

Challenges of Translator Training and Competence in the Arab World: Jordan as a Case Study

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges facing translator training and competence in the Arab world (Jordan as a case study). As the translator's profession is constantly developing due to technological advances and the industry's growing needs for language services and solutions, a translator needs to be well-trained and really competent for keeping up to the ever-changing conditions the whole world is witnessing. Methodically, a four-facet interview was made in person with professors of translation studies at Jordanian universities and virtually with others from different Arab countries. The subject participants were asked to talk about what university curricula need to focus on: i) bilingually, mother and foreign language proficiency, ii) culturally, knowledge of culture and subject-matter specialty, iii) technically, CAT tools and machine translation (MT) engines and iv) personally, project management and soft skills. A sound methodological base was found to be necessary for training translators in the form of short-term courses (at the tertiary level with renewable curricula by universities) and long-term practices (with relevant policies and appropriate actions by institutions). Expected to cater to specific market skills or niches, practicums (or internships) were also found to be good places novice translators can learn how to deal with long texts, work to deadlines, learn interaction with clients and handle poorly written SL texts. Moreover, achieving translation competence was revealed to be highly related to a wide range of personal attitudes and technical skills. On the whole, a mismatch still exists between what is being taught to students and what the market is willing to pay for. Translators need to develop their competence in a variety of sub-areas: linguistics, knowledge, technology and personality; the same can be called as the academic/vocational dichotomy of competence.

Keywords: Translator training, translation competence, university curricula, Arab world/Jordan, challenges.

1. Introduction: Translation competence (TC) might be first tackled as a specific term by Chomsky (1965) from a purely linguistic perspective. It is almost defined to be the ideal user's perfect knowledge of language in a homogeneous speech community. In a translational context, however, this definition is still to lack an important aspect which is that user's familiarity with both source and target languages (cf. Neubert, 2000) along with such other competences as the cultural, textual, subject-specific and research ones (Schäffner & Beverly, 2000; Pym, 2003). In 2010, Šeböková developed a competence model according to which a translator can be trained in a more efficient, more productive manner, arguing that linguistic competence is essential for the translation one (see Figure 1). TC can be eventually "the underlying system of knowledge and skills needed [for a translator] to be able to translate" (PACTE, 2011).†

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PACTE stands for the process of acquisition of translation competence and evaluation.

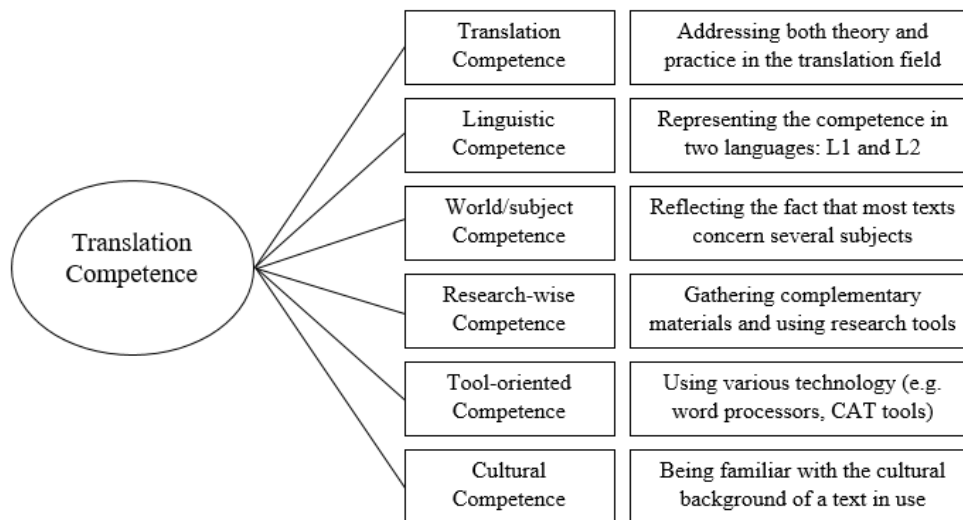


Figure 1. Translation Competence Model Adapted from Sebokova's (2010)

