

Translator and Interpreter Profiles : New Boundaries and Fuzzy Edges

Margaret Rogers

*Centre for Translation Studies
University of Surrey, Guildford, UK*

Introduction

It is now a commonplace to assert that the translation profession has undergone momentous changes in the last 15 years or so as a result of many factors including new technology, the emergence of a global translation market, the linking of translation with other documentation services, the rise of professional associations and codes of conduct, and increased provision of training/education. The most exciting developments in interpreting are now happening in the context of business and public services, also influenced by new technology, globalisation and social awareness. In such a time of change, this paper will consider some of the challenges for universities as the principal but not exclusive providers of programmes aimed at furnishing future translators and interpreters with the necessary competences. Not least of these challenges is how such competences can be circumscribed or 'profiled'.

The paper will start by considering recent developments in the academic literature on the learning and teaching of translation and interpreting, before fine-tuning the context in which the question of «profiles» will be developed here. The core of the discussion on profiles then follows, attempting to map the broad professional field in terms of core competences and their links to technological support. The final section considers some implications for the future.

Recent Developments in the Learning and Teaching of Translation and Interpreting

The history of foreign language pedagogy in the West is a long one, covering millennia (see, for instance, Kelly 1969). That of translation and interpreting as communicative and mediating activities with specific but varied goals of social interaction, and in which proficiency in two or more languages is a necessary but not sufficient condition, is much shorter. It is only fairly recently, since the end of the second world war in the mid-20th century, that training in translation and interpreting has begun to be formalised in the sense that courses and programmes are offered by recognised institutions such as universities¹. Earlier forms of training are said to include collaborative working in teams. Pym (1998:34), for instance, cites many examples of collaborative enterprises, which he regards as the precursors of formal training, from the translation of Buddhist texts in 4th-8th century China to the Toledo School of 12th century Spain.

In fact, it is hardly surprising that the formalised and institutionalised practice of *teaching* translation and interpreting remained largely unreflected for several decades after its inception as the practice of translation and interpreting as activities *in themselves* also remained largely unreflected in any kind of systematic way. It was only with the advent of Holmes' mapping and naming of 'Translation Studies' that the framework for considering various branches of this new academic discipline emerged. In this context, pedagogy can be regarded as part of the 'Applied Translation Studies' branch (Holmes 1972/2000). In one sense then, pedagogy can clearly be seen as a normative activity which sets guidelines for good practice and for problem-solving, in contrast to the branch of Descriptive Translation Studies (part of 'Pure Translation Studies'), which has quite different goals, namely to describe and explain existing practice in various social and cultural contexts in order to understand the nature and functions of translation and translations. On the other hand, as Chesterman (2000:88) has pointed out, in rejecting the 'humble slave' metaphor of translation, pedagogy can also be potentially norm-breaking with the implication that:

...our trainees should be aware not only of the prevailing norms and the values underlying them, but also of the possibility of refining or breaking these norms, of finding better ways to meet prevailing values, of refining the values themselves.

Such «emancipatory translation» can contribute, according to Chesterman, to «improving the quality of intercultural life» as «the ultimate aim of translation» (*ibid.*)

The literature on translation and interpreting pedagogy emanating from western European sources, including the edited volume in which Chesterman's article appears (Schäffner & Adab 2000), experienced a particular surge at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, as academics began to reflect on classroom practice from a number of different perspectives, including personal experience, case studies, cognitive studies (e.g. Think Aloud Protocols), and educational psychology. Relevant publications include Dollerup & Loddegaard 1992; Dollerup & Loddegaard 1994; Gile 1995; Kussmaul 1995; Dollerup & Appel 1996; Kiraly 2000; Hatim 2001; Hung 2002; González Davies 2004; Sawyer 2004).

The Current Context

Translation was used pedagogically for many years in institutionalised contexts as a way of teaching and testing the comprehension of foreign language syntax, morphology and vocabulary (translation into the mother tongue) and the production of the same (translation into the foreign language) (see, for instance, Rogers 2000 for an overview). Much less is known about ways in which interpreting exercises have been used over the years in the context of foreign-language teaching. The context for the use of translation and interpreting exercises in foreign - language learning has over the years had little if anything to do with the broader social context in which it has been taught and everything to do with the prevailing conventional wisdom on how best to teach foreign languages. The situation with translation and interpreting as professional skills is quite different.

