

# **Specialized Translation Teaching Between Theoretical Orientations and the Reality of the Market**

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## **Abstract**

According to Maier and Kenny (1993), there is an ‘increasing concern’ in the ‘current translation pedagogy’ to prepare students who can work with ‘highly specialized material’. In this context, the present paper sets first to consider some factors which define translation, curriculum objectives and how to make these objectives in the service of our own local strategic and economic needs. Second, the paper will consider some theoretical orientations in specialized translation teaching. To be informed about different trends in specialized translation at the international level has a twofold advantage: updating research at the national level and taking informed decisions as far as the local situation is concerned. The third part of the paper will deal with the possible adaptations of the orientations that are most convenient to our local strategic and economic needs and the setting up of our own genuine orientations.

## **Introduction**

According to Maier and Kenny (1993), there is an ‘increasing concern’ in the ‘current translation pedagogy’ to prepare students who can work with ‘highly specialized material’. In this context, the present paper sets to consider some factors which define translation, curriculum objectives and how to make these objectives

in the service of our own local strategic and economic needs. Second, the paper will consider some theoretical orientations in specialized translation teaching. To be informed about different trends in specialized translation at the international level has a twofold advantage: updating research at the national level and tacking informed decisions as far as the local situation is concerned. The third part of the paper will deal with the possible adaptations of the orientations that are most convenient to our local strategic and economic needs and the setting up of our own genuine orientations.

### **1. Factors Defining Translation Course Objectives and the Algerian Local Strategic and Economic Needs\***

According to Kelly (2005), many training courses in certain university systems and academic traditions do not have explicit definitions of their intentions which can be used as a basic reference point by both staff and students. Now, however, explicit intentions are the rule in almost all courses: “It has now for some time been recognized in most systems, as part of the general move towards improving student learning, that explicit intentions must be formulated for *all courses*” (Kelly, 2005, p. 22).

Explicit intentions had been, for some time, teaching objectives, i.e. what the teacher wanted the student to learn, emphasizing on teacher input. Recently, however, emphasis has been placed on learning outcomes, i.e. what students will be able to do at the end of the course.

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Kelly (2005) enumerated several factors which help in defining learning outcomes/objectives, some of them being:

### **1.1 Socio-Cultural Context**

For Kelly (2005), the European socio-cultural and institutional context in which courses are to be offered is the most important factor because there is a big difference between a full undergraduate or a postgraduate programme and a professional development course. The former, being held at the university, has general educational considerations to be taken into account; whereas the latter, being organized by a professional association, does not have such considerations at all. Thus different settings yield different objectives.

The Algerian socio-cultural and institutional context in which translation courses are offered is that of a Licence undergraduate course of four years, followed by a Magister postgraduate course of three years (this was until very recently; two years ago) and a Master course of two years (this is the actual programme). Both programmes are held at the university and they differ as to their general objectives. A general translation competence is the general objective of the undergraduate translation courses and a more 'specific' translation competence is the general objective of the Master translation courses. In cases where the Master course is a continuation of a Licence course in translation, the specialization aimed at in the Master course can be seen as realistic. But in cases where the Master course is a continuation of an LMD Licence course in languages, the

specialization aimed at is somehow hindered, in our view. Instead of specializing in one of the fields of translation, the Master course will have to encapsulate basic translation-related knowledge for the students from language departments.

### **1.2 Professional Standards**

One way to approach the current state of the translation profession is to dwell a little on what professional translators are actually required to do, if the overall aim of the course is to train professional translators. The UK Languages National Training Organization (LNTO today the National Centre for Languages CILT) in a 2002 leaflet provided the following career guidance description:

Translators work with the written word. They convert documents from the source language into the language of the people who need to know and read the content of the translation (i.e. the target language) and the final translated document should read as clearly as it did in the original (Kelly, 2005, p. 24).

According to Kelly (2005), this description is undermined by 'old' beliefs: that there is always one source text, that both source and target texts are in written modes, excluding multimedia text for instance, and that the target text is always needed by the reader.

Another way to approach the current state of the field is to analyze job advertisements and descriptions. The following is an advertisement for a translator

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position in SDL International (Kelly, 2005, p. 25). The basic profile of the recruits is that of

high-calibre graduates with an appropriate qualification in an any specific or arts discipline relevant for the work of the EU-institutions and the capacity to adapt and evolve professionally to meet our basic requirements (Kelly, 2005, p. 26).