The analytical, critical and practical knowledge of language, considerable skills of translation technologies and transferable skills for professional performance are what translators nowadays in need. A changing translator profile causes a shift in translation study programmes towards the development of transferable skills along with translation-related skills (Horbačauskienė, 2017). Going along with the employers' expectations in relation to the abilities and skills of professionally trained translators, the overall situation in the Arab world is still witnessing significant changes in the translation-related industry from the perspective of employers who agree that translation graduates need to be empowered to act professionally in a changing environment. Therefore, the present study attempts to answer the following two research questions:

- What principal factors or parameters does a good model of competence involve for training translators in Jordan?
- Are there any ancillary components needed for having well-trained competent translators in the Arab world?

2. Related Literature

2.1 Human Translator and Tools: Reviewing the traditional methodologies of translator training, Qinai (2010) proposes an eclectic multi-componential approach to involve a set of interdisciplinary skills with the ultimate objective of meeting market demands. He argues that courses on translation for specific purposes and think-aloud protocols—along with self-monitoring and self-evaluation mechanisms—go in parallel with group projects to provide trainee translators with: i) a fair knowledge of the tactics of target text production and ii) teamwork cooperation and labour division. In the same respect, Ketola et al (2018) examine an international online course on multimodality for a group of 28 postgraduate students of translation studies in 2016 taught by 13 lecturers in Europe. They attempted to identify ways in which students interact with each other in e-learning environments as the data used were obtained from the students' discussion in the online platform, peer grading submissions and final course evaluation forms.

On a related side, Núñez & Bolaños-Medina (2018) stress that translation as a decision-making process, associated with problem-solving activity is still at the core of process-oriented research in translation studies. Reviewing the main contributions to this area, they analyzed the concepts of competence and intrinsic motivation in translation and psychology. As a descriptive, correlational study of three variables, it measured the potential effect of competence and intrinsic motivation towards accomplishment on students' self-perceived efficacy of problem-solving. Actually, translator training is an area that has received much interest among the research community of translation studies (Salamah, 2021). For highly qualified and skilled professional translators around the world, this necessity has motivated research into skills and competences professional translators need to perform their tasks effectively.

Technically, the development of online information literacy in translator training is a necessity. The role that information skills, especially web searching skills, play in translation as a cognitive activity requiring information and constant decision making is highly important (Raido, 2011). Her paper also argues that if we were to train translation students to work in different subject areas, our focus needs to shift from the acquisition of specialized knowledge to the development of information skills for problem solving in any field of expertise. However, Öner Bulut (2019) proposes that translator competence must be re-thought in the face of the rapid and dramatic technology. Drawing on the concept of translator competence and the social constructive approach to translator training, his study focuses on a pathway to be followed in order to outline a competence pertaining to the human translator supposed to compete or collaborate with machines.

Adding 'human' to the translator competence is still an aim to be achieved by research. A learning practice designed to integrate machine translation (MT) into translator training helps students raise their awareness of the 'professional self-concept' as human translators. In this vein, Al-Rumaih (2021) investigated the integration of computer-aided translation (CAT) tools into translator-training programs in Saudi Arabia. Her investigation addresses the usability of these tools in different translation courses and tasks, the matter which contributes to enriching the field of translation technology. A mixed-method approach was used to enhance the validity of the data sets, revealing that CAT tools are effectively integrated yet into the translator-training programs of the universities under study as not all of them provide CAT courses.

2.2 Culture and Language in TC: Culture-wise, translators of LSP (language for special purposes) texts must be educated and trained by efficient methods. Using popular LSP texts in the respective fields as one of the main media, Ilynska et al (2017) investigate the efficiency of this methodology in developing thematic, linguistic and cultural competences of the students. The methodology was previously tested on the students of a professional Master study programme at Riga Technical University, Latvia. An opportunity could be provided for structuring student background knowledge and expanding it to account for linguistic innovation, and methods of teaching students translation in an electronic learning environment are highly relevant. In the same respect, Gubanova & Shirokolobova (2019) attempted to organize and individualize learning activities of students in accordance with their future professional activities. Professionally oriented teaching of translation also includes how to work with all and any related terms and concepts.

