Acquiring translation and interpreting competences: integrated approach

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Abstract. Introduction. Translation in modern world has become a very important instrument of international communication in recent years. The training objectives, expressed in terms of competences to be acquired, appear to scholars to be priorities, before defining a programme in which the content also depends on the resources available in a given context. It sets out what is to be achieved, acquired and mastered at the end of training or for the requirements of a given activity.  

Objective. To examine the competences needed to develop the skills of an interpreter as a final product of the process of interpreters’/translators’ training and try to conceptualize and further develop theoretical and practical base for training future interpreters.  

Methods. Reviewing the studies on translation competences carried out abroad and in Ukraine with the view to analyzing existing scientific concepts of translation competences acquisition.  

Results. Translation products occur as a result of the interaction between expectations of what translations should be and the translation practices as well as competences by which interpreters produce/create acceptable translations within temporal and economic constraints. Interpreting can be defined as the process of immediately changing message produced in one language into another language in real-time, thus producing a message that faithfully incorporates linguistic and cultural features of the source language discourse, translation typically refers to transferring a message between written texts. In order to draw up the necessary competence for interpreters’ training the typology of interpreting has been taken into account. The main objective for an interpreter to achieve immediate communication and interpreting constraints were outlined. The definition of translation competence and how it is acquired according to the results of empirical-experimental research methods were presented in the article. The significance of PACTE model for the further study of interpreting competences is distinguished here. After presenting the theoretical framework surrounding the concept of translation competence, the competences applied to translation, including various modes of interpreting were set out. The EC translator/interpreter profile is presented in the article. This profile could give researchers an idea of the qualities, skills, and qualifications EU translators and interpreters need, and what challenges they face. As a result the competences which can lead to train professional interpreters were singled out. The competences proposed are interdependent. They all lead to the qualification of experts in multilingual and multimedia communication; they comprise the minimum requirement to which other specific competences may be added. A condition common to translation and interpreting is that specific subcompetences must interact, and possibly some translation-specific skills can help in acquiring interpreting-specific competences.  

Conclusion. There are a number of similar or related factors at work in the two sub disciplines that can be pursued within the scope of an integrated approach. An integrated translation and interpreting approach may help shed more light on some of the intermediate forms of linguistic mediation, such as interpreting. The process of developing translation and interpreting competences is a complex, multidimensional functional system, needed to develop the skills of an interpreter as a final product of the process of interpreters’ training.  

Key words: translation, interpreting, competence, intercultural communication, translation studies.
expressed in terms of competences to be acquired, appear to scholars to be priorities, before defining a programme in which the content also depends on the resources (human, financial, institutional and technical) available in a given context. It sets out what is to be achieved, acquired and mastered at the end of training or for the requirements of a given activity, regardless where, when and how.

Recent surveys of the field’s contents can be found in the works of E. Gentzler (1993), D. Gile (2000), M. Baker (1996), R.T. Bell (1995), D. Robinson (2003), B. Hatim (1997), S. Bassnett (1995), J. Munday (2001), I.D. Melamed (2001), A. Chesterman (1997), W. LÖrscher (2002), A. Pym (2001, 2005), S. Tyulenev (2003), F. Pöchacker (2004), L.K. Latyshev (2000, 2001), I. S. Alexeeva (2008) and many others. These overviews are very incongruent. The few subdivisions of types of translation studies areas clearly differ from one another, and, taken together, these contributions result in a collection of fairly long lists of translation studies approaches that lack a consistent basis.

The goal of the present article is to examine the competences needed to develop the skills of an interpreter as a final product of the process of interpreters’/translators’ training.

It is a well-known fact that the professions of translator and interpreter are significantly different; nevertheless we can hear interpreters being called as translators from all around the world. Moreover in Russian there is only one word defining this profession. It’s necessary to add the adjective “oral” to the word “translation” in order to understand that we are speaking of interpreting.

