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## **A Class in Translation Service Provision for Students of Applied Linguistics UMCS**

### **Abstract**

This study presents how students of translation at the Department of Applied Linguistics UMCS assessed the class dedicated to translation service provision competence. Analysed are data in the pre-test and post-test questionnaires taken by 30 (pre-test) and 21 (post-test) class participants in its initial implementation in the academic year 2022/23. Results indicate a general sense of satisfaction with class content and participation, and the open questions provide valuable information on potential areas of class enhancement. The article provides a general outline of the subject: content and methods. Apart from regular content-oriented classes, four workshops with language service provision professionals were held. Students had optional tasks to take: study tasks to explore selected aspects of business functioning in Poland and social media activities to build the brand associated with the class.

**Keywords:** translation service provision competence, translator education, portfolio management, solopreneurship, freelancing

### **Introduction**

Translation as a service and a business activity has become of interest to a growing number of researchers over the past two decades. It is true that the service-related nature of translation has been long recognised, yet it is particularly the latest research – reviewed briefly below - that seeks to answer the question what is service, what kind of service translation is, and why seeing translation as service provision and translators

as service providers can be beneficial to translation studies and translator education. In the context of our study, the educational aspect is paramount. Informed by a vast body of research, the authors developed a dedicated class (mandatory academic subject) in building translation service provision competence to MA students of translation at the Department of Applied Linguistics, Maria Skłodowska-Curie University in Lublin, Poland. The class had its first edition in 2023 and engaged all students of the Department in the first year of MA in translation (33 in 2023). This study presents and discusses results from the pre-test and post-test questionnaires taken by these students. Both pre-test and post-test bring a lot of information to use in the future editions. A general conclusion at this stage of subject development is that its content and class interaction is well assessed by the participants, who were also eager to share ideas for potential improvements to the programme.

### Literature Overview

One of the main concept behind the research we present and the class we describe is that of service in general, and of language service in particular. For the sake of brevity, we present the historical outline of research on translation service as divided into three chronological stages. The initial stage emerges as early as early 1980s, with the seminal functionalist notions of *skopos*, *commission* (Reiss & Vermeer 1984) and *translatorial action* (Holz-Mänttari 1984). It was perhaps for the first time then when translation researchers realized and outlined the communicative and collaborative complexity of the translation process. The studies of the time mostly focused on the notion of translation as no longer an individual act, but a social action. Yet, at the time, the notion of translation service was not addressed directly: *skopos*, *commission* and *translatorial action* were abstract generalisations.

Stage two comes with the rise of *sociology of translation*, which is a study of “the sociological process of the translation event” (Chesterman 2009: 16). One dimension of the sociological take is *translator studies* – a term which is a deliberate modification of the classical notion of *translation studies*. Chesterman (2009) explains that in translator studies the texts and textual relation stay in the background, while “the translators themselves are primary research subjects” (Chesterman 2009: 15). Even though Chesterman (2009) is considered a seminal text for sociology of translation, it must be kept in mind that this research strand is already outlined in a collective volume by Wolf & Fukari (2007), with Chesterman’s own contribution in it (Chesterman 2007). The texts by Chesterman and by other authors in Wolf & Fukari (2007) marked an emergent interest in the social and professional functioning of translators and interpreters, giving rise to prolific research in the years to follow. A novelty of translator studies was its openness to empirical evidence behind phenomena that had previously been taken for granted. This is perhaps best evidenced by multiple empirical research contributions by Helle V. Dam and Karen Korning Zethesen. The long record of their works includes studies on translator status (Dam & Korning Zethesen 2008, 2010, 2011), translator profession (Dam & Korning Zethesen 2016) and professionalism (expertise) (Dam & Korning Zethesen 2014). Other empirical research enriching the field includes studies like Chodkiewicz (2012), Havumetsä (2012), Kuznik & Verd (2010), Risku *et al.* (2020) or Ruokonen (2013). Among more theoretically oriented studies of the time, Drugan (2013) and Kuźnik (2014) are noteworthy, even though the data-oriented studies mentioned above also feature important theoretical content.

One more type of publication that emerged in relation to the studies typical of stage two were those in translator pedagogy. Perhaps the first to be mentioned here is Gouadec (2007). For one thing, this monograph offers the broadest available exposition of potential configurations of the translation service, often quoted, analysed and developed further in translator studies. An equally vital aspect signalled by Gouadec (2007) is how translator education is to make optimal use of what we now about the translation process. Another short, but undeniably seminal publication is EMT (2009). As part of an educational programme, EMT (2009) was among the first formulations of the notion of translation competence (the-then topical concept in translator education) in which service provision plays a pivotal role. The above mentioned Chodkiewicz (2012) is an empirical study based to the list of competences in EMT (2009). She investigated how active professional translators and translation students perceive the skill catalogue produced by EMT experts. Some results are discussed later in this article. Klimkowska & Klimkowski (2015, 2020) rely on EMT (2009) for the list of research items in a study to determine the entrepreneurial resources of Polish students of translation.