Although EFL pedagogy and translation teaching share a common communicative orientation, the interaction between the two is not entirely positive. From a bilingual perspective, Atari & Radwan (2013) attempted to characterize the inadequacies of L2 reading strategies and genre writing conventions for undergraduate translator trainees. They revealed how the trainees failed to: i) employ bi-directional top-down and bottom-up text processing in their reading of the source texts and ii) recognize the genre conventions in both language systems (i.e. Arabic and English). In actual fact, the training curricula in English as considering courses on language skills and the translator competency need to be maximized. For this purpose, Sharif (2016) chose Sebökova's (2010) model to measure the necessary competency areas to be developed at a master educational level, proving that the present English translation study curriculum could help students acquire the necessary skills despite the weaker areas clarified by his research.

In the wider context of power asymmetry between dominant and endangered languages, a focus is to be paid to individual agents learning and practicing translation. Koskinen & Kuusi (2017) reported the first challenges of the translator training courses organised in 2015-2016 for Karelian language activists in Finland. They analyzed three kinds of data: i) course materials (lectures and exercises), ii) field notes kept during observation and iii) a reflective assignment with student feedback. Also, García (2017) argued that teaching and learning a foreign language is considerable across different stages of education. Apart from language training in general contexts, language for special purposes also constitutes a prolific field of study. In order to gain insight into actual teaching practices in this area in Spanish universities, the methods and approaches used in classroom by 58 foreign language lecturers were examined.

3. Research Method

3.1 Sampling Frame and Sample Size: For the population of concern (PoC), it is all the potential university professors and/or translation trainers in the Arab world dealing with the Arabic-English and English-Arabic language pairs. On the whole, the university professors having neither taught translation nor worked as translators were not targeted. They might not be able to realize the challenges, difficulties or problems faced by translators on site. Based upon the sampling frame above, each respondent could be selected as a sample size him/herself, which might justify why only 50 copies were distributed. Each respondent or group of respondents could be undertaken for further research on its own (Dornyei, 2003, p. 70). Actually, the universities and educational institutions were the specific places focused on.

Dear respondent,

This self-administered interview forms an integral part of a research project in translation studies. It concerns itself with the challenges of translator training and competence in the Arab world in general and Jordan in particular.

Your responses are very significant and highly appreciated! Any personal information will be treated as strictly confidential and no direct reference to any person will be made in discussing any item of this research instrument.

I would be much grateful if you could complete it within one week. Should you have any further inquiries, kindly do not hesitate to contact me by phone or email.

Kind regards,
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A Self-administered Interview to Apply to Faculty Members at the English and/or Translation Departments in the Arab World for the Purpose(s) of a Research Project
Titled as:

"Challenges of Translator Training and Competence in the Arab World: Jordan as a Case Study"

April 2022

Academic Rank:

Field of Study:

Years of Experience:

(As a Translator):

(As a Lecturer):

Figure 2. The Cover Page of the Self-administered Interview Distributed

The self-administered interview was distributed in 50 copies to professors of translation in Jordan as well as other Arab countries. The Jordanian respondents were either met in person or contacted by phone while the others were only contacted via Facebook or WhatsApp as the researcher had already been in touch with them by means of various events or webinars held online. For practical reasons, a particular segment—as a convenience or opportunity sample by geographical proximity, availability at a certain time and easy accessibility (cf. Dornyei, 2003)—was, therefore, considered. A number of 34 copies were returned within about three weeks (February 26 to March 11, 2022). The subject respondents were 23 faculty members from five Jordanian universities plus 11 others from such Arab countries as Egypt, Iraq and Palestine.

3.2 Instrument: Self-administered Interview: Based on the related literature in both theory and practice, the self-administered interview was designed to consist of four binary sets (along with the cover page and a special space for further comments). Each set tackled one component of TC: bilingual, cultural, technical and personal. The binarity in this particular respect represents the two items included in each set; one was major and the other minor (see Figure 2 above). It was just like a questionnaire with open questions given to a selected group of respondents in order to collect facts or opinions in a set format. Such a research tool could be good as “a widely used and useful instrument for collecting survey information” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 245) although it is sometimes “accused of simplicity of answers yielded and effect of fatigue for being long and low rate of response” (Bryman, 2001, p. 129). As “a pre-formulated written [...] questions to which respondents record their answers” (Sekaran, 2003, p. 236), it is however “easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly” (Dornyei, 2003, p. 6).