Interpreting can be defined as the process of immediately changing message produced in one language into another language in real-time, thus producing a message that faithfully incorporates linguistic and cultural features of the source language discourse, translation typically refers to transferring a message between written texts [7, 8].

Talking about interpreting we have to mention that it is often described in relation to the setting in which it takes place, broadly referred to as conference, press conference, debate, hearing, court or community-based. There are fundamental changes in the nature of interpreting across different settings that can be described according to a number of parameters: the mode of interpreting (simultaneous: interpreting while the delegate is speaking, consecutive: interpreting after the speaker finished, relay: interpreting between two languages via a third, pivot: using a single language as a relay, cheval: an interpreter working alternatively in two booths in the same meeting, asymmetric: all delegates listen to interpretation into only a few languages, whispering: whispered simultaneous interpreting, sign language: simultaneous interpreting into sign language); the nature of the discourse (monologic vs. dialogic), language direction (uni-directional or bi-directional) and the social characteristics of the interpreter-mediated encounter.

In order to draw up the necessary competence for interpreters’ training let us consider the typology of interpreting. If we take interpreting in conference settings it would be largely monologic and we can establish a fact of a physical distance between the interpreter working from an isolated booth at the back of the premise and his/her clients. This is contrasted with the community-based interpreter who is dealing with conversation (dialogic discourse), often in an institutional context in close physical proximity to both clients. We share the point of view of B. Alexeeva who expands on these parameters in her typology of interpreting: non-involvement vs. involvement; equality/solidarity vs. non-equality/power (in relation to status and role of speaker and addressee); formal vs. informal setting; literacy vs. orality; cooperativeness / directness vs. non-cooperativeness / indirectness (relevant to negotiation strategies); shared vs. conflicting goals [2].

These parameters represent the range of variability of interpreting across different settings. However, there are infinite variations along the continuum reflecting the contextual variation in each interpreted encounter.

Directionality in interpreting describes the use of an interpreter’s two languages when interpreting in the simultaneous or long consecutive mode, that is, when the source language discourse is monologic. It is a well-established precedent that conference interpreters work simultaneously in one language direction, typically from their “B” into their “A” language, but increasingly market demands require that they also work into their B language. The professional association for conference interpreters (Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence – AIIIC) describes an interpreter’s languages according to the “A-B-C system” [1].

Since a source text for interpreting is only presented once and under severe time restrictions, the interpreter has to solve a situation immediately and here. He or she has to apply so-called short-term strategies as compared with long-term strategies of written texts translator who has a privilege to choose solutions to difficulties presented by a source text. In interpreting, as a consequence, considerations about correct grammar, standard language, style of the source text may be pushed into the background. The main objective for an interpreter is to achieve immediate communication.

One more interpreting constraint is the linearity one. Interpreters do not receive a source text in its entirety; they work with incomplete parts of it. Some information needed for rendering the source speech in the target language is still kept disclosed by the time interpreters have to start producing the receptor version. This may put an additional pressure on interpreters to try lessening misinterpretations which might follow from an incomplete text.

Now let’s have a look at the situation how it could be achieved. First of all, it’s necessary to consider the requirements to people who would like to become interpreters or translators. In order interpreters need to
compete successfully for translation jobs in different institutions and to work in the rapidly evolving field of multilingual and multimedia communication the translation competence (TC) plays a prominent role.

This term is not unanimously recognized among translation scholars. Many definitions of translation competence emerged throughout the years, but in the most general terms translation competence represents “... the underlying system of knowledge, abilities and attitudes required to be able to translate” [4, ñ.43]. In the scope of translation studies, translation competence has more to do with performance. Translation competence is mostly described as a complex concept that requires knowledge of two or more languages and usually consists of two or more sub-competencies.

Difficulties facing scholars in their attempts to define translation competence stem from the rather complicated nature of translation as such. Translation is in theory an interdisciplinary field and in practice a multitasking activity that requires much more than “merely” a linguistic competence in two languages. Translation competences have to provide translators with the ability to recreate the source text in a context of different language and culture.

