

Mariusz Marczak, PhD
Pedagogical University of Cracow
Chair for Translator Education

Developing Selected Aspects of Translation Competence through Telecollaboration

Abstract

The European Master's in Translation (EMT) model of translation competence (TC), which was developed by the European Commission and its in-house translation service Directorate-General for Translation, constitutes an outcome of an attempt at standardising the concept of TC. As a consequence, it is inclusive, rather than exclusive, in nature and comprises selected components of previously proposed theoretical and pedagogical models of translation competence while aiming to reflect the reality of professional experience within the area of translation. The purpose of this article is to examine how the implementation of information and communication technology (ICT), telecollaboration in particular, within Translation Studies programmes at university level may facilitate the development of particular aspects of the six sub-competences of the EMT model: (i) translation service provision competence, (ii) language competence, (iii) intercultural competence; (iv) information mining competence (v) technological competence and (vi) thematic competence. The author analyses whether, and to what extent, the functionalities of telecollaboration tools and the work modes that they promote are likely to assist translator educators in dealing effectively with the components of the competences which constitute the EMT model. Conclusions are also drawn about the limitations of the use of telecollaboration in translator education.

Keywords: *translator education, translation competence, Information and Communication Technology, telecollaboration*

1. Introduction

Information and communication technology is being increasingly utilised by translators who take advantage of its capacity for the facilitation of the translation process as well as the support it lends to effective communication with partner-translators, clients, reviewers and supervisors. In addition, it may be posited that translation is beginning to evolve towards the implementation of computer technology for the purpose of telecollaboration, not only communication functionalities but also through online translation services (Bogucki, 2009; Mrochen, 2014).

In the light of calls for greater compatibility of university programmes with the job market, advocated by e.g. Weigt (2015), it seems mandatory for translator education to help translator trainees live up to the reality of the contemporary translation market and the expectations of their prospective employers. Consequently, it seems desirable for translator education to incorporate methodologies involving the use of computerised translation technology, including telecollaboration. It may be expected that such a solution will benefit

trainee translators by permitting them to develop collaboration skills, the ability to take autonomous decisions while participating in group projects and the sense of shared responsibility for teamwork.

2. Telecollaboration

Telecollaboration emerged as a teaching technique back in the 1990s (Marczak, 2013) and since then it has been defined in a variety of ways. However, at the common core of the definitions offered lies the idea of the implementation of computer-mediated communication for the purpose of collaboration between groups of students. Benson (2001) proposes that it involves learners working together on a common goal with a view to completing a given task. Cognisant of that are also Beatty and Nunan (2004), who add that telecollaboration is a work mode which requires readiness to listen to others and discuss others' ideas to decide about task completion.

As Belz (2003) puts it, "Telecollaboration involves the use of Internet communication tools by internationally dispersed students of language in institutionalized settings in order to promote the development of (a) foreign language (FL) linguistic competence and (b) intercultural competence" (Belz, 2003). This definition also reverberates in the words of Guth and Helm (2010), who delineate telecollaboration as an "(...) Internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence (...) through structured tasks" (Guth & Helm, 2010: 14).

It is quite common for scholars to associate telecollaboration with the development of linguistic and intercultural competence, which also shows in the writings of Grucza (1993a) and the definition offered by O'Down and Ritter (2014), who maintain that telecollaborative work "(...) refers to the use of online communication tools to bring together language learners in different countries for the development of collaborative project work and intercultural exchange. This type of network-based language learning (NBLT) covers a wide range of activities and exploits a variety of online communication tools, including email, web-based message boards, and videoconferencing" (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2014).

Others, e.g. Schultz (2003) and Jegede (2002), link telecollaboration to the development of learners' higher order skills and critical thinking skills, respectively, while Dooly (2008) defines telecollaborative work in slightly more general terms, without associating it with specific educational goals and characterises it as a work mode which "(...) aims at providing

problem-solving objects that will facilitate genuine interaction" (Dooly, 2008: 67). All in all, telecollaboration has been utilised to such a great extent that it is considered as a pillar of contemporary language education (Thorne, 2006).

One of the advantages of telecollaboration for which it has been increasingly implemented in language education is the range of tools with the use of which it may be practised and the number of student groupings and activities which it may potentially involve. Lee et al. (2006) demonstrate that telecollaborative work is teamwork which inherently involves communication, collaboration, knowledge sharing and the use of information resources. Vinagre (2007) adds that it is based on social interaction and debate, which may serve the purpose of organising intercultural student exchanges.