While much of the literature on translation and Translation Studies is concerned with literary translation, most professional translators in the world today earn their living by translating what are sometimes called «specialised texts» (or in German, *Fachtexte*), in commercial situations or in connection with the operation of large international organisations. Sometimes disparagingly and unjustly dismissed as «commercial translation», the translation of specialised texts has a long and important history in the transfer of knowledge between cultures, as evidenced by the reported need for consultation with subject-field experts which must have been crucial to the translation into Latin

of Greek and Arabic texts in the Toledo School in Medicine, Mathematics, Astronomy and Astrology (Woodsworth 1998:40). And Delisle & Woodsworth note collaboration between translators (Christian missionaries) and subject experts such as scientists, mathematicians, and government officials from the sixteenth century on (1995:106-7).

In our 21st century world, economic capital lies increasingly in knowledge rather than in plant and machinery: hence the «knowledge society» rather than the «industrial society» (see, for instance, Leadbeater 1999:vii, who speaks of ‘knowledge capital’). And so the dissemination of that knowledge across the globe becomes a crucial economic driver. In addition, legislation in certain areas of the world, and in the European Union in particular, requires that documentation is produced in a number of languages (see, for instance, Product Liability Directive, 85/374/EEC²). In addition, documents may be translated not only at the final stage but also at draft stages of development in supranational organisations, in which linguistic and civil rights require that all citizens have access to information in their own language.

Not only has the generation of knowledge become ever more specialised and abundant, access to that knowledge has been opened up by the Internet: an ever broader readership has and expects to have access to knowledge, and the Internet has become a prime research resource for many translators and interpreters, whether through email contact and discussion lists, or through the World Wide Web (www). In a global society, this also means that the volume of documents that need translating and of events which need interlingual interpreting is growing.

Ways of working and the general context of working have also been changing rapidly. In a European context, for example, many documents are now translated into multiple languages, requiring teams of translators, terminology co-ordination and project management. In order to anticipate and obviate translation problems in such large projects, source texts may be authored (often in English) in a way which aims to neutralise cultural problems (e.g. through the avoidance of culturally - specific metaphors), to standardise the use of terminology (e.g. supported by the creation of a termbase), and to allow for expansion in translation (e.g. by allowing for sufficient white space in the source text so that pagination and layout can be retained in the translated versions of the document). Some international companies plan translation in to their projects as simply one stage in the document production cycle, offering a «turn-key» service from development of the concept for the documentation,

through terminology management, authoring and translation, to dissemination in print or on the WWW, and eventually, regular maintenance or upgrading.

Technology plays a crucial role in supporting all these developments, and in some cases, prompting them. Where translators now regularly use Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools such as Translation Memory, Terminology Management Systems (TMSs), Localisation tools, Web translation tools, and so on (see, for instance, Quah 2006), interpreters are learning to work remotely using video conferencing and telephone interpreting in order to match increasing demands for particular language combinations and expertise whilst overcoming the problems of physical distance. Standards need to be closely monitored in this new branch of interpreting, however, as adequate training remains scarce and the research base underdeveloped.

Concomitant with all these changes has been a growing professionalisation through the rise of professional associations and registers of translators and interpreters in both national and international contexts, including the establishment of codes of conduct (see, for instance, the codes of conduct – corporate and individual – of the Institute of Translation & Interpreting in the UK, <http://www iti.org.uk/indexMain.html>). Such codes are particularly important as the titles «translator» and «interpreter» are not normally legally protected. Those with professional training and recognised qualifications can then distinguish themselves from those without by reference to their observance of the code of the relevant professional association.

In order to satisfy the needs of this fast-changing market – or viewed another way, to ensure that there are those qualified to do a professional job – the shape and content of university programmes aiming to produce those qualified people, are also changing.

Profiles for Translation

A «profile» can be regarded as a summary of the *competences* which are considered necessary in order to function in a given professional context. For pedagogic purposes, profiles are important in order to:

- design curricula so that they are fit for purpose – considering, for instance, the kind of professional world in which graduates will be operating – including relevant components and combining these in a coherent way;
- develop syllabuses to include the necessary knowledge and skills (learning outcomes) in each component of the curriculum;

- select appropriate materials, as well as learning and teaching methods to match intended learning outcomes;
- assess and grade work according to the intended learning outcomes so that the profession can form reliable judgements about the competence of its potential new members.