Now let’s consider the results of PACTE’s group empirical-experimental research methods to investigate translation competence and how it is acquired. The PACTE Group (Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) has been a competitive research group since 1997 and a consolidated group (as recognized by the Generalitat de Catalunya since 2002. It was a member of the Institut de Neurociències de la Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (2001-2009) and is now a member of GRECO (Grup de Recerca en Competències) of the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya.

The research universe consists of various texts and concerns groups of professional translators, language teachers and translation trainees. Examined languages are Spanish, Catalan, German, English and French; all correspond to the current market demands in the Catalan region. The research focuses on both translation product and translation process. PACTE’s model consists of a set of interrelated sub-competencies, which are interdependent, hierarchical and can compensate for one another. The main aim of this group is to validate their theories employing empirical tools [5]. PACTE’s model differs from previous approaches mainly due to the emphasis they put on procedural aspect, regarding translation competence as “expert knowledge in which procedural knowledge is predominant” [5, ñ.59].

Initially PACTE model presented transfer competence (the core) which included communicative competence in two languages, extra-linguistic competence, psycho-physiological competence and professional-instrumental competence.

Respective sub-competencies were defined in the following manner:

1) **transfer competence**: central competence, which integrates all the others. It is the ability to complete the transfer process from the source text to the target text, taking into account translation’s function and the characteristics of the receptor;
2) **communicative competence**: in two languages, the system of underlying knowledge and skills necessary for linguistic communication. For translators, this competence should be separated into understanding in the source language and production in the target language;
3) **extra-linguistic competence**: is composed of general world knowledge and specialist knowledge. It includes knowledge about translation, bicultural, encyclopedic and subject knowledge;
4) **instrumental-professional competence**: knowledge and skills related both to the tools of the trade and the profession;
5) **psycho-physiological competence**: ability to use all kinds of psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal resources.

The transfer competence itself is further divided into several parts: comprehension competence (ability to synthesize and activate extra-linguistic knowledge and thus capture the sense of the text), ability to deverbalize and to maintain the SL and the TL in separate compartments, reexpression competence – textual organization and creativity in TL and competence in carrying out the translation project – choice of the most adequate method.

PACTE arrives at the conclusion that TC is “made up of a set of sub-competencies that are inter-related and hierarchic, with the strategic sub-competence occupying a dominant position” [5, ñ.60]. From PACTE’s perspective TC is predominantly a procedural phenomenon with three process oriented sub-competences and two declarative sub-competences [6]. Furthermore, perhaps due to the process oriented approach, all sub-competences are influenced and complemented by psycho-physiological components.

Under the influence of results emerging from evaluating TC and TC acquisition the model changed in time; it was restructured. Based on new research tools and the re-validation of respective sub-competencies, the model later developed into the following construction [5]:

1) **bilingual sub-competence**: predominantly procedural knowledge needed to communicate in two languages. It includes the specific feature of interference control when alternating between the two languages. It is made up of pragmatic, socio linguistic, textual, grammatical and lexical knowledge in the two languages;
2) **extra-linguistic sub-competence**: predominantly declarative knowledge, both implicit and explicit, about the world in general and special areas. It includes: bicultural knowledge (about the source and target cultures), encyclopedic knowledge (about the world in general) and subject knowledge (in special areas);
3) **knowledge about translation sub-competence**: predominantly declarative knowledge, both implicit and
explicit, about what translation is and aspects of the profession. It includes: knowledge about how translation functions and knowledge related to professional translation practice;

4) **instrumental sub-competence:** predominantly procedural knowledge related to the use of documentation sources and information and communication technologies applied to translation: dictionaries, encyclopedias, grammars, style books, parallel texts, electronic, corpora, searchers, etc;

5) **strategic sub-competence:** procedural knowledge to guarantee the efficiency of the translation process and solve the problems encountered. This is an essential sub-competence that affects all the others and causes inter-relations amongst them because it controls the translation process;

6) **psycho-physiological components:** different types of cognitive and attitudinal components and psycho-motor mechanisms. They include: cognitive components (memory, perception, attention and emotion), attitudinal aspects (intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigour, critical spirit...), abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis, etc. [9, 10].