These requirements can be summarized in the following points:

1. Flexibility in changing circumstances.
2. Ability to operate under administrative rules
3. High degree of intellectual curiosity and motivation
4. Capacity to work independently or as a part of a team

In addition to these requirements, graduates should have or be prepared to acquire the following specific skills: language skills (perfect and thorough knowledge of two or more languages), thematic skills (familiarity with different fields) and translation skills (such as register conventions or research strategies).

In fact, the profession is in constant change as Shreve (2000, p. 217 cited in Kelly, 2005, p. 27) posited:

The profession of translation (can be seen as) a special kind of ecosystem moving through time, modifying itself under the pressure of influences

emanating from its socio-cultural environment, and evolving successfully from one form into another.

He added that there is a dispersion of the language industry into different professional roles taken by graduates trained as translators: bilingual editors, multimedia designers, research specialists, cultural assessors, multicultural software designers, software localizers, terminologists, and project managers (Shreve, 2000, p. 228).

In the same respect, Kingscott ( 2000, p. 227 cited in Kelly, 2005, p. 27) speaks about ‘ *a growing fragmentation of the field*’, and identifies changes in the profession such as the globalization of communication, the increasing use of English as a ‘world auxiliary language’, and the multimodal nature of much text production to enumerate but few examples.

A very good solution, in this context, seems to be preparing learners to be more flexible and to adapt to constant change, as Kelly (2005, p. 27) puts it:

The constant evolution evoked here is, I believe, essential to any description of professional activity in our age. Not in vain is one of the essential concepts of current education policy that of lifelong learning in recognition of the impossibility for educational institutions clearly to define the future needs of society in concrete terms, and *thus the need to prepare trainees to be*

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*flexible, adapt and constantly learn new skills* (emphasis ours).

Obviously, there is an enormous range of activities and skills required belonging to the translation profession. Specialized courses, for Kelly (2005, p. 27), are designed to train specialists in only one area of translation expertise; whereas generalist courses, the most wide spread training courses, are designed to cater for the huge diversity in the current market, while foreseeing likely future developments students are to be prepared for.

In the Algerian context, as far as specialized courses are a continuation of general courses, there is a possibility to satisfy both our local strategic and economic needs. Specialized courses aiming to replace general courses, in our context, are neither market grounded nor competence transferability justified.

### 1.3 Disciplinary Considerations

If the overall aims are to be described in terms of what professionals are required to do and to know, as Kelly (2005) puts it, then addressing the concept of translation or translator competence becomes necessary. According to Kelly (2005), different authors have used the concept of translator /translation competence in different ways: to describe the actual translation process as an expert activity from a cognitive perspective, to design translation curricula ...etc.

The concept of competence in higher education and training has been taken to refer to: “a combination of skills, knowledge, aptitudes and attitudes, and to include disposition to learn as well as know-how” (Working group for the implementation of Education and Training 2010; 2003, p. 10 cited in Kelly, 2005, p. 33). In fact, the recent move in European higher education towards a new model of tertiary education together with the attempt to harmonize European curricula (facilitating graduate professional mobility with Europe and making European higher education more competitive in the world) has led to as Kelly puts it “*fruitful period of self-analysis and reflection in many tertiary education institutions*”. If we are to consider the concept of ‘*competence*’ in the context of this reform process, distinction should be made between “*general, generic or transferable competences*” and “*subject area specific competences*” (Kelly, 2005, p. 34). The first type of competences should be the aim of all undergraduate or postgraduate courses (whose mission to help individuals attain personal fulfillment and development, inclusion and employment); whereas the second type of competences should be the aim of their own fields (a role more specific to their own respective fields).

For Kelly (2005), offering a very wide range of generic competences, in the translation field, is very striking and difficult to be found in other academic fields at university level. This permits ‘our’ students, according to her, to be almost uniquely flexible, adaptable and highly employable citizens. She further added that with the incredible proliferation of translator training courses the world all over, we could run the risk of training



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students with highly specialized competences not then be of use on graduation. This risk is reduced with the transferability of 'our' subject area competences to other fields.

In fact, the Algerian context does not present constraints such as professional mobility and making higher education more competitive accordingly. These very specific constraints have influenced the need for more professional translators in Europe.