The main two formats in which telecollaboration may be organised comprise synchronous communication and asynchronous communication. The former involves efficient communication in real time, i.e. it enables the participants to post messages to their partners immediately, as is the case e.g. in an online chatroom. The latter, in contrast, permits communication which inevitably takes more time and is based on messages being exchanged with a delay, as it happens e.g. on an online forum.

Each of the communication modes involves the use of specific online tools. Synchronous computer-mediated communication involves the implementation of internet chat, audio- and video-conferencing, Multiple Object-Oriented environments (MOOs), where users interact with each other in a virtual reality and use objects which they are capable of creating themselves (Khosrow-Pour, 2006), whiteboarding and instant messaging. Asynchronous communication is based on information exchanges via email, online discussion boards, wikis, blogs or online word processors, e.g. *TitanPad* or *PrimaryPad*.

Telecollaboration may be used in order to diversify work formats for students based at the same institution, whereby they can collaborate with their colleagues via online tools. It is typically used with students from different institutions so that they can perform tasks with partners from distant locations. Telecollaborative work may be organised for individual students, e.g. when paired-up partners work in email tandems (Krajka, 2012), or for groups of learners, when students work collectively.

Telecollaboration may engage students in a vast array of activities, including: peer reviewing, where students analyse and evaluate one another's writing (Carvin, 2007); the creation of personal portfolios (Higdon, 2005), whereby students collect and store in an organised fashion a set of multimedia resources/materials; the collaborative writing of a mini-dictionary or a glossary of specialist terms (Elia, 2009); the creation of annotated reading lists

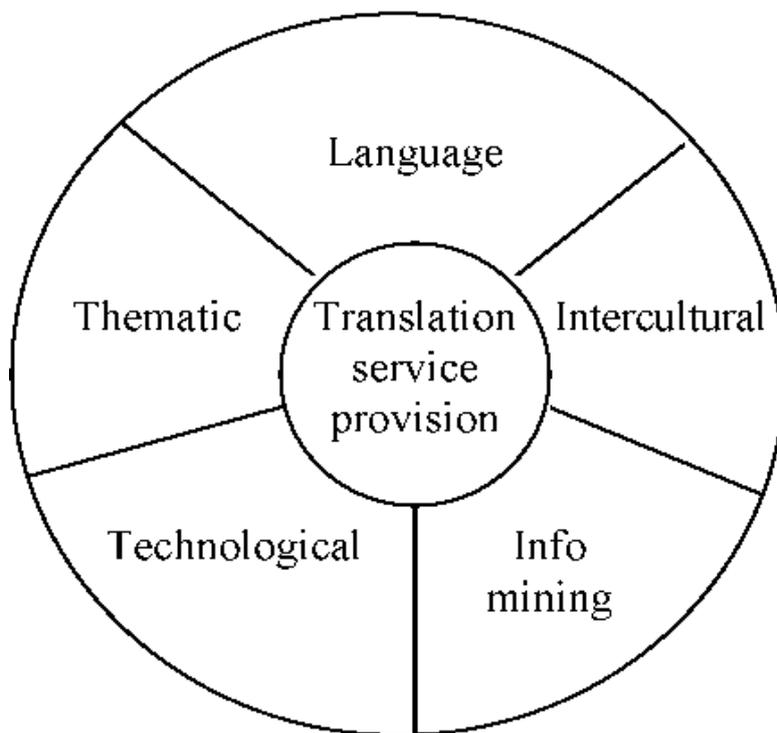
(Harmelen, 2007); collaborative editing (Franklin & van Harmelen, 2007); the creation of a virtual vocabulary notebook (Sharma & Barrett, 2007); the use of webquests (Dodge, 2000), where students perform extensive web searching, information gathering, information processing and the preparation of a final product; and the running of e-journals (Żylińska, 2003), where learners upload their own multimedia resources for others to read and comment on.

The afore-mentioned work modes and tools are likely to appeal to learners at varying levels of language competence and can revolve around a wide range of topics. In addition, learners can find them stimulating due to the richness of multimedia resources which they may involve.

3. Models of Translation Competence

The history of translator education has witnessed numerous attempts to encapsulate a range of competences which should optimally be developed in translator trainees with a view to equipping them best for the profession. Models of translation competence have been proposed – *inter alia* – by Winkler (1992), Sim (2000), Pym (2003) and Kastberg (2007). The models proposed to date could even be categorised as pedagogical models (cf. Schäffner & Adab, 2000), i.e. those which stem from particular problems relating to the process of translator education, or empirical models (cf. Campbell, 1991; PACTE, 2003), which have been verified by empirical tools.