We think that in our further study of interpreting competences PACTE’s model is significant, because it explicitly includes psycho-physiological attributes.

After presenting the theoretical framework surrounding the concept of translation competence we would like to devote the following part of our article to setting out the competences applied to language professions or to translation over a wide semantic or professional range, including various modes of interpreting.

The situation in our country with translators / interpreters’ training at Universities requires being clear. Translators need a range of competences to compete successfully for translation jobs in institutions in our country, in European countries and all over the world. For this purpose the Ukrainian Master’s in Translation (EMT) research project (UTTU 2014) was created to define the basic competences necessary for translators working in the different institutions.

This project was born in a period of dramatic changes for the translator’s profession: rapidly growing need for high-level linguistic services, enhanced by such factors as globalization, technological progress and demographic movements, and dramatic increase in the number of official EU languages (using the research results of European Commission, Translation, 2007) from 11 to 23 between 2004 and 2007, which brought to light the short supply of qualified professionals in some languages and language combinations. This could be achieved by encouraging Master’s programmes in translation from Ukrainian universities to implement commonly accepted and market-oriented professional standards.

Its main task is to help raise the standard of translator / interpreter training in Ukraine and foster cooperation and exchanges between higher-education institutions offering translation courses.

This framework does not cover the specific needs of translator trainers or those of translation studies researchers. The training objectives, expressed in terms of competences to be acquired, appear to us to be priorities, before defining a syllabus in which the content also depends on the resources (human, financial, institutional and technical) available in a given context. This reference framework should be understood within the overall context of university education for translators / interpreters, which goes beyond the specifically professional competences listed below. It sets out what is to be achieved, acquired and mastered at the end of training or for the requirements of a given activity, regardless where, when and how.

It corresponds to second-cycle training of 90 or 120 credits (ECTS), presupposing mastery of the working languages (of at least level C1: “Competent use of language (Effective Operational Proficiency)”, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages).

This is intended as a basis, enabling the content of training sequences/modules/syllabi/sessions to be established and the most appropriate teaching methods to be chosen.

Let’s consider the translator/interpreter profile presented in EC. This profile can give us an idea of the qualities, skills, and qualifications EU translators and interpreters need, and what challenges they face.

It is not an official list of requirements for a particular position. To realize our teaching objectives we need to refer this profile to competences used in future interpreters’ training. So, EU translators and interpreters are required to translate political, legal and administrative texts, and web texts — usually into their main language. These are frequently complex and encompass all the European Union’s areas of activity (economic, financial, scientific, technical, etc.). Basic requirements are as follows:

- an ability to grasp varied and complex issues, react swiftly to changing circumstances, manage information and communicate effectively;
- initiative, imagination, and intellectual curiosity and motivation;
- a capacity to work consistently and under pressure — independently and as part of a team — and to fit into a multicultural working environment;
- an ability to maintain the self-discipline required to work in a large public-service organization.

In addition to these basic requirements, which apply to all Commission recruits regardless of their specialization, UE recruitment profile focuses on graduates who have — or are prepared to acquire — the specific skills set out below, and are willing to upgrade these and other skills throughout their term of employment:

**language skills** (perfect command of all aspects and stylistic levels of your mother tongue/main language;
thorough knowledge of two or more official EU languages – at least one of which must be English, French or German); thematic skills (familiarity with economics, financial affairs, legal matters, technical or scientific fields); translation skills (a capacity to understand texts in the source language and to render them correctly in the target language, using a style and register appropriate to the purpose of the text; a capacity to research topics and terminology quickly and efficiently – in both source language and target languages; a capacity to master computer-assisted translation and terminology tools, as well as standard office-automation software).

