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**ANXIETY IN ADVANCED TRANSLATOR TRAINING: AN APPROACH FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE TRANSLATOR'S COMPETENCE**

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Abstract: *New and unfamiliar situations often create in people a mix of emotions, in which motivation and curiosity coexist with anxiety and a reduced level of self-confidence. Since this phenomenon also occurs in situations in which people are supposed to learn something new, research has started to show interest in the role played by the affective factors in a wide range of cognitive processes. The present study starts from the conviction that translator training is a domain in which such affective variables are particularly relevant, considering the growing demands placed on translators nowadays and, in close connection to that, the pressure experienced by trainees. Therefore, by combining research data with reflective insights drawn from the author's teaching experience, the paper aims at investigating those elements of the general translator competence that generate the highest levels of anxiety among students enrolled in advanced translation courses.*

Key words: *affective variable, anxiety, competence, research, translator training*

1. Introduction

The extensive use of translation in today's globalized world has determined a considerable increase in the general expectations regarding the translators' professional expertise and competences. This involves a lot of pressure not only for the translators themselves, but also for the field of translator training, which has to constantly develop curricula that, in addition to providing a solid foundation for learning, are also in line with the market realities.

This psychological pressure is also taken over by the translation students, especially by those enrolled in advanced training programmes, who expect their training institutions to provide them with the competences and skills meant to help them function successfully in real professional contexts. These expectations often represent the source of a mixed emotional response which combines motivation and curiosity with anxiety and a reduced level of self-confidence. If in the field of foreign language learning, research has indicated that affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence have a significant impact on learning outcomes (e.g. Oxford, 2016, Pushpanathan et al. 2025), in the field of Translation Studies the affective variables of relevance for translator training have received less attention. However, the responsibility associated with producing appropriate target texts in various specialized domains, under potentially tight deadlines and in relation to various categories of clients, make translation trainees particularly vulnerable to affective pressures.

Considering all these aspects, the present paper aims to investigate those components of the general translator's competence that generate the highest levels of anxiety among students in advanced translation classes in their quality as both trainees and future translators. Relying on data collected by means of a questionnaire administered to students in translation, as well as on the author's experience as a translator trainer, the study will identify the most important sources of student anxiety and will offer some methodological recommendations meant to promote both the development of a good translation competence, and the creation of a positive affective climate.

2. What does the translator's competence actually involve?

In order to identify those elements of the general translator competence that are source of anxiety and lack of self-confidence among students, it is necessary to elucidate, first of all, what the concept of translator's competence actually covers. It must be stressed from the very beginning that, just like other concepts of central importance such as equivalence or norms, the translator's competence has not

received unitary treatment in Translation Studies. More specifically, over time, there have been numerous attempts at naming and defining this concept, and at identifying its sub-types, as I will explain in what follows.

In the early stages of Translation Studies, when, under the influence of the discipline of Applied Linguistics, translation was considered to be a linguistic operation involving transcoding between two languages, translation competence was generally defined as a “language-summation concept” based on the ability to put together the linguistic competencies gained in two languages (cf. Pym 2003: 483). Representative in this respect is the view expressed by Wills (1982, in Pym 2003: 483), who claims that a good translator must have the source language text-analytical competence, as well as the equivalent target language text-reproductive competence.

As translation theory shifted its focus from language as an abstract system to language use in communicative contexts, translation theorists realized that linguistic competence alone was insufficient and had to be supported by other types of knowledge, abilities and skills. One consequence was that translation competence started to be described in terms of models consisting in a set of interrelated components, which can be studied both in isolation, and in their interplay. One of the most influential models of this type is that proposed by Bell (1991), in whose view translation competence represents a sum of target-language knowledge, text type knowledge, source-language knowledge, subject area knowledge, contrastive knowledge, and communicative competence covering grammar, sociolinguistics and discourse. In the same vein, Nord (1991) adopts a functional perspective towards translation, claiming that the translator’s competence is made up of the competence of text reception and analysis, research competence, transfer competence, competence of text production, competence of translation quality assessment, and linguistic and cultural competence both on the source and the target side.

The 1990s witnessed the elaboration of a series of models that were generally influenced by insights from the fields of second language acquisition and intercultural communication. Thus, Hatim and Mason (1997: 170-171) present a three-stage model which involves source text processing skills, target text processing skills, and transfer skills. The two theorists refer to a variety of skills that are relevant for each of these stages, explaining that the categories of skills overlap, and that each particular skill will interact with all the others. Another important theorist, Neubert (2000: 15), proposes a hierarchical model in which the transfer competence dominates over the other four components, that is language competence, textual competence, subject competence, and cultural competence, ensuring the quick and efficient translation of the text. Presenting a similar model, Schäffner (2000: 146) claims that the transfer competence is the translation specific competence, as it integrates all the other sub-competences: linguistic, cultural, textual, and domain/subject specific. However, Schäffner also includes in her model the (re)search competence, a general strategy competence aimed at the ability to solve problems triggered by the cross-cultural transfer of texts.

