

Towards the Optimization of a "Training Situation": Analysis of the End-of-Studies Project of the Bachelor's Degree in translation at COLT

Hamad bin Ibrahim AL-TRAI

*French Language and Translation Department
College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University,
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (COLT-KSU)
htraif@ksu.edu.sa*

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Abstract

The end-of-studies project is an important curriculum component in the 5th year, Bachelor's Degree (undergraduate) course at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT). The trainee translators are asked to choose one of two sub-modules: The translation of a book chapter or internship, commonly called "cooperative training", in a professional environment. Each sub-module constitutes a "training situation".

Analysis of the effectiveness of a training situation requires a multidisciplinary approach borrowing from two distinct interacting fields that mainly include the field of translation studies and training. In this study, the effectiveness of the Project is analyzed in its two sub-modules to find out the adequate solutions to improve the training situation. This case study is based on a survey implemented through a questionnaire covering the two sub-modules of the end-of-studies project. It helps in measuring the extent to which the project meets the job market's needs in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Keywords: Translation Studies; Training Situation; Undergraduate End-of-studies Project; Trainee Translators; Translation Training Curriculum.

Introduction

Translation is a practice that requires many skills in language, culture and communication, fostered as parts of a coherent and quality training course (Kaharuddin, 2018). The Bachelor's Degree (undergraduate) course in translation at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT),

King Saud University includes an internship in a professional environment. The importance of this “training situation” can never be underestimated, as it is essential to the crystallization of the trainee translators’ theoretical knowledge and the consolidation of their translation practice at the university. This is highly significant since any translation activity should reflect “the realities of future professional needs” (Snell-Hornby 1992:19) to be regarded as a real-life task.

Teaching translation as a formal academic subject can be used to strengthen the acquisition of structures and vocabulary. All-round comprehensive translator education is much broader. Greater communicative purposes must be taken into account. According to Neubert (1989:5), “the study of translation and, in particular, the academic institutions where the practice of translation is taught do not exist in an intellectual ivory tower. They serve social needs”. This means that the pedagogical challenge of training translators for the job market must incorporate cross-cultural communication in its wider sense.

Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 is a major transformation plan comprising three themes: “a vibrant society, a thriving economy, and an ambitious nation” (Vision 2030). This vision embraces translation as a language activity needed by the labor market. With high dependence on documents, emails, financial reports, and market analyses to reach financial decisions, the market currently needs translators with linguistic proficiency.

In fact, there is a strong connection between economy and translation; good translation can generate large economic savings (Pym, 1995). With the technological advancements occurring nowadays, low-skilled employees can be easily replaced with machines or technological solutions. Hence, translators face huge challenges in today’s job market. They must be armed with solid language skills, cross-cultural knowledge and state-of-the-art technological awareness to integrate successively into the job market and to prove themselves as an irreplaceable source of translation expertise.

At the outset, it is important to underline that it is my personal and professional experience, spanning more than twenty years in translation teaching and training, supervising and examining more than 280 final year projects within the COLT, which prompts me to evaluate this project. The latter is mandatory for the validation of the semester and the completion of the requirements of the course, as it offers 5th-year trainee translators an opportunity to practice the knowledge acquired during the years of study. The improvement of this fundamental component of the curriculum requires a critical re-reading and revaluation of its present implementation within the COLT.

The importance of the final year project prompts us to answer the following questions: Does the project as it is currently designed and implemented at the French Language and Translation Department at the COLT achieve the objectives spelt in the curriculum? What are the skills needed to produce a good translator? What are the means likely to improve translators' "training situation"?

The answers to these questions require combining various concepts pertaining both to applied translation studies and training to examine the current "training situation", assess its actual implementation and consider its possible restructuring.

1. Methodology

Action research (AR) is not new to the translation field. Many theorists use AR for researching translation (Albir, 2001; Hatim, 2001; Williams & Chesterman, 2002), others have actually used it in certain fields as in translator and translation teacher education (Cravo, 1999) and translator training (Kiraly, 2000) or in more specialized domains, such as audiovisual translation (Neves, 2005).