Even if many of the works listed in stage two overtly used the concept of translation service, service provision or service competence, the main focus was placed on translation as product and process, or translators as agents in social networks. Stage three introduces a turn in the research optics. Firstly, it is the service and the process of its design, delivery and management that becomes the pivot for investigative efforts. Secondly, researching the service calls for voices other than those in translation studies or translator education.

Business and people skills are only beginning to be included in translator training programmes and research agendas, although their relevance has been increasingly recognized [...] This is a gap the discipline needs to fill in the future. Interesting new avenues for research could perhaps be found in the direction of service studies (or serviceology or service science), which looks at service management and service innovation across fields. (Koskinen 2020: 146)

Kujamäki (2020) presents an approach anchored in service research called Service-Dominant logic. She finds the approach particularly relevant to translation services as it puts strong emphasis on the process rather than the product in added value creation. From this perspective, a translation service is a translator's co-creation of value for their clients. To use Reiss & Vermeer (1984)'s concepts, one could say that a translation service often has its skopos defined beyond the text and its translation (product). The end user value may call for skopos re-positioning to some later stages of text use (for instance in the case of research text translation, where the skopos can be placed on the successful publication, rather than on translation of the original – for more details, see: Klimkowski 2022). For space scarcity, we refrain from discussing this new emergent research trend in details. The reader is redirected *e.g.* to (Kujamäki 2021) for a broader outlook on recent advancements.

### **Solopreneurship Academy: The Background and Rationale**

*Solopreneur Academy* is an educational brand corresponding to the academic subject *Translators on the Service Market*, which is part of the formal curriculum for 1st year MA translation students (Applied Linguistics, UMCS). The decision to have an alternative name for a regular academic course was deliberate: to make the students experience how branding works and what it takes to develop a brand.

The point was to build a brand for the class that students can choose to contribute to by their posts in social media – more details below.

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Three main reasons are underlying for the subject proposal and implementation. Firstly, the latest research discussed above highlights a need for theoretical investigations into the concept of *service* as the pivot for service provision. In our view, this perspective also needs its extrapolation onto translator (interpreter) education. Secondly, a considerable body of empirical research depicts an extremely complex picture of the translation profession, often paradoxical and self-contradictory views on translator status and job satisfaction. A good example is (Chodkiewicz 2012), who collected responses from 33 professionals and 22 students of translation concerning their assessment of skills that make up the translation competence as outlined in EMT (2009). The responses show that despite the vision promoted by the EMT (2009) experts that the translation service provision competence is the common denominator for all the other dimensions of translator performance, the students and the professionals did not acknowledge its role as pivotal. For example, (Chodkiewicz 2012) observes that:

Translation service provision competence “was found highly important by both groups [...], although it was not among the highest ranked ones. This seems quite unexpected since this “highly” practical competence is at the centre of the EMT model and its elements are also highlighted in other recent scholarly works [...]. (Chodkiewicz 2012: 46)

Our own research (Klimkowska in print) involving 206 active Polish translators indicates that not all aspects of the translation service provision competence are valued the same by the professionals. For example, while 87.50% of the respondents assessed *negotiating with clients* to be a very important skill, and 83.70% assessed *service pricing* in the same way, only 51.00% valued skills in *service portfolio building* that high. A noticeable number of respondents (33.70%) assessed the skill as important and another 10.60% as rather unimportant.

Findings of the kind illustrated above are more a regularity than an exception, and they pose an obvious question to translator educators: if empirical data do not provide unquestionable support for the role of service and service provision competences, should we highlight their role by addressing them in dedicated educational components?

Our answer is definitely positive. Firstly, the fact that either students or professionals assess different skills in different ways does not mean that the service-related competences have no place in translator education. Irrespective of result fluctuation, only a marginal number of responses could signal the irrelevance of the skills in the eyes of professionals or students. Secondly, service-related functioning is a transference skill, which equips students with strategies of market functioning that can be extrapolated beyond the language service industry. Thirdly, the academic subject that we outline here is implemented in a country whose translation market is characterised by low structuration (European Commission. Directorate-General for Translation et al. 2013) and which favours freelancing/solopreneur models of service provision.