Mapping the professional field as a basis for compiling a profile – the context for establishing the fitness-for-purpose of translation and interpreting programmes in universities – is not straightforward. Figure 1 below shows one possible view:

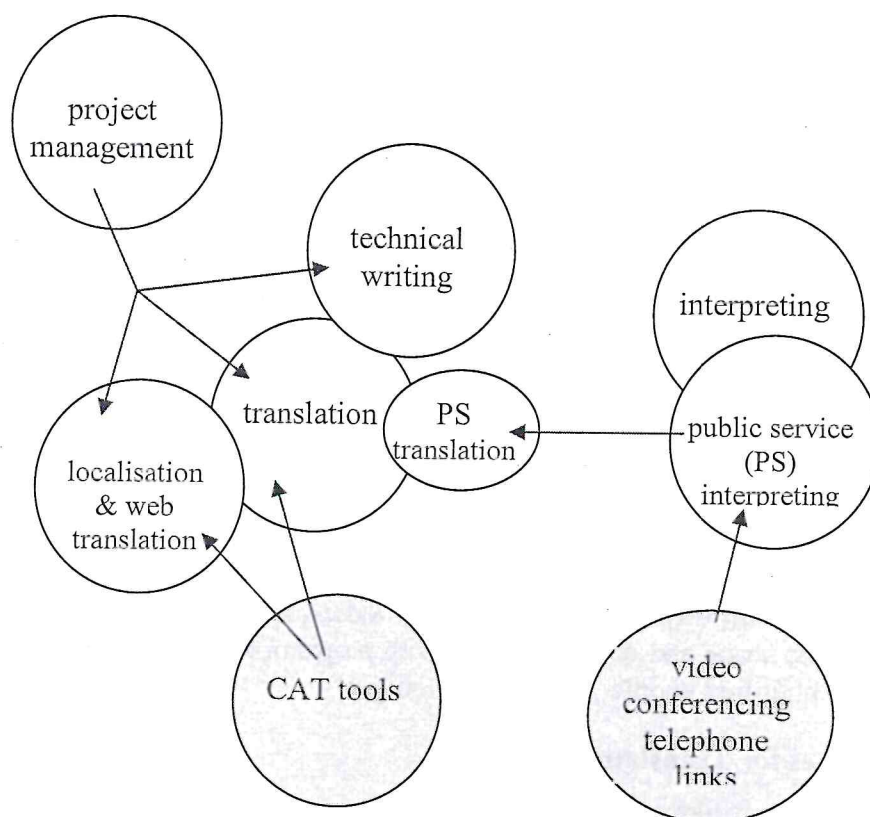


Figure 1: A possible map of the fields of translation and interpreting

There are, of course, different ways of developing professional profiles. Neubert's proposed profile for translators focuses on the types of competence which he considers necessary to carry out the job with an appropriate level of expertise: language competence; textual competence; subject competence; cultural competence; and transfer competence

(Neubert 2000:6-10). Nearly a decade after Neubert specified this profile, it seems timely to add «technological competence», in view of the rapidly changing context for translation in the professional world. This type of competence is not simply skills training: it also encompasses the knowledge and expertise to make strategic decisions involving the use of technology and the ways in which human translators interact with it.

Neubert's profile could be called a «static» profile, looking ahead to what university programmes are aiming for their graduates to achieve on completion of their degree. Another possibility is a dynamic, strategy-based view such as that proposed by Chesterman (2000), which profiles the stages of development through which the student translator passes, from novice to expert, with intermediate steps of advanced beginner (including «strategy analysis» and «strategy practice», building on the «strategy exemplification» and «strategy recognition» of the novice stage), competence («characterised by conscious decision-making» including «strategy justification» and «strategy comparison»), and proficiency (which «stresses intuition rather than analytical thought», linked *posthoc* to «strategy evaluation») (Chesterman 2000:83-5)³.

While Chesterman's profile can feed into decisions on pedagogical issues, e.g. teaching and learning methods and their sequencing, Neubert's more end-focused view is strongly suggestive of the likely content of the curriculum. What I have called 'static' and 'dynamic' profiles can therefore be seen as complementary in shaping training for translators.

Some Implications

The profiles of translator and interpreter competences are embedded in social, cultural, political, economic and technological contexts. Hence, their interpretation and application at any particular time and in any particular geographical or cultural context may vary, although the growing globalised nature of the professional market may increasingly diminish such variation. Curricula therefore need to be regularly reviewed within the broad context of «profiles in principle», such as those discussed in the previous section. In order to be sustainable, however, curricula need to strike a balance between immediate and pressing current market needs (such as a specific CAT tool or a particular highly-focused subject field) and longer-term developments (such as a general

growth in the use of CAT tools or a growing demand for scientific-technical translation).

Such decisions about the shape, focus and content of any curriculum for translator or interpreter training also need to be sensitive to the fact that it is very common in European universities, for instance, for students to originate from many different regions of the world, meaning that more specific needs of particular locales cannot all be simultaneously accommodated in one programme or even in one institution.