This study leans on action-oriented research to analyze the final year project with its two sub-modules for its restructuring and optimization. In the Introduction of *Handbook of Action Research*, Reason & Bradbury (2001:1) define action research as: "A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile

human purposes... It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice... in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people”.

This type of research is deemed of immense benefit to translator training because it combines theory, practice and reflection; these being the most important components of any successful translation program. Undergraduate students can hugely benefit from direct interaction with scholars, professionals and their prospective clients. They are offered an opportunity to view “the inner workings of the professional world [and] not only view it from inside the academic cocoon” (Díaz Cintas, 2004: 201).

Students are also given the opportunity to interact with all those persons involved in the commissioning of their project but without being subjected to the pressures of the actual professional experience. Students will come to know many of the tricks of the trade even before coming into the trade. Since “learning to be a professional translator means learning to act like one” (Király *in* Pym, 2003: 29), the sooner students come into direct contact with professionals, the better they will know how to deal with the difficulties of the professional world.

The study uses the questionnaire as a methodological tool designed for trainee translators on the subject of the end-of-studies project. Their feedback and their answers on the set of questions posed provide illuminating results on the points of success and weakness of the project under analysis.

2. Objectives of the end-of-studies project at the COLT

Like all educational institutions teaching and training in translation, the COLT defines the objectives of the end-of-studies project and its sub-modules in terms of improvement and performance. These objectives are stated in the curriculum as follows:

- Enabling trainee translators to methodically and professionally use their translation knowledge and training;

- Applying the acquired knowledge and the developed skills during the university training;
- Simulating translation in a professional environment;
- Applying all the modules taught during the training years in a real situation;
- Contributing to the professional integration of the trainee translators into the job market and the update of their networks and helping them position themselves within the framework of their professional project.

However, the implementation in our department of the two types of the end-of-studies project reveals several setbacks and weaknesses at various levels:

- **Language Level:** The trainee translators 'poor command of the source and the target languages (Arabic and French, respectively).
- **Cultural Level:** The trainee translators 'lack of knowledge of the cultural reality and environment governing the target language. In this context, Valentine (1996: 23) explains that "*Knowledge of the world is the essential resource of the translator-communicator*". Therefore, the gap in cultural presuppositions plays a decisive role in the success or failure of the translation activity and subsequently in the translators 'competitive training.
- **Methodological Level:** This refers to the problems resulting from a curriculum organization offering trainee translators the choice between two sub-modules, which are unequal in time duration, text length, and consequently the types of knowledge to be acquired. However, the completion of one of the two sub-modules is enough to graduate from the university and bear the title of translator.

In light of the above setbacks and weaknesses, it is obvious that COLT faces a training/learning issue that prevents effective training leading to professionalization. The analysis of the end-of-studies project, therefore, has to pursue a double objective: to better adapt the applied sub-module to

the pursued objectives and to point out several data-based decisions, which are likely to improve the quality of the performed projects.

In order to limit the scope of the project, three parameters of “the training situation” outlined by Valentine (1996: 47) are evoked:

- *The structural context or institutional framework, i.e., the characteristics of the training institutions, their operating rules, their goals and objectives, the learning object and its sequences, the provided training type and level, the awarded degrees, the profiles of learners and trainers;*
- *The skills and abilities to be fostered in learners, i.e., the elements pertaining to the practice of the profession embodied in basic competencies;*
- *The pedagogical context or the teaching-learning situation, comprising learning contents, pedagogical intervention methods, i.e., the various learning activities, pedagogical supports as well as the types and means of assessment that trainers implement to facilitate the development of the required skills.*

Valentine also specifies that the training course design requires mainly the definition of the skills to be developed (Valentine, 1996: 53). Thus, the definition of skills provides the foundations upon which the structural context’s short and long-term objectives are set, that is the training program or the curriculum, respectively. Table (1) as follows provides a summary and illustration inspired by Valentine:

Table (1): Parameters of the End-of-Studies project

Structural Context: Higher Education Institution: College of Languages and Translation	
Training Subject: Translation	Degree: Bachelor Degree in Translation
Trainers: Bilingual University Professors	Learners: Arabic-speaking/bilingual
Competencies to be developed in learners: knowledges and skills needed in the	
Translation Methodology	Translation Skills (TS)
Learning/training situation: End-of-studies project	
Translation of a book chapter	Internship

The above parameters defined in Table (1) are in continuous interaction and reflect the reality of the training context, i.e. all the constituent elements of the teaching or learning situation are implemented and monitored via a dynamic process.