Nevertheless, the result fluctuation reported is also a signal that any academic course or subject addressing translation service provision needs to be a mosaic of constituents, allowing participants to choose those which they find relevant for their learning trajectory.

## Content areas

The content of the class is arranged around four main topic areas:

1. Designing a service portfolio, to help students realize their fields of interests, modes of translation they favour. Students are asked to use three parameters when building their portfolios: (a) which fields match students' interests; (b) which fields offer profitability vistas; (c) which fields offer client base opportunities.
2. Designing a business model in which the portfolio is to be implemented as a service ecosystem. It is a well-known fact that language professionals can work in a number of variants: in-housing, freelancing/solopreneurship, or hybrid modes. Discussing benefits and costs of each option helps students plan their optimal interaction with the language market.
3. Basics of business management is a component devoted to concepts of income, taxation, social levies, formalities of starting and running a business in Poland, IT support for business operations *etc.*
4. Marketing and CRM is to help students define the channels and modes of communication with their prospective and present client base. Major marketing and CRM policies are discussed for students to be able to decide on their optimal choices.

## Multiple Voices

A vital feature of the class arrangement is that apart from regular, curricular classes, four meetings with active professionals were planned and arranged. There are two main reasons behind this solution. Firstly, the voice of professionals in a profession-oriented academic classroom (González Davies 2004) has a strong interest-raising and empowering function: it is no longer an academic teacher (who may be a professional, but their voice is situationally that of a teacher) who talks, but renowned industry experts. Secondly, the content presented by a teacher is "legitimised" by the experts: a teacher does not have to argue that 'this is vital knowledge, this is why you need to know this' since experts bear witness to that knowledge by their actual career narratives.

## Marketing Activities

Apart from regular classes and meetings with industry experts, the students have an option to engage in social media marketing. This task consists in developing a series of posts in relation to regular classes and expert meetings. It makes students experience using social media for (self-)branding purposes, to unveil the potential and realise the risks of this marketing channel.

## Study Tasks

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Conducting research on a selected aspect of business activity in Poland is another optional activity for the students. Topics include researching websites of Polish institutions like Social Security Company, Tax Office and other organisations like banks, security companies and accountancy services.

## Portfolio

The semester assignment is to fill in data in a personal portfolio covering four main topic areas of the class. The students have an oral examination and are asked to discuss, justify and expand on their choices. They can also ask questions or seek confirmation to what they wrote. The examination is a dialogical event and its main role is formative: helping students determine “where am I on my way and what’s next.”

## Pre-test and Post-test: Method and Tool

The research we wish to present in this study comes from a pre-test and post-test questionnaires taken by the students. Pre-test was taken at the beginning of the first class before class content and objectives were disclosed. The students only had access to an official course syllabus published by the university. The subject was mandatory to all students, whereas taking either pre-test or post-test was not. The students were informed in writing (within the questionnaire form) about the option to refuse to take part and about the fact that the questionnaire is taken for research purposes. The students were asked to express their consent to research use in a written and legible form (checking yes/no in a consent formula). The pre-test questionnaire was filled in by 30 students (out of 33 total class participants), while post-test by 21 (out of 33). It must also be emphasised that the questionnaires were not intended primarily for measuring skill development in students, but for confirming that the course empowered students’ own work on getting ready for the market and determining directions for potential enhancements of the class.

## Results

The general perception of the course was positive in the pre- and post-test. 29 out of 30 taking pre-test assessed the subject as a valuable component of their MA course. 20 out of 21 post-test responses stated the same.

Table 1. *Is it good to have this subject in your curriculum?* Own research, chi-square – 2.2435,  $p=0.5234$

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Definitely yes	16	12
Rather yes	13	8
Hard to say	0	1

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Rather no	1	0
Definitely no	0	0
Total:	30	21

Asked about their professional plans after graduation, the respondents answered as follows:

Table 2. *Do you have professional plans after graduation?* Own research, chi-square - 3.5740, p=0.3112

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Definitely yes	1	2
Rather yes	18	16
Hard to say	8	2
Rather no	3	1
Definitely no	0	0
Total:	30	21

In both pre- and post-test questionnaires, the students expressed their noticeable interest in service provision as a viable professional option:

Table 3. *Do you find language service provision an attractive professional trajectory?* Own research, chi-square - 0.9486, p=0.6223

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Very attractive	1	2
Rather attractive	28	18
Hard to say	1	1
Rather inattractive	0	0
Inattractive	0	0
Suma:	30	21

The next questionnaire item was intended to check if the participants realised they need skills to narrate about their service to potential clients. The post-test shows a little improvement in this respect:

Table 4. *When asked by someone, will you be able to explain what translation services you offer?* Own research, chi-square - 9.2523, p=0.0261

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Definitely yes	0	1
Rather yes	12	14
Hard to say	6	5
Rather no	12	1

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Definitely no	0	0
Total:	30	21

Questionnaire item five investigated the gap between what the respondents expected of the subject (pre-test) and what they believe they gained (post-test). This item was an open question so the participants were able to list more than one benefit. The table below shows the main three categories to which the answers can be classified.