The number of existing models of translation competence makes it impossible to discuss them all within the limited space of the present article, however, the scope of the kinds of competences contained within those models may be illustrated by analysing the model which is particularly relevant to the European context of translator education and was proposed by the Directorate-General for Translation (European Commission) in association with a number of European universities (EMT, 2009). The model was an attempt at introducing convergence to master's level translator education programmes offered by European universities as part of the Bologna process, and it is supposed to embrace the most important competences to be developed in translators to be. Graphically it is presented as a circle of five major competences relating to the overarching competence of translation service provision, including: language competence, intercultural competence, information competence, technological competence and thematic competence.



(EMT, 2009: 4)

Each of the major competences illustrated above can be further broken down into a set of relevant sub-competences, which specify what knowings, which are supposed to be reflected in one's abilities, they entail.

Translation service provision competence is supposed to work at interpersonal and production levels. On the interpersonal level it refers to the ability to negotiate, clarify, plan, comply with regulations, work under pressure, perform teamwork and self-evaluate. On the production level it denotes the ability to define and evaluate translation problems as well as find adequate solutions as well as justify one's translation choices and decisions (EMT, 2009).

Language competence constitutes the foundation of translation competence as without it one cannot translate. Thus, it involves the knowing of how to understand grammatical, lexical and idiomatic structures and conventions of particular languages and knowing how to utilise that knowledge in both the source and target languages. In addition, it also comprises the ability to develop sensitivity to language change, which helps one remain up to date with a given language as it is actually being utilised by the community of its native users.

Intercultural competence is in a sense complimentary to language competence in that it facilitates successful mediation between different languages and cultures, which the translator

is inevitably involved in. The EMT model of translation competence delineates intercultural competence in two dimensions: sociolinguistic and textual (ibid.).

On the sociolinguistic level intercultural competence refers to knowledge and skills which enable a translator to: recognise the function and meaning of utterances in social, geographical, historical, stylistic variations of a language, identify the rules for interaction, which would ensure successful communication, including the use of non-verbal communication channels in negotiations. This competence would also enable the translator to produce language utterances in an appropriate register in both spoken and written discourse (ibid.).

On the textual level, intercultural competence signifies the knowledge which makes it possible for the translator to understand and analyse the overall structure of a document, including the ability to understand and analyse the coherence of multimedia documents. It also regards the ability to read the implicature of a text on the basis of the presuppositions, allusions or stereotypes which are woven into it. An interculturally competent translator will be able to recognise, describe and evaluate his/her problems with comprehension, as a result of which, he/she will successfully identify the most appropriate strategies for resolving them (ibid.).

Intercultural competence also means the ability to summarise the content of a document, to recognise culture-bound elements and identify values and cultural references relating to the cultures in question, and to compare elements of culture and different methods of composition. However, this competence is not reduced to reception, exclusively. It additionally embraces the prerequisites for production such as the ability to compose a document which meets particular rhetorical standards and follows the conventions of a given text genre, and the ability which permits a translator to draft, rephrase, restructure, condense, and post-edit documents in pairs of languages corresponding to the source and target texts (ibid.).

Thematic competence refers to the knowledge and skills which are prerequisites for the successful performance of information search, which in an age characterised by the abundance of knowledge available to the general public on the Internet gains particular importance. If the translator is to work efficiently, they must be capable of finding adequate information relatively quickly, but they also need to learn how to develop knowledge in specialist fields which relate to the subject matter tackled in the source text. At the same time, they need to approach the search task per se and the knowledge found with curiosity as well as display the ability to analyse and summarise the findings (ibid.).

Information mining competence comprises knowledge and a skills which, by and large, enable the translator to identify their own requirements, develop strategies which are indispensable in researching documents and terminology, extract and process information, develop criteria for the evaluation of documents written in specific pairs of languages, use computerised/online tools, including terminology management software, corpora and e-dictionaries, effectively, and archive documents (ibid.).

Technological competence denotes the knowledge of how to effectively Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools for the purpose of the translation job and other computer software which they can implement in order to correct text and perform documentary research. In the course of translation they also need to be able to create and manage databases which will contain term banks and glossaries, but they also need to be able to deal with computer files in a variety of formats, e.g. those containing the source/target text.

Given the dynamic nature of CAT tools and rapid developments in information and communication technology, translators need to keep themselves up to date with changes to the software that they already know, but also explore the market for new resources. As a result, they need to be able to explore new software solutions and adapt to them in a relatively short time (ibid.).

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4. Telecollaboration for Translation Competence

It is desirable to consider to what degree telecollaboration lends itself to the development of particular competences which constitute translation competence at large in the light of the affordances offered by the former and the characteristics of the latter.