3. Analysis of the undergraduate end-of-studies project in translation at the COLT

Experience in the translation field is key for all junior translators gained from superiors, colleagues, clients, reviewers, or simply by trial and error (Pym, 2009). New trends of training like entrepreneurship in simulated translation bureaus (Van Egdom et al., 2020) empower students in numerous ways and make them more prepared for the job market. This is the primary level of training that is complemented by formal training in terms of courses which equip students with the necessary linguistic and specialized knowledge of the various fields of translation.

With the globalization of translation and the development of computer software and applications, the new generation of trainee translators has to keep abreast with the innovations in the field so that the gap between the labour market’s demands and the trainees ’needs would not

expand. This issue prompts us to analyze a major module in the undergraduate program, which is the end-of-studies project.

This module constitutes, in its two versions, a decisive and pivotal stage in the training or learning process of translators. The project prepares trainees to carry out a translation activity in a professional environment by applying the knowledge acquired and the skills developed during their training.

The translation skills involved in the end-of-studies project are defined by the COLT curriculum. This is why the project is a fundamental component of the training or learning process, which paves the way for the learner's entry into the translation profession upon graduation. Trainee translators are expected to hone quality, transcultural, personal and professional skills to enhance their translation abilities and, as a result, their profile as translators.

3.1. First sub-module: Translation of a book chapter

In the many images, descriptions and definitions advanced by translation specialists, translation takes on the form of reconstruction or recreation of language and communication, transposing statements, thoughts, laws, etc. from a source language and culture into a target language and culture. According to Tatilon (1986:7), translation is *“an operation which aims to produce, on the model of an original text, an end text whose information is - in each of its aspects: referential, pragmatic, dialectal, stylistic - as close as possible to that contained in the original text”*.

In the first type of the end-of-studies project module, carried out during the first semester of the 5th year, trainee translators have to produce an original translation from Arabic into French, or vice versa, of 60 pages (18,000-20,000 words) of a book published since no more than five years. The book is suggested by the department or agreed upon by the supervisor and supervisee, and its language may be general or specialized (legal, marketing, financial, industrial, scientific, etc.). During the implementation of the project, supervisors are asked to guide trainees and evaluate their

translated texts. On their part, trainees have to submit five translated pages every week, follow closely their supervisor's instructions, address their comments and edit their translations in the light of the provided feedback. In this way, they put into practice their acquired translation knowledge and achieve an effective transition from the general to the specialized translation of their choice.

It is to be noted that the trainees' immersion process in the required translation often constitutes a real challenge to them. They often find themselves in a semi-professional situation having to perform a specialized translation which can be very challenging. Nevertheless, at this stage, they should be able to understand the source text's subject and terminology and produce an accepted and correct translation within a relatively short period of time, sometimes while performing other learning tasks simultaneously. Nonetheless, despite the challenges posed by the translation project, confronting a specialized text remains a stimulating and challenging experience.

During a mini-defense organized at the end of the semester, it is required from the trainee translators to write a "Project Report" outlining the characteristics of their subject, the difficulties and challenges encountered and the translation procedures applied. Thanks to the review of the translation issues relevant to the book selected for translation and the analysis of the translation processes implemented to address those issues, the report proves useful for both the trainee translators who defend their work in front of a jury as well as their classmates who attend their viva. Accordingly, this end-of-studies project is more or less similar to a mini-master's dissertation.

3.2. Second sub-module: Internship

In the second sub-module of the end-of-studies project, trainee translators who want to join a professional environment instead of translating a book chapter may apply for and complete an internship according to the COLT regulations.