### 1.4 Translation Course Objectives and the Algerian Local Strategic and Economic Needs

In fact, we should state clear agendas in education, economy ...etc, and they need to be developed on the basis of our *genuine strategic and economic needs*. The challenge thus is to have course objectives which are in the service of our *genuine strategic and economic needs* which are:

- 1- The translation of knowledge in all the fields of science as a necessary step for the development of our country.
- 2- To make Arabic the language of science and technology.
- 3- To satisfy the market needs in terms of translation services.

If these are our needs, then our objectives will follow as:

- 1- To train translators in all fields of science to cope with the scientific 'gap' between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds. This can be done through specialized courses in translation; but a specialization that follows a profound general course. This is because specialization -in the Algerian case- springs from the need to transfer science to develop the country; not for satisfying the needs of a market that is different from the European one.
- 2- To train translators who can satisfy the needs of the market. This can be done through general courses; which in the Algerian context provided a solid initiation to different 'specialized' fields.

As to whether the general translation competence of the 'previous' licence undergraduate courses in translation fulfills the needs of the Algerian market or not, most authorized translation offices agreed on the fact that translation graduates need to learn a lot once at the work place. The graduates' deficiencies seem to be mainly in the professional and interpersonal skills. This is the case because most of the translation held in these offices is mainly conventional and stereotypic. Thus, as far as our local economic needs are concerned, the general translation competence got from the translation courses seems somehow adequate. Reforms, however, are to target professional, interpersonal (and team work) and technological aspects of the graduates' translation competence. As far as the general translation competence of the Master courses that are a continuation of LMD licence undergraduate courses in language are concerned, we can trace a different challenge: how to transfer

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specific translation skills (literary translation competence for instance) into wide spectrum of skills needed in the translation market; represented here by the exigencies of the translation market.

### **2. Some Theoretical Orientations in Specialized Translation Teaching**

There are many articles that dealt with the practice of specialized translation. De Campos (2009), for instance, dealt with the practice of specialized translation as regards academic certificates. She highlighted the use of a two steps method; the analysis of the specialized source text to identify elements of fundamental significance to translation, and the search for specific translation patterns through parallel texts.

Nunez (2014), from her part, tried to clarify key concepts regarding the didactics of economic, financial and commercial translation. Her syllabus included theoretical aspects, aspects related to the ability to do conceptual or terminological search and aspects related to the specialized translator's real practice.

#### **2.1 Munoz' Critical Account**

According to Munoz Martin (2002: 01), a translation teacher and a professional, 'the objective of translation was, until very recently, the intellectual operation of translating, with two stages of progression, namely general translation and specialised translation'. In his article, he questioned the grounds for such an objective and suggested a general pedagogical update.

Munoz (2002) criticized translation classes as being taught in conditions different from those of the real world (in terms of professional tools and reference documentation), not highly demanding and provide modest results

‘To begin with, we have to persevere with improving the methods used to teach a profession whose profile, nature and expectations are changing’ (Munoz, 2002: 02).

He further pointed to areas where improvement is needed:

- a- Professionalization in pedagogy and research
- b- Need for theoretical models to understand the translation process and break into specific objectives ‘to establish a progression that is consistent with the objectives’
- c- Need to reconsider the progression in translation which tends to be established in two stages: general and specialized translation. Munoz (2002) thinks that texts intended for a wide audience (such as disclosure), that are part of general translation, have a greater variation, complexity of vocabulary and syntactic and rhetorical structures than those which are most widely used in specialised-translation classes.
- d- Need to reconsider the unrealistic pedagogical strategies due to ‘...the gap in terms of real conditions as regards the use of technology, volume of work, deadlines, complexity of texts..’(Munoz, 2002: 04).

## **2.2 Updating the Criteria of Translation Class Content: Munoz Suggestion**

Munoz (2002) further suggested ideas for updating the criteria determining the content of translation classes:

- Translation classes should be given in a manner to encourage students to adopt realistic routines that can be transferred to professional activity: ‘translation classes should be given in realistic environments in classrooms in which IT equipment is available, for example’ (Munoz, 2002: 4).
- There is a three-stages progression to adapt to the reality of the Market as far as text type is concerned:

1<sup>st</sup> stage: progression, in terms of textual typology, can be established by focusing on the texts that are translated most frequently (civil registry, brochures for tourists, press magazines, packaging for food).

2<sup>nd</sup> stage: texts to be translated are those which are assumed to be the most sought after in professional circles. The market here determines specialization.

3<sup>rd</sup> stage would concentrate on common text types within a specific speciality.