The first of the afore-mentioned competences is service provision competence. On the interpersonal level it appears to be particularly convergent with the kind of work modes which telecollaboration involves as it comprises the ability to negotiate, clarify, plan, comply, work under pressure, work with partners in a group and self-evaluate. It is striking how all of these abilities are inherently part of telecollaborative tasks. As a matter of fact, they are the scaffolding of telecollaboration; one might even venture to state that they define it.

On the production level service provision competence can also be developed through collaborative tasks as it requires students to define and evaluate translation problems, find adequate solutions as well as justify one's translation choices and decisions. It would be hard to argue that such abilities will be developed by default because that would be true only about telecollaborative translation tasks. Yet, it must be observed that defining and evaluating

problems, finding adequate solutions to them, justifying their decisions and self-evaluating one's work are all inevitably part of telecollaboration, too. All in all, it may be concluded that translation service provision competence can be potentially developed through telecollaboration.

The same applies to the development of language competence, which could be furthered through telecollaboration, provided that the tasks in which students are involved offer them an opportunity to explore the language subsystems of grammar and lexis and conventions of the language in question, e.g. by examining samples of genuine communication in search of language patterns and changes which they undergo. In the case of translator trainees, this kind of learning would be particularly beneficial if it involved language pairs, i.e. both the source language and the target language.

In the case of intercultural competence telecollaboration is an adequate didactic solution as it may be implemented in order to involve students in activities derived from ethnography of communication, where they can analyse data from computer-mediated asynchronous communication tools, such as online blogs, forums or discussion groups, with a view to analysing samples of intercultural communication. Through that they could recognise the function and meaning of utterances in different variations of a language, identify the rules for interaction and analyse the how the participants of a communication act use language register in order to establish understanding. At the same time, if students involve in video-enhanced synchronous communication with representatives of other cultures and record it, they can use the data gathered in order to examine verbal as well as non-verbal channels through which meaning is negotiated.

Telecollaboration can also be used in order to develop intercultural competence on the textual level, whereby they could analyse the structure of a range of documents, the implicature of texts on the basis of the presuppositions, allusions or stereotypes which they contain. For that purpose they can use data available in both mono- and bilingual online corpora. In effect, they are offered a chance to identify, describe and evaluate problems with comprehension and decide on the most appropriate strategies for resolving them.

Text analysis will also enable students to practise summarising the composition and content of documents, recognising culture-bound references and identifying the values and thought patterns which underpin the messages expressed. At the productive end, students could participate in telecollaboration projects where they would compose documents representative of selected text genres, or draft, rephrase, restructure, condense, and post-edit documents in pairs of languages. All that can be done with the use of telecollaborative tools,

e.g. online text processors such as *TitanPad* or *PrimaryPad*, which permit reflective communication in real time.

When it comes to thematic competence telecollaboration seems particularly applicable as it permits students to develop information searching skills, which are necessary for translators to explore a particular subject field e.g. in order to understand specialised language contained within the source text. Nowadays an information search is most likely to be performed on the internet, which provides numerous data resources available to the general public. While telecollaborating students can be easily referred to online resources, such as term databases, repositories of parallel texts or mono- and bilingual corpora so that they can practise how to access, extract and validate adequate information quickly. Moreover, as the EMT model of translation competence indicates, this kind of task will be best performed if the translator approaches it with curiosity. That, in turn, may be evoked through collaboration with others, with the benefit of job sharing and peer support.

As far as information mining competence is concerned, it seems advantageous to attempt to develop it through telecollaboration as while performing tasks with their colleagues, students are likely to share a variety of strategies to be used while researching documents and terminology as well as extract and process information. That can help students increase awareness of their own needs and the kind of strategies which are likely to be most optimal for them. Students may benefit from an opportunity to discuss particular problems with their colleagues while performing telecollaborative translation tasks e.g. in order to establish what criteria to use in order to evaluate documents written in particular languages. They will also inevitably learn how to use computerised/online translation tools and archive documents, provided that the projects they are supposed to perform involve the performance of a translation task. In this manner translator trainees will not only learn how to collaborate with others but also utilise online translation services, e.g. *Wordfast Anywhere*, *Systran*, *Google* or *Translation Toolkit*, and file storage/exchange facilities, e.g. *Google Drive*, *One Drive* or *Dropbox*.

The afore-mentioned competence dovetails in its coverage with technological competence, which also relates to the use of online translation tools and other resources relevant to the needs of the translator, e.g. text correction facilities or documentary research tools, such as online mono- and bilingual corpora, e.g. *JRC-Acquis Multilingual Parallel Corpus*, or term bases, e.g. *InterActive Terminology for Europe (IATE)*. By collaborating with their colleagues student translators may exchange information about translation software available on the market and evaluate the tools they identify in the context of their own needs.

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