So, we will try to single out the competences which can lead to train professional interpreters (Figure 1).

| Type of Interpreting Competence | Definitions/Components |
|--------------------------------|------------------------|
| Language Competence            |                         |
| Intercultural Competence       |                         |
| Technological Competence (mastery of tools) |             |
| Translation Service Provision Competence |             |

| Sociolinguistic dimension |
|---------------------------|
| Understand grammatical, lexical and idiomatic conventions of language A and one’s other working languages (B, C); use these structures and conventions in A and B. |
| Recognize the functions and meanings in language variations (social, geographical, historical, stylistic); identify the rules for interaction relating to a specific community, including non-verbal elements (useful knowledge for negotiation); produce a register appropriate to a given situation, for a particular speech or message. |
| Understand and analyze the macrostructure of a message and its overall coherence (including where it consists of visual and sound elements); grasp the presuppositions, the implicit, allusions, stereotypes and intertextual nature of a message; describe and evaluate one’s problems with comprehension and define strategies for resolving those problems; extract and summarize the essential information in a message (ability to summarize); recognize and identify elements, values and references proper to the cultures represented; bring together and compare cultural elements and methods of composition; compose a message in accordance with the conventions of the genre and rhetorical standards. |
| Search for appropriate information to gain a better grasp of the thematic aspects of a message; develop one’s knowledge in specialist fields and applications (mastering systems of concepts, methods of reasoning, presentation, controlled language, terminology, etc.) (learning to learn); develop a spirit of curiosity, analysis and summary. |

| Thematic Competence |
|---------------------|
| Use effectively and rapidly and to integrate a range of software to assist in correction, translation, terminology, layout, documentary research (for example text processing, spell and grammar check, the Internet, translation memory, terminology database, voice recognition software); prepare and produce a translation in different formats and for different technical media. |

| Interpersonal dimension |
|------------------------|
| Be aware of the social role of the translator; follow market requirements and job profiles; organize approaches to clients/potential clients (marketing); negotiate with the client (to define deadlines, tariffs/invoicing, working conditions, access to information, contract, rights, responsibilities, translation specifications, tender specifications, etc.); clarify the requirements, objectives and purposes of the client, recipients of the translation and other stakeholders; plan and manage one’s time, stress, work, budget and ongoing training (upgrading various competences); specify and calculate the services offered and their added value; comply with instructions, deadlines, commitments, interpersonal competences, team organization; know the standards applicable to the provision of a translation service; comply with professional ethics; work under pressure and with other experts, with a project head (capabilities for making contacts, for cooperation and collaboration), including in a multilingual situation; work in a team, including a virtual team; self-evaluate (questioning one’s habits; being open to innovations; being concerned with quality; being ready to adapt to new situations/conditions) and take responsibility. |

| Production dimension |
|---------------------|
| Create and offer a translation appropriate to the client’s request, i.e. to the aim/skopos and to the translation situation; define stages and strategies for interpreting; define and evaluate translation problems and find appropriate solutions; justify one’s translation choices and decisions; master the appropriate metalinguage (to talk about one’s work, strategies and decisions); establish and monitor quality standards. |
The competences proposed are interdependent. Thus, for example, the aptitude for taking reasoned decisions is horizontal; it applies equally to the provision of a translation service and to documentary research. They all lead to the qualification of experts in multilingual and multimedia communication. Together, they comprise the minimum requirement to which other specific competences may be added (for example in localization, audiovisual translation or research).

So, by “competence”, we mean the combination of aptitudes, knowledge, behaviour and know-how necessary to carry out a given task under given conditions. This combination is recognized and legitimized by a responsible authority (institution, expert).

Now let’s have a look at the results of our survey involved in-service translators and interpreters as to the most important translation (T) and interpreting (I) competences.