Internship refers to the experience acquired in the professional field by translating authentic texts for clients or users under the supervision of a competent professional translator. It allows apprentice translators to have genuine contact with the real world of practice and to test the skills developed and the knowledge learnt during their training. Mareschal (2005: 250-262) explains this type of training as follows: *“The student spends a certain number of days of internship in a translation firm or the translation service of a (large) company. This internship often takes place in the summer, i.e., outside the academic period, and its duration, which includes a minimum period, may vary depending on various factors, the main ones being the volume of work available at the company and the possibility of supervision by the employer. The interest of this internship is to allow the candidate translator to participate actively in the life of a translation company, to become familiar with its structure and operation, and to learn about the requirements and realities of the market.”*

At the COLT, internship is called "cooperative training in the field" and it refers to 75 hours of internship or training spent in a professional environment during the first semester. The COLT makes its network available to trainees to support them in their search for a host organization or company and ensure follow up of their work. Hence, cooperation agreements defining the terms and conditions of the training course are signed between the COLT and various national organizations and translation firms.

Apprentice translators complete the internship under the supervision of a referent teacher from the university department within a national institution, such as The Ministry of the Interior, the Institute of Diplomats under the Foreign Affairs Ministry, the Human Rights Organization, the Health Ministry, the Saudi Press Agency SPA, Al-Arabia Satellite Channel, G. Expo Conference and Forum organization companies and/or translation firms. It should be noted that there are no official agreements to govern the relationships between the host organization or company on the one hand and the higher education institution (COLT) and the intern on the other hand.

The trainee is jointly supervised by an internship tutor appointed by the host organization and a referent teacher at the COLT. The tutor is responsible for monitoring the internship in accordance with the modalities predefined in the agreement. At the end of the internship, the apprentices have to submit a report and defend it in front of a jury. The assessment is made by the organization or the company, i.e., where the internship takes place, as well as by the referent teacher. It includes a logbook, an interns group meeting that takes place at the COLT, an internship report and an evaluation form of the professional skills and personal qualities of the intern, completed by both the tutor and the referent teacher.

During the internship period, interns must meet higher expectations than those of a new translator in the job market. In addition, they have to keep samples of their work and the comments provided by the examiners to complete a report which is then submitted with the evaluation made by the supervisor to the professor responsible for the internships. The trainee's mark reflects the quality of the internship report and the content of the supervisor's assessment.

However, is the 75-hour internship sufficient for the trainees' learning or immersion in the professional environment? The answer is no. The internship is scheduled for the duration of ten days, a few months before majoring in the translation course. Thus, the space-time granted to apprentices is not enough to take full advantage of the internship experience, which involves a lot of aspects, such as familiarizing the students with the work environment, developing personal and communication abilities, experimenting with students' translation skills, discovering and demonstrating skills and aptitudes; in a few words, developing and applying the immersion strategy in a professional environment.

It is therefore recommended to pursue an internship formula of a much longer duration as a sub-module of the end-of-studies project so that apprentices have enough time to adapt to the professional environment and derive the expected benefits from their training. It is deemed essential for a

better training/learning of translators to keep the current internship formula, but as a compulsory component of the curricula of the five years of study. Undergraduate trainee translators would then acquire more knowledge and skills if they complete an internship each summer. When they reach the final year, their skills will be developed, and they will be able to successfully accomplish the internship. In our perspective, this is the most appropriate formula to implement the second sub-module of the project.

4. Questionnaire Analysis: Students' opinions on the end-of-studies project

Since the objective of the present research is to improve the translation training/learning situation at the COLT, the trainees' opinions are essential in identifying the limitations of the final year project. Indeed, the evaluation, restructuring and optimization of a training situation can only take place by considering trainee translators' views. Subsequently, the questionnaire constitutes an effective methodological tool for action research as it helps in collecting the data to be analyzed. Before distributing the questionnaire, however, support was sought from peers and academics who helped refine it by eliminating ambiguities in the contents and optimizing the clarity of the statements to make sure that the research objective would be reached.