Finally, the constraints under which most universities operate also need to be acknowledged as a real factor affecting curriculum and other developments. On the one hand, universities are expected to respond to a fast-changing professional world with flexibility and considerable focus; on the other hand, they operate on quite different cyclical rhythms from commercial organisations, often with heavily bureaucratised processes for implementing change. There may also be regulations about required tutor profiles and academic qualifications, potentially ruling out the involvement of practitioners in the teaching programme. And in these days of technology-based working methods, problems of software purchase (a budgetary issue) and software maintenance and upgrade (a budgetary *and* infrastructural issue) are not easily overcome and remain non-trivial in the delivery of relevant and up-to-date programmes. These are all on-going challenges which face all colleagues who are trying to give their students the best start to their professional careers.

References

1. CHESTERMAN, A. 2000. *Teaching Strategies for Emancipatory Translation*. In: C. Schäffner & B. Adab (eds), pp.77-89.
2. DELISLE, J. & WOODSWORTH, J. (eds) 1995. *Translators through History*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins & UNESCO Publishing.
3. DOLLERUP, C. & APPEL, V. (eds) 1996. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 3: new horizons*. Papers from the Third Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark, 9-11 June 1995. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
4. DOLLERUP, C. & LODDEGAARD, A. (eds) 1992. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting : training, talent and experience*. Papers from the first Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark, 31 May-2 June 1991. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
5. DOLLERUP, C. & LODDEGAARD, A. (eds) 1994. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 2: insights, aims, visions*. Papers from the second Language International Conference, Elsinore, Denmark 4-6 June 1993. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
6. GILE, D. 1995. *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
7. GONZÁLEZ Davies, M. 2004. *Multiple Voices in the Translation Classroom*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
8. HATIM, B. 2001. *Teaching and Researching Translation*. Harlow: Longman.
9. HOLMES, J. 1972/2000. *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies*. In: L. Venuti (ed.) *The Translation Studies Reader*. London & New York: Routledge, pp.172-185.
10. HUNG, E. (ed.) 2002. *Teaching Translation and Interpreting 4: Building Bridges*. Selected papers from the Fourth Language International Conference, Shanghai, 1998. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
11. KELLY, L. 1969. *25 Centuries of Language Teaching*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
12. KIRALY, D. 2000. *A Social Constructivist Approach to Translator Education. Empowerment from Theory to Practice*. Manchester: St. Jerome.
13. KUSSMAUL, P. 1995. *Training the Translator*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: Benjamins.
14. LEADBEATER, C. 1999. *Living on Thin Air. The New Economy*. Harmondsworth: Viking.

15. NEUBERT, A. 2000. *Competence in Language, in Languages, and in Translation*. In: C. Schäffner & B. Adab (eds), pp.3-18.
16. PYM, A. 1998. *Ausbildungssituation in aller Welt (Überblick)*. In: Mary Snell-hornby et al. (eds), pp.33-6.
17. QUAH, C.K. 2006. *Translation and Technology*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
18. ROGERS, M. 2000. Translation. In: M. Byram (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*. London & New York: Routledge, pp.635-8.
19. SAWYER, D. 2004. *Fundamental Aspects of Interpreter Education: Curriculum and Assessment*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia : Benjamins.
20. SCHÄFFNER, C. & ADAB, B. (eds) 2000. *Developing Translation Competence*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia : Benjamins.
21. SNELL-HORNBY, M., HÖNIG, H., KUSSMAUL, P. & SCHMITT, P.A. (eds) 1998. *Handbuch Translation*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg.
22. WOODSWORTH, J. 1998. *Geschichte des Übersetzens*. In: Mary Snell-Hornby et al. (eds), pp.39-43.

-
1. The pattern in many European countries was until fairly recently, as in the case of Finland until the 1980s, for example, for translation and interpreting as professionally-oriented activities to be taught outside the universities in separate institutes, with a heavily practice-focused orientation. Over the last three decades or so, the increasing trend has been to incorporate such institutes/courses into universities.
 2. This European Union legislation stipulates that documentation is part of the product or service supplied (opening the way to liability claims against faulty or misleading documentation) and requires that it be supplied in the language of the supplier of the product/service as well as in the language of the customer.
 3. Chesterman takes and adapts these five developmental steps from a critique of Artificial Intelligence: Dreyfus, H.L. & Dreyfus, S.E. (1986) *Mind over Machine*. Oxford: Blackwell (see Chesterman 2000:77).