The most important components of T and I Competence:
- T and I competence — 25 %.
- Textual Competence (the skill to analyze and create the coherent text) — 20 %.
- Language Competence (A, B, C languages) — 19 %.
- Information and Linguistic Search Competence — 14 %.
- Self-discipline and work capacity — 4 %.
- Mobility and capacity of learning — 3 %.
- Computer literacy — 3 %.

At the universities both disciplines (interpreting and translation) are taught together, and some university curricula stipulate exams in both of them for obtaining diplomas (in Ukraine — all the universities). In other institutions, one has to pass a translation degree before one is allowed to do interpreting, whereas some offer exclusively interpreting courses, often at postgraduate level.

In real life translators may be requested to do an oral translation of a written text, or to translate from an audio/video tape, and likewise, interpreters are frequently confronted with the task of interpreting on the basis of written manuscripts or slides, or will have to interpret/translate draft documents for adoption or rejection by conference participants (sight translation).

Basic competences, such as linguistic and cultural competence as well as world and relevant special knowledge, must have been acquired by the translator just as by the interpreter. Equally important are the ability to process texts or messages cognitively and analytically (comprehension) and to produce texts or messages comprehensibly and communicatively with the appropriate means; the latter will, of course, differ in translating vs. interpreting. Stylistic competence, the ability to make swift decisions and to access one’s knowledge and relate textual information to previous knowledge is as important, and so is the competence to tackle interlingual problems. Translation scholars define this skill as a transfer competence which is achieved if all part and sub-competences interact successfully.

However, though this general transfer competence is a factor translation and interpreting should have in common, the various sub competences will necessarily differ, as will the degree or need of strategic text processing. Such differences can be traced back to the difference in the processes at work in translation and interpreting respectively.

If we assume that there is such a basic transfer competence, it should include a number of basic skills common for translation and interpreting, which must be complemented by translation-specific and interpreting-specific competences. A condition common to translation and interpreting is that specific subcompetences must interact, and possibly some translation-specific skills can help in acquiring interpreting-specific competences. Such an interaction may involve translation-specific and interpreting-specific competences in those types of translating or interpreting which are of a more intermediate character in the continuum that links translation and interpreting [3].

This would imply that there are certain components of training that translators and interpreters can acquire together and others, which must be trained specifically.

We can give these competences in a diagram (Diagram 1).

```
Basic/ general  
transfer  
exter  
competence

| translation- specific | interpreting- specific |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| competence             | competence             |

Diagram 1. Basic skills common for T (translating) and I (interpreting)
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We share the opinion of one of the famous researchers S. Kalina that one major difference between translation and interpreting relates to the effort/result ratio [3]. In translating, one takes an effort to achieve the best result possible. Within the limits and constraints given, interpreters have to find the best acceptable solution to hand, i.e. the constraint on the time and effort determines the quality of the result. This means that operations have to be performed as routines that have become automated to a considerable degree. Teaching interpreting has to develop ways for students’ acquiring the necessary automatisms or routines [3].

Conclusions. So, as a conclusion from the above we
can assume that although ways and means of problem-solving may differ in translation and interpreting, there are a number of similar or related factors at work in the two sub-disciplines that can be pursued within the scope of an integrated approach.

Moreover, an integrated translation and interpreting approach which takes account also of the results of interdisciplinary research of the two sub-disciplines with other disciplines may help shed more light on some of the intermediate forms of linguistic mediation, such as oral translation or interpreting from/with written material, which are not covered extensively in the literature and deserve far more attention than has so far been devoted to them.

That’s not the end of the research into the teaching of translation/interpretation. In our further research we are going to investigate the problem which subskills of the overall goal of translating/interpreting competence should be taught separately, and by which means and in which order they are to be trained.

The literature on interpreting training offers no methodological guidance, and teachers may be at a loss to decide what is to be learned first, what is required next, and what degree of interaction can be managed by students at which stages.

Thus, the process of developing translation and interpreting competences is a complex, multidimensional functional system of influence on an individual, who is taught as a subject of intercultural communication, minding new specific values and becoming aware of multilingualism and multiculturalism.

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