Figure 3. Four Sheets of Answer as the Main Part of the Instrument

A general framework for building this survey-based instrument was followed to involve three phases: planning, designing and piloting. Steps were carefully taken for ensuring the content and determining the layout. For achieving a sequence of questions and the best rates of response, a flow was adopted through which four answer sheets were provided in order (see Figure 3 above). For the instrument's consistency and replicability (i.e. testing what is to test), it was sent to three experts for ensuring the topic is worth-studying. The sets of data needed for such parts of research were shown to be successfully obtained and valuable sets of information were thus expected to be brought into. The instrument was found to be consistent and replicable with an "amount of agreement or correspondence" among the coders (cf. Neuendorf, 2002). In this respect, Cohen et al. (2000: 105) argue that it is impossible for a study to be one-hundred percent valid, and coding errors could be only minimized not eliminated. For addressing the purpose of the present study:

- the survey was appropriately represented and the instrument was comprehensive enough to collect the information needed, and
- comparable results were obtained as the instrument was carried out on a similar group of persons in similar contexts.

4. Data Analysis/Results

4.1 Principal Factors of Competence

4.1.1 Factor 1: Bilingual

Table 1. The Bilingual Factor of Translator Training and Competence

Sr.	Principal Factors of Competence	Jordan	Arab Region
	Factor 1: Bilingual		
1	Trainee translators misconstrue the theme/rheme arrangements in their production of target texts by failing to make the necessary modifications to produce an accessible text for the target readers.		
2	A set of pre- and mid-translation exercises to guide trainees to use their background knowledge employ top-down and bottom-up text processing strategies are suggested.		

- 3 Willingness is a central theme in an activist context, and revitalisation provides a shared motivating intention to translate, focusing on the student translators' perception of agency.
- 4 Both language abilities and translation abilities must be seen as a shared competence, signalling attitudes that favour perceiving agency in terms of multiple translatorship.
- 5 The present obligatory courses apply appropriate content necessary for the educational or professional context of training translators considering the optional ones as problematic areas.
- 6 The instructors have important roles in the outcome of curricula but they need some improvement to gain a better result, and the time allocated to practical courses is not sufficient.
- 7 The lexical, semantic, morphological and syntactic features potentially implying teaching methodologies akin to those used in other education settings occupy most of the instructors' goals.

4.1.2 Factor 2: Cultural

Table 2. The Cultural Factor of Translator Training and Competence

Sr.	Principal Factors of Competence Factor 2: Cultural	Jordan	Arab Region
1	Such skills of reading and writing, drawing up reports and presenting in a foreign language must be improved for student translators, being taught independent research skills.		
2	Teaching scientific and technical translation is based on a combination of cognitive, interactive and communicative teaching methods in native and foreign language.		
3	The training purpose is the development of a future professional personality ready for professional activity, possessing necessary communication skills.		
4	Applying popular LSP texts instead of purely technical or scientific texts with neutral style or rigid genre conventions helps student translators develop advanced text processing and decoding skills.		
5	Applying popular LSP texts instead of purely technical or scientific texts with neutral style or rigid genre conventions helps develop awareness of expressive resources of the source and target languages.		
6	Applying popular LSP texts instead of purely technical or scientific texts with neutral style or rigid genre conventions helps develop understanding of socio-pragmatic language use.		
7	A professional approach for translator training must be adopted for educating the student translators with new horizons of culture and introducing new technologies.		