Starting with the 2000s, translation competence has turned into an object of study in its own right, and research on it has increased substantially (cf. Hurtado Albir 2015: 258). In this context, there have numerous contributions made by research groups who aimed at establishing translation competence models and competence-based training programmes. One of these models is provided by the EMT (European Master’s in Translation) expert group, a group set up by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for Translation with the purpose of increasing the quality and the availability of translators functioning on the European markets. In 2009, this group implemented a reference framework for the competences valid for translation, a document that was revised and improved in 2017, and again in 2022, “in the light of the changes which have affected both the language industries and European universities” (EMT Competence Framework 2017: 2). This competence framework describes in detail the key competences and the skills that translation graduates must possess in order to function effectively in the constantly changing field of multilingual and multimedia communication. Five main areas of competence are defined: language and culture (all the general or language-specific linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and transcultural knowledge and skills which represents the driving force behind all the other competences); translation (encompassing not only the actual meaning transfer phase between two languages, but also all the strategic, methodological and thematic competences used before, during and after it); technology (the ability to use the most relevant information technology applications and to adapt rapidly to the new tools and resources, to make effective use of search engines, corpus-based, text analysis and computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, or to master the basics of machine

translation); personal and interpersonal skills (such as planning, time and stress management, complying with instructions and deadlines, teamwork, etc); service provision (from client awareness and negotiation to project management and quality assurance) (cf. EMT Competence Framework 2017).

The overview of the knowledge and skills needed by a good translator presented in this section clearly indicates that the notion of translation competence has come to integrate more and more constituents in time, and that it is now perceived as a very complex phenomenon. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that translator – be they experienced, beginners or potential – have certain worries and fears related to what it means to be really competent in this field.

3. Anxiety in translator training: a case study

After clarifying the concept of translator's competence and identifying its components, next I will discuss the relevance of the information presented so far for the context of translator training. I will do that by means of a research study meant to explore the affective factors of relevance in the process of translator competence development, with a particular focus on the anxiety experienced by students at an advanced level of training.

3.1 Research methodology

As a data collection instrument, I used a questionnaire, which was applied, between October 2022 and June 2025, to 87 students enrolled in advanced translation programmes at university level. All participants had already completed at least three years of formal translation training and had been exposed to a variety of text types and translation tasks. The respondents completed the questionnaire in writing and the answers were anonymous.

The questionnaire includes one closed question, that enables the quantification of the answers, and one open-ended question, that allows participants to elaborate on their responses and to reflect on specific sources of anxiety. The closed question required the respondents to rank various elements of importance for a good translator's competence from 1 to 5 according to the degree of worry that they may create in each of the participants, 1 representing the lowest degree, while 5 – the highest degree. The elements to be ranked are in close correlation with the description of the areas of competence defined by the EMT Competence Framework : (a) knowing how to deal with the clients; (b) knowing how to plan and manage one's time, stress, work, budget and ongoing training; (c) knowing how to work in a team; (d) knowing how to create and offer a translation appropriate to the client's request; (e) knowing how to define and evaluate translation problems and find appropriate solutions; (f) knowing how to proofread and revise a translation; (g) knowing how to recognise function and meaning in language variations (social, geographical, historical, stylistic); (h) knowing how to identify the rules for interaction relating to a specific community, including non-verbal elements (useful knowledge for negotiation); (i) developing strategies for documentary and terminological research; (j) knowing how to use tools and search engines effectively; (k) dealing with specialist fields (mastering systems of concepts, controlled language, terminology, etc.); (l) knowing how to adapt to and familiarise oneself with new tools, particularly for the translation of multimedia and audiovisual material; and (m) knowing how to prepare and produce a translation in different formats and for different technical media. For the open-ended question, the students were supposed to mention two aspects of a potential career as translators that they feel anxious about.

After collecting the answers from the 87 participants in the study, the data were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative analysis involved ranking the competence elements mentioned in the questionnaire according to the students' levels of anxiety, while the qualitative analysis focused on identifying recurring themes and explanations in the students' answers. This mixed methodology is meant to enable a more nuanced interpretation of the respondents' perceptions. The main findings resulted from the analysis of the answers provided by my subjects are presented and discussed in what follows.