The questionnaire was administered to 56 trainee translators in the 5th year, during the first semester of the academic year 2020/2021. It has been subdivided into three sections:

- General questions linked to the university course;
- First sub-module: The translation of a book chapter;
- Second sub-module: Internship.

The objectives and purpose of designing the questionnaire were explained to trainee translators and they were invited to take enough time and think carefully before responding. To respect the freedom of the trainee translators, participation in the questionnaire was optional, and so was the mention of the participants' names.

4.1. General questions on the university course

In the first section of the questionnaire, questions about the university course were asked. The objectives of these questions are two: to understand the trainee translators ’opinions on the university programs and to optimize the end-of-studies module. The participants ’answers are shown in Table (2):

Table (2): General questions

Questions		Strongly agree (%)	Moderately agree (%)	Don't agree at all (%)
1.	Is the five-year course sufficient for learning and mastering the French language and its translation?	37.5	41	21.5
2.	Are you satisfied with the quality of teaching and the teaching methods applied in the department?	50	30	20
3.	Do you feel able to effectively integrate into the job market upon graduation?	35	35	30
4.	Would you like to major in a specialized translation and/ or interpreting graduate course after the License?	37	28	35

Table (2) shows the participants ’answers to the first section of the questionnaire, devoted to the issues of the university translation course, specialization and professionalization. The trainee translators ’answers tell us about their opinions regarding the duration of the translation course, their satisfaction, the quality of teaching provided by the COLT, their ability to

integrate into the job market, and their intention to pursue graduate studies in translation.

Next to this, trainee translators were asked if they found the final year project useful. They answered that the project aided in the acquisition of new technologies and improvement of the mastery level in the source as well as the target languages, allowing the development of skills in the translation of long texts and encouraging trainees to use electronic references and bibliographies.

4.2. First sub-module: The translation of a book chapter

In this section, an important question was asked to the trainee translators: "Why do you want to translate a book chapter?" The answers varied: Eight (8) respondents said that they enjoyed reading and wanted to improve their translation skills, eleven (11) respondents explained that they wanted to translate a unique and defined subject, the remaining seven (7) said that they chose this sub-module because they had not obtained approval for internship in external institutions or organizations. The next question was about the choice of the book genre to be translated: 41% of the respondents did not choose by themselves, 18% chose Wikipedia articles, 10% chose literary texts and 31% chose technical texts.

Finally, trainee translators were asked to talk about their translation experience. They all confirmed that this module allowed them to improve their skills in both the source and target languages, to perform enough documentary research and to learn how to argue in defense of their translated texts during the weekly meeting with the supervisor.

4.3. Second sub-module: Internship

In this section, the opinions of trainee translators who chose internship or on-the-job training, to gain professional experience in the field of translation are presented. To ensure the trainees' full integration into the training environment, some suggestions regarding their experience in the internship were provided. Table 3 shows the results of the survey involving

a total number of 30 students. The figures represent the number of those who took the survey.

Table (3): Internship

Statements	Yes	No
Improvement of terminology	25	5
Experimentation in the professional environment to practice the skills developed at the university	30	0
Preparation for a future job in translation	30	0
Development of communication skills	15	15
Full integration into the professional environment	12	18
Incompatibility with the professional environment	20	10
Achievement of internship objectives	15	15
Development of new skills	25	5
Coping with unexpected problems	17	13
Understanding issues	14	16
Reformulation of issues	18	12
Internship time frame is adequate	10	20

The results in Table (3) show that even if most of the trainee translators appear to have benefited from the internship period, they feel dissatisfied with some of its aspects, such as developing communication skills, full integration into the professional environment, understanding the source text and the duration of the internship period.

At the end of the questionnaire, trainee translators were asked to mention any other information regarding their experience with the end-of-studies project. 85% of those who chose to translate a book chapter expressed their satisfaction with the development of their translation skills.