- As far as extralinguistic determinants are concerned, ‘A possible progression would begin with orthographical and typological rules, as they affect all text types. A second stage would examine the influence of other semiotic systems that also function within the same

communication apparatus (cinema...). The third stage could focus on situational determinants such as customers and proofreaders...' (Munoz, 2002:05).

- As far as the professional aspects of the process of translation is concerned, Munoz (2002) conceptualized the progression as follows:

In the first stage, students should learn the different profiles of the university leavers; in the second stage, they should focus on actual general professional routines (use of templates, development of documentary and terminological strategies); in the final stage, students will focus on relationships with customers.

- As far as intellectual scope of the profession is concerned, Munoz (2002) conceptualized the progression as follows:

The 1<sup>st</sup> stage consists of questioning ideas related to language, communication and the tasks involved in translation.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage is that of understanding translation process.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage engage in reflection upon the implications of the work of translators from ethical circumstances to its place within the intellectual work of a linguistic community or polysystem.

And last, as far as the mental processes are concerned, and as translating entail the development, reinforcing, diversification and speeding up of a series of

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mental operations, initial stages might contain contrastive linguistics and false friend identification; intermediate ones correspond to subjects related to students' conduct and background and final stages relevant to practice in an extremely realistic environment.

The following is a diagram taken from Munoz (2002: 09) summarizing the criteria for learning progression in translation:

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stage aspect	initial	intermediate	Final
Topic	general	introduction to <u>specialities</u>	<u>Specialisation</u>
<u>Text type</u>	Most common	Paradigmatic	Most frequently occurring
Tasks	Comprehension/expression	Single professional tasks	Complete professional tasks
<u>Extralinguistic determinants</u>	orthographical and typographical	Semiotic	Situational
professional	profiles of leavers	actual general routines tools	relationships with others who make up production chains
Output	300 words / hour	400 words / hour	500 words / hour
Theory	critique of ideas received	study of processes	reflection on the product and process
Mental	classifiable problems standard solutions	specific tasks justified reasons	convergence of tasks, case studies analogy-based solutions

Diagram: organisational criteria for learning progression  
in translation (Munoz, 2002: 09)



### **3- Possible Adaptations of Specialized Translation Teaching Orientations to the Algerian Context**

It is possible to adapt the specialized translation teaching orientations previously presented to the Algerian context as follows:

- a- De Campos' (2009) two steps method of the identification of elements of fundamental significance and search for translation patterns through text analysis and parallel text can be used in both general and specialized courses suggested for the Algerian context.
- b- Nunez' (2014) economic translation syllabus can be also insightful as to the theoretical aspects that have to accompany a specialized text.
- c- In Munoz's (2002) view, texts for the purpose of disclosure (or general translation texts) proved to be more difficult for students for which they got lower grades than specialized text. This remark is true for Algerian students as well. However, more research is called to determine whether disclosure texts include basic elements to be found in specialized texts, and thus ease will be due to this 'basic nature' rather than difficulty.
- d- Munoz's (2002) suggestion-in translation teaching- to start with the most recurrent text type in the profession is relevant to satisfying the economic needs in the Algerian context. As for the strategic needs, we can combine 'basic texts' or 'general' texts with 'specialized' ones in the general translation course. In later specialized

- courses, the progression will rather be built on the strategic needs.
- e- Munoz's (2002) view about combining various criteria in a single specialized translation class is an idealistic position, trying to satisfy the needs of an ever changing market; but it is reductionist of the 'holy' mission of the university. It is our assumption that whatever amount of professional aspects are included in higher education curricula, this does not and should not change the holy mission of the university which accords with our genuine strategic objectives.
  - f- Specific strategic objectives: as was previously stated training translators in all fields to cope with this 'scientific gap' between the advanced world and the third world is a short-term strategic objective. This strategic objective is to be realized through, in our view, postgraduate specialized translation courses.
  - g- Specific economic objectives: training translators able to satisfy our *genuine economic needs* is a short-term economic objective. The 'specificity' of the Algerian translation market illustrated by the work of the translation offices, in our view, makes it possible for this objective to be realized by general translation courses constantly updated with insights from the profession.

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### Conclusion

In this paper, we tried to explain that though-at national as well as international levels- there is an increasing concern in the current translation pedagogy to prepare students who can work with highly specialized material (Maier and Kenny, 1993), local strategic and economic needs are of paramount importance in establishing actual translation courses. International theoretical orientations of specialized translation teaching can only be informative to both local specialized translation teaching and research.

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