3.2. Findings

Since the main purpose of my study is not to make statistics, but just to reflect a certain reality and to discuss some pedagogical implications, I will focus mainly on the qualitative implications of my research. In other words, I will make reference to quantitative aspects only as far as they indicate those

elements of the translator's competence that, according to most of the respondents, are associated with the highest degree of anxiety, that is, they are ranked with 4 and 5. Thus, as revealed by the scores registered by each of the elements included in the closed question, the highest levels of anxiety are related to time and stress management (b), interaction with clients and negotiation within specific communities (a, h), knowing how to adapt to and familiarise with new technological tools (l), and dealing with language variation and with specialized domains (g, k). As we can see, the students' fears have to do with professional aspects, on the one hand, and with particular linguistic aspects, on the other.

As for the answers offered to the open-ended question, they follow similar trends, but the fact that the respondents had the opportunity of expressing themselves freely led to the emergence of additional elements. Thus, as far as the professional elements are concerned, the answers that I analysed make frequent reference to the possibility of finding a job, given that Artificial Intelligence does a lot of a translator's work nowadays. As one subject puts it, "I am worried about how my work is valued. I fear exploitation and being paid less than the machine". The problem of money is frequently mentioned by my subjects especially with regard to the fact that employers sometimes compromise the quality of the translators' work for the sake of giving them less money. One student expresses the fear that such practices may be dangerous for the translation career in general: "Employers often prefer to underpay translators, or opt for a cheaper variant or machine-made translation, which may put a translator's job in danger". As for the fears regarding linguistic aspects, several subjects referred to mistakes that may create problems in real-life situations. The following answer is representative in this respect: "I am anxious about the idea that a mistranslation could lead to serious harms and wrong interpretation/reading of a text, depending on how important a text is. Such mistakes could have very terrible consequences".

It can be concluded that both the quantitative and the qualitative findings show that the participants in my study report two major sources of anxiety in relation to the various components of a good translator's competence. First, students refer to the insecurity regarding aspects of professional self-management and interaction with the translation market, such as coping with deadlines, self-promotion and being employed, negotiating contracts, using professional resources, and coping with the changing technology in the field of translation. Second, students expressed concern about lack of familiarity with specific professional and cultural contexts, particularly with regard to terminology and linguistic variation. In the next section, I will discuss some possible pedagogical implications arising from the findings of my research study.

4. Pedagogical implications

The pedagogical implications of the data revealed by my study are organized according to the two major sources of anxiety discussed in the previous section.

4.1. The "tools of the trade"

Since the highest levels of anxiety are linked to professional self-management and market-related abilities, training regarding these areas should be integrated into the curricula of the translator training programmes. An effective technique that teachers can use involves the use of various types of task-based activities which are designed to simulate real professional situations. Tasks focusing on time management, self-advertising, managing finances, negotiation, and client communication can help students become familiarized with certain professional practices and, consequently, can reduce the level of uncertainty. A very useful resource in this respect is Imre's book *An Introduction to Translator Studies* (2020), in which we find, among others, a series of practical recommendations regarding both self-management (pp. 91-126) and managing relations with clients (pp. 127-148).

4.2. Linguistic particularities

In order to make students feel confident about translating in real-life situations, translator training courses should provide them with terminological and cultural knowledge that enables them to produce a target language text considered functionally appropriate in a certain communicative context. As I have mentioned several times (for instance, Cozma 2010, Cozma and Dejica 2013), teachers can increase the future translators' awareness with regard to the specific linguistic and structural features characteristic of texts from various domains of activity by resorting to genre as a teaching tool. Any

genre-based educational approach is oriented towards the creation of meaning at the level of discourse and not towards the acquisition of various lexical or syntactical elements. More exactly, by using such an approach, translator trainers aim at making their students aware that, beyond the linguistic units revealed by the text to be translated, there is a higher level of order and patterning in language, and the requirements imposed by this higher order must be respected by anyone who wants to be effective in a certain English language discourse community. By involving students in various activities regarding the situational considerations of the source and the target texts, analysis of parallel texts, searching the Internet or consulting glossaries of terms, target-text production, and revision, teachers can help students approach unfamiliar domains with greater confidence.

5. Conclusion

As a general conclusion, I must say that both the theoretical and the practical evidence presented in my study highlights the need for translator training programmes to address not only aspects of cognitive or professional nature, but also the creation of a supportive emotional learning environment. Even if translation courses cannot provide students with practice related to every single problem that they might encounter in their future careers, they should be organized in a manner that is likely to “motivate the student toward his field by making him find out for himself the manner in which the learning of translation goes together with translation in the real world” (Wills 1996: 6). This is just one more proof that a critical factor in successful professional translator training is represented by the quality of the emotional environment that characterized the learning process.

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