4.2 Ancillary Factors of Competence

4.2.1 Factor 1: Technical

Table 3. The Technical Factor of Translator Training and Competence

Sr.	Ancillary Factors of Competence Factor 1: Technical	Jordan	Arab Region
1	The need to seek, use and generate translation-related information depends on the type of users and tasks performed, emphasizing the need for examining real users and learning contexts.		
2	Universities still lack elements to promote the integration of CAT tools into their relevant programs as a significant percentage of students do not use such tools in their tasks or courses.		
3	More integration of CAT tools in the universities' translator-training programs are proposed for enhancing their outcomes and increase their graduates' opportunities in the job market.		
4	MT could be integrated into translator training as early as possible with a focus on helping translation students raise their awareness of their existing and potential roles as human translators.		
5	Such minor skills as post-editing and pre-editing can be included into training MT systems, assessing training data and collaborating with MT developers as expert human translators.		
6	A further awareness helps students learn how to learn (i.e. to become life-long learners) in order to continue to confront the unknown and unpredictable future challenges.		
7	The overall potential of social media platforms in translator training reflects on how online courses can be designed so that pedagogical benefits of e-learning tools are duly exploited.		

4.2.2 Factor 2: Personal

Table 4. The Personal Factor of Translator Training and Competence

Sr.	Ancillary Factors of Competence Factor 2: Personal	Jordan	Arab Region
1	Translation competence is an under-researched area in the Arab context as further research is needed for improving the quality of both translator training and translation services.		
2	Working together in an online environment is the source of both learning challenges and opportunities with several difficulties posed by peer assessment tasks.		
3	The intrinsic motivation towards accomplishment and competence has the capability to predict problem-solving in a positive and significant way.		

- 4 Strategies can address both competence and intrinsic motivation among translation trainees for improving the learning and teaching process in university settings.
- 5 Simulated conference interpreting prepares trainees to research terms and refers to documentation from previous conferences with an emphasis on memory, attention and automaticity.
- 6 Peer reviews enable not only the teacher to give positive feedback in the classroom but also the students to find out why a translation goes wrong by evaluating their colleagues or themselves.
- 7 It is important to enhance TT delivery skills as the key to successful translation in the market, along with the ability to render the TL text verbally or in writing.

5. Conclusion: A new norm in translation focusing on translator training and competence is what the present study seeks to develop (see Figure 4). Generally speaking, competence refers to such sorts of expertise and aptitude that either translators or interpreters need in their jobs. The development of new information and communication technology also influences the ever-changing competence with constant updating (Aula Int, 2005). In actual fact, substantial changes in the translation industry are still being witnessed for improving the translator-training environment and empowering the student translators with a range of transferable skills to act professionally. Within an interlingual domain of communication, basic required competences are shared, and many skills are necessary for meeting communicative goals helping translators and interpreters have that kind of competitive advantage.

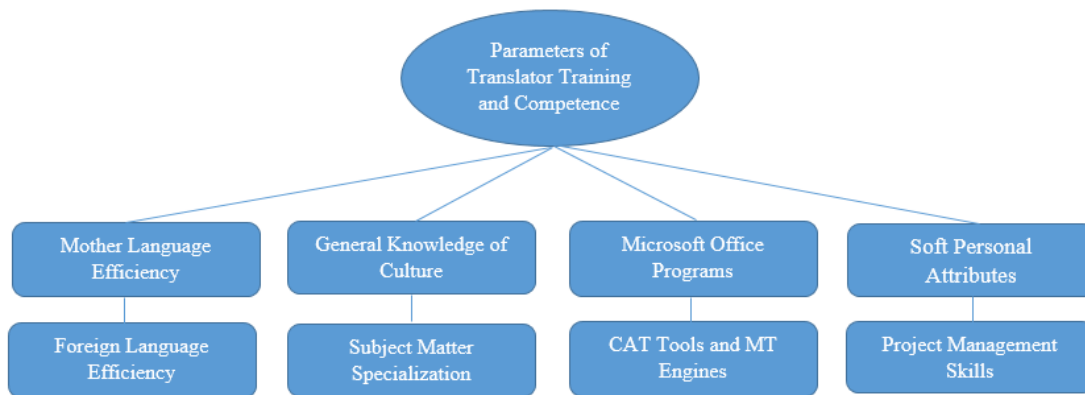


Figure 4. A Special Norm of Translator Competence

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