Table 5: *What expectations do you have of the subject (left-hand column)? On what expectations did the subject deliver (right-hand column)?* Own research (figures do not sum up to N=30 and N=21 owing to multiple responses possible for this item)

	Pre-test (N)	Post-test (N)
Acquiring/enhancing knowledge about the translation market. Beginning market activity	30	16
Knowledge and skills on launching and managing a business	26	21
Defining one's niche or area of translation service provision	19	8

The last three items only occur in the post-test questionnaire. These were open questions intended to elicit descriptive assessment of the subject and possible improvements. Selected, most frequent participant responses are listed down below:

**1. What was missing in the class?**

- I'd like more guests
- I'd like more information on employment opportunities
- I'd like more practical information on service provision options now, when at the university
- I'd like to learn about CV and employment documentation
- I'd like to learn more about entering the market
- I'd like to know more about the translation market in Poland and abroad
- I'd like to know more about building my service portfolio
- I'd like more group and team work (workshops)
- I'd like more case studies
- I'd like translator-client role playing activities

**2. Which class components/aspects/motives recurred too often or for too long?**

- Too many guests
- Too much on solopreneurship at the cost of other forms of market activity (which could be more attractive for students)

**3. What could make the subject better?**

- I'd like to get contacts to attractive employers
- This subject should be held at the BA not the MA course

- This subject is attractive as such, but the curriculum is overloaded which prevented my engagement in the topic the way I'd like to.

## Discussion

The data presented above offer an insight into how the students assessed their class what they expected, and would expect of it. The data disclose a complex, sometimes paradoxical picture of student assessment of the class, their skills, their readiness to self-educate as solopreneurs or as other active market players. This is hardly surprising as neither the needs, nor expectations of 30 young adults can be convergent as regards career plans. Neither the pre-test nor post-test did investigate the participants' background in service provision or actual interests in becoming language specialists on graduation.

In our view, the responses for the closed items and the open ones testify to the general acceptance of the subject in the form delivered, with perhaps one vital exception: the balance between what the students expected and what they acquired does not confirm they feel satisfied with post-class skill levels. For example, in pre-test 30 (out of 30) students expressed their expectation to get or improve their knowledge of the market and skills of entering into the market. Yet, in the post-test only 16 out of 21 respondents admitted having satisfied their need. The students were much more satisfied with developing their personal entrepreneurial potential: 21 out of 21 respondents stated so in the post-test. Only 8 out of 21 students responded in the post-test that they knew how to determine their area of service provision.

Notwithstanding the above, some data generalisations seem plausible and can be used to improve classroom experience – at least for those students who are interested in the topic. Firstly, the number of student voices asking for more practicalities in the class cannot be ignored. The students provided a short, but very concrete list of activities to include. Secondly, if more practical activities are to occur in-class, the list of four guest meetings will have to be reduced. At the same time, voices of other partners of the Academy can be made available to students in an asynchronous mode (recorded interviews for self-study on a learning platform). In this way, we can seek to satisfy those students who found four guest meetings too much as well as those who would like a greater access to professional voices. Thirdly, the portfolio semester assignment must also be discussed in-class to provide guidance to students who want to spend more time on nourishing their solopreneur potential.

## Conclusions

The literature of the subject unveils a complex network of views on translation service provision, and on how the service orientation should inform translator education. It is relatively easy to find empirical and conceptual works that would enthusiastically promote the service orientation as vital part of translator pedagogy; yet, some data studies and some educational conceptions are not that eager to put strong emphasis on translation service provision education. We find the arguments of the former theorists more convincing. This is why we decided to give our students an opportunity to engage into a translation service provision training on a regular, curricular basis. The most positive outcome of the subject implementation is that the majority of the participants found it a necessary component of their translator education,

let alone the fact that some of them would be happy to work even harder on their solopreneurship competences than the subject in its initial edition allowed them to. At the same time, the research made us realise that to cater for the needs of such a diversified group as 33 students invited to plan their service provision careers, we need to provide them with more than just regular, curricular content. A vision that could be of better use to students is that of a learning eco-system, where content and interaction can be altered depending on learning needs. The research presented above follows the initial edition of the class, yet some small-step improvements taking the subject closer to the learning eco-system stage are feasible.

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