15% from the same category of the respondents said that they were not able to perform a specialized translation because the genre of the book or the involved terminology was overwhelming. Regarding those who chose an internship, 75% of them said that they would recommend the place where they carried out their on-the-job training to their colleagues. Other data shows that 5% of the apprentices received job offers during their internship. Finally, 25% of the apprentices thought that their skills were poor and would not allow them to cope with the translation issues encountered during the internship.

It should be considered that the complex relations governing the training and employment centers are accentuated nowadays and the needs of the translation market are amplifying and becoming increasingly demanding. This situation requires the planning of practical methods which ensure the quick and full integration of apprentice translators into the professional environment. To reach this objective, trainees have to meet the qualifications required by organizations, companies and translation firms. In this regard, Durieux (2005: 46) argues that “[...] the design of a translation teaching program for a given institution in a given country requires a study of the labour market, an audit of the political, economic and academic situation in which the course takes place, an analysis of the purpose of this course and an inventory of the means available to achieve it”.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undergoing radical changes called for by Vision 2030. The field of translation has to follow the country's orientations and attempt to optimize the academic syllabi, specifically the end-of-studies project in the translation. This is why the questionnaire conducted at the COLT is intended to better identify the needs of trainee translators and measure the degree of compatibility and efficiency of the end-of-studies project to the emerging and ongoing needs of the employment market in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Based on students' feedback on their preparedness for the job market after graduation and whether the end-of-studies project helped them in that

regard, students' responses varied without a strong agreement from students on the sufficiency of this project for their future immersion in the job market. Students need longer time span of internship to gain more professional, communicative, extralinguistic, personal and intercultural skills that would make them more apt to fulfill the needs of the job market. It is proposed that this internship would extend over the five years of study with every year offering a module of advanced internship for students. Every module in every year can incorporate a certain translation specialized field to familiarize students with the market needs. Success in all modules will be a requirement for graduation from the Faculty and gaining the title of "Junior Translator".

It is also suggested that the end-of-studies project can incorporate both sub-modules for a more comprehensive learning experience. This means that students can translate a book in the first semester, for instance. Then, in the second semester, they can pursue internship. Even better, if internship is extended over the five years of study. Then, the end-of-studies project can only incorporate the translation of a certain work to evaluate students' translation skills. Their work will be regarded as a mini-thesis which can be later adapted into a Master's thesis, if they decide to pursue postgraduate studies in translation after graduation. By this, students will gain from incorporating the two modules in their study program for a more extensive learning experience, rather than asking them to choose one of them and depriving them of the benefit of the other.

To optimize benefit from the end-of-studies project, it is also recommended that the COLT undertakes a restructuring and updating of the teaching process of the end-of-studies project to overcome its shortcomings. Improvement should specifically target a fuller integration of the students in the job market and better training of students on the communication skills they need to acquire. Increasing communicative experiences of students, in the form of peer review of their work, group work, presentations, etc. can enhance their communication skills and prepare them for the future. Moreover, offering specialized translation courses throughout the study

years will allow students to deal with the terminology challenge of their end-of-studies translation project.

Action-oriented research is deemed highly beneficial for the optimization of the teaching and learning experience of translation. It combines both theory and practice and highlights the necessity of integration or immersion of students into a professional or semi-professional situation that will educate them on how to cope with the challenges of the job market. Consequently, this type of research can yield great insights on the design of various courses in language generally, and translation specifically.

For future research on translator training, it is recommended that more action-oriented research be conducted on other simulated training situations to strengthen trainee translators' skills and improve their immersion level into the professional world. This can include, in particular, training situations that incorporate technological solutions as an inevitable aid to translators nowadays in our ever-changing world.

Continuous training of students in several modules stretched across the study years will not only provide length, comfort, consistency, better practice and self-confidence for students but will also simulate real-life situations with their challenges and unfavorable circumstances. The mental processes included in this process of training for solving problems and responding instantly to clients' demands are very beneficial for trainee translators because this reduces the years of experience students need after graduation. The sooner students have hands-on experience in the translation field before they graduate, the better. They evolve as more experienced translators faster and engage sooner in the job market.

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