscurile*, *expuneri la* (instead of *față de*) *IMM-uri* and *pentru* (instead of *în*) *scopul*. On the whole, this category of errors is much more frequent for the second group of students than for the first one.

A final step of the translation quality analysis in our approach consisted of marking the number of cases of unclear wording in all 120 students' translations. The obtained results, which show that such errors are much more frequent among students from the second group, are presented in Table 4.

The second phase of the approach consisted of an analysis of the needs and expectations of ten students from each of the two profiles, undertaken by means of short interviews conducted in the summer of 2017. The first question was *Have you ever thought of becoming a business translator?* A positive answer was obtained from 80% of the respondents from the first group, and only 10% (one respondent) from the second group. This huge gap was expected, since the students from the second group had already informed, prior to the translation exercise, that they had never considered this career path. The respondents from the second group were additionally asked how they felt now, after doing the translation exercise. Some answered that they thought it would be a possibility, but they were not sure how it paid, as they thought translation was not a well-paid job. Other students pinpointed the importance of translation training: one stated that she thought future translators should major in philology at the Faculty of Letters, which is where one learned how to translate, and another one said that she had actually enjoyed the exercise, but she should definitely get more training.

When asked what they thought they would need to become successful business translators, students from the first group admitted they would definitely need more training in business, like 'reading magazines or understanding the mechanisms' or 'reading more business books or articles in order to get acquainted with the language'. Another student from the first group said it would be helpful to have some professional guidance, 'for instance a tutor in a translation company, at least in the beginning'. The students from the second group also were highly aware of their needs and drawbacks and stated they would need more training on translation

Table 3: Comparison between the two profiles in terms of grammar errors

Problem	Incorrect structure	Profile 1 (%)	Profile 2 (%)
Wrong use of gerunds in Romanian	<i>nivelurilor de risc derivând</i> <i>rolul lor fundamental creând creștere</i>	30 36	60 30
Lack of subject/predicate agreement	<i>redresarea și creșterea (...) depinde</i>	53	71.6
Wrong use of prepositions	<i>proportionale la riscurile</i> <i>expuneri la IMM-uri</i> <i>pentru scopul</i>	31.6 26.6 28.3	63 38.3 40

Table 4: Comparison between the two profiles in terms of cases of unclear wording

Profile/no. of cases	1 case (%)	2 cases (%)	3 cases and more (%)
Profile 1	31.6	45	23.4
Profile 2	6.6	18.3	75.1

methodology, as they did it 'empirically, without thinking much about it', as well as on 'how to write correctly, Romanian grammar and vocabulary'.

4 Conclusions

We consider that the exercise we conducted allowed us to pinpoint specific translation-related weaknesses of students from each profile. Philology students studying to become translators needed more training in terms of management of financial terminology and, moreover, failed to understand some linguistic structures due to their lack of familiarity with the topic. This could be mitigated by reinforcing their acquaintance with financial terminology and financial language in general, not only through translation classes but also through complementary classes. As for the second group (Business students), they also misunderstood some linguistic structures due to limited language skills, which could be solved through an active development of their source language understanding skills (reading comprehension competence). Moreover, as the translation exercise has shown, they had flaws in writing a clear, fluent, grammatically correct in the target language (their mother tongue) and, in some instances, used their words clumsily. This issue could be solved by reinforcing their academic writing skills.

Summing up all the above, we postulate that the academic training of future translators should not only focus on their translation skills but also on the other skills stated in the EMT competence framework. Future specialized translators should also get training in complementary subjects (e.g. an introductory course in economics, a course in basic law) – in their mother tongue, i.e. the target language of their translations. This has already been implemented in the last few years within the Translation Studies BA programme of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Craiova, whose syllabus includes an introductory course in economics and a course on European institutions, *inter alia*. In addition, it has been shown that graduates of Business study programmes taught in English are unaware and have not been informed on the possibility to pursue a career in business translation; they are convinced that translations are only performed by people with a background in philology and have never thought that they could do it. We are of the opinion that, though this may not be a major professional outlet for them, it is important that they should become aware of it. Of course, their training is not designed for this purpose, and English-taught Business study programmes at the University of Craiova do not even include foreign language training/mother tongue training – students have to take a basic English language examination as they are admitted in the first year, then they get no English language training at all. All in all, this might be an untapped potential in terms of human resources for the business translation market in Craiova in particular (the focus of our research) and in Romania in general.

All in all, both translator profiles have their strengths and weaknesses, so there is no 'ideal' business translator profile that would automatically guarantee impeccable performance. Limiting translation career opportunities to graduates of Philology is depriving the market of valuable human resource. Last but not least, as in every other field, university policies or even perhaps national-level policies on translator training should be adapted to the ever-evolving demands of the global market.

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Appendix 1

(43) The capital requirements should be proportionate to the risks addressed. In particular the reduction in risk levels deriving from having a large number of relatively small exposures should be reflected in the requirements.

(44) Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are one of the pillars of the Union economy given their fundamental role in creating economic growth and providing employment. The recovery and future growth of the Union economy depends largely on the availability of capital and funding to SMEs established in the Union to carry out the necessary investments to adopt new technologies and equipment to increase their competitiveness. The limited amount of alternative sources of funding has made SMEs established in the Union even more sensitive to the impact of the banking crisis. It is therefore important to fill the existing funding gap for SMEs and ensure an appropriate flow of bank credit to SMEs in the current context. Capital charges for exposures to SMEs should be reduced through the application of a supporting factor equal to 0.7619 to allow credit institutions to increase lending to SMEs. To achieve this objective, credit institutions should effectively use the capital relief produced through the application of the supporting factor for the exclusive purpose of providing an adequate flow of credit to SMEs established in the Union. Competent authorities should monitor periodically the total amount of exposures to SMEs of credit institutions and the total amount of capital deduction.

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