



Konrad Klimkowski

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Poland)

ORCID: 0000-0002-9835-635X

Why is Translation Relevant Today: Ideas for Future Translators

**Dlaczego tłumaczenie nie jest jedynie kwestią przeszłości:
kilka uwag z myślą o przyszłych tłumaczach**

Abstract

Cultural, educational and professional frameworks recognised by our civilization have been formulated as texts. Translation is the only method allowing for their global dissemination. Religions, literatures, learning theories and organizational cultures are “products” of translation. Yet, the relevance of translation is not only a matter of the past. It is argued in this article that translation is relevant today. In its educational aspect, translation can help realize that language differences are a resource in text comprehension and meaning making. Professional benefits of translating include language fluency that is more than a technical skill: it enables recognising nuances of meaning and sense, allowing for realistic language use. It can be a core advantage for specialists in creative industry, for industry analysts and for lots of other professionals engaging in cross-cultural interactions. Finally, being a translator one has a transversal competence of service provision.

Key words: *translation, translating, multilingualism, interculturality, service provision, transversal competences.*

Abstrakt

Istotne dla naszej cywilizacji systemy kulturowe, edukacyjne i profesjonalne zostały sformułowane w postaci tekstowej. Tłumaczenie jest jedyną dostępną metodą ich globalnego upowszechniania. Religie, dzieła literackie, teorie uczenia się czy kultury organizacyjne są "produktami" przekładu. Znaczenie przekładu (translacji) nie jest jedynie kwestią przeszłości. Niniejszy artykuł dostarcza argumentów przemawiających za tym, że procesy translacyjne są dla nas istotne. W aspekcie edukacyjnym tłumaczenie pozwala uzmysłwić sobie, że różnice językowe są podstawą rozumienia tekstu i nadawania mu znaczeń. Korzyści z działalności tłumaczeniowej obejmują też biegłość językową, która jest czymś więcej niż umiejętnością techniczną: uczy rozpoznawania odcieni znaczeniowych wyrazów i realistycznego użycia języka. Te sprawności zapewniają przewagę pracownikom branży kreatywnej, analitykom branżowym i wielu innym specjalistom, których praca opiera się na interakcjach międzykulturowych. Bycie tłumaczem uczy także świadczenia usług, a ta kompetencja określana jest mianem transwersalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: *translacja, tłumaczenie, przekład, wielojęzyczność, wielokulturowość, świadczenie usług, kompetencje transwersalne.*

Introduction

The aim of this article is to argue in favour of the relevance of translation¹ as cultural, educational and professional activity and to explore advantages that translation offers to young people planning their education. Firstly, the relevance claim is built on historical grounds, with the main point that translation underlies our civilisation. Secondly, some available data on the translation market are discussed to portray the potential vistas for translation and translators. To keep a balanced approach, most evident risks are discussed that loom over the translation profession. Thirdly, a specific synthesis of the two previous insights is offered, showing how learning to translate (interpret) and how to provide translation services can be a valuable educational experience.

¹As used in this text, the notion of translation covers all kinds of complex operations necessary and distinctive for the activity and action of translating or interpreting. This is why only the notions of translation and translating are used in most instances here, with few exceptions where interpreting is addressed directly. On the whole, the majority – if not all – arguments and claims made about translation and translating as defined here pertain well to both the written and the oral mode.

An historical outline

That culture is semiotic in nature is a widely accepted statement – at least from the times of Lévi-Strauss (Lévi-Strauss, 1963) or Lotman (Lotman, Uspensky, Mihaychuk, 1978). Similarly, since Barthes (Barthes, 1998) and Geertz (Geertz, 1973), we are ready to unconditionally agree that culture, communication and text are interdependent phenomena. As can be inferred from numerous text in Robinson (2002), the consequent stages of cultural or military expansion depended on translating activities (e.g. Antient Egypt, Greece and Rome). Sacred text translation became a vital cultural issue during the Medieval quest for religious unity (or uniformity) under the auspices of Christianity (see e.g. a 'literalist' approach by Burgundio di Pisa, a 'sense-based' approach by St. Jerome and a 'sign-based' approach by St. Augustine – see Robinson, 2002 for details). At the same time, disputes over religious text translation was among main causes for religious reformation movements (see e.g. Luther, Tyndale or Schleiermacher). And if one can say that the epoch of Romanticism represented an early stage of cultural globalisation, it could be so mostly through prolific translating activity upheld by the most renowned literary figures of the time (e.g. Goethe or Shelley). Anyone familiar with 'world literature' is likely to say: 'I read Alighieri, Shakespeare or Proust.' But was it really that we read all these works in their originals? More likely it is that we reached for these authors through translation. Finally, when we think how much information and knowledge is available globally today, we need to realise that the only way to make it all available globally is through translation. It is true that more and more people learn languages, and most of us already are bilinguals or multilinguals. Still, the amount of what is left to be translated is such that our culture is forced to rely on translation as a profession for its daily, text-based functioning. It is equally true that the translation market gets more and more technological and automated, and that the long-term horizon for translation is hard to define. Yet, the nearest future is perhaps best captured in a post whose authorship is difficult to establish, but which permeated social media accounts (*LinkedIn*, *Twitter*) in January 2023, and was specifically triggered by the emergence of the Chat GTP application (*ChatGTP*): "AI will not replace humans, but humans with AI will replace humans without AI."

Translation as a profession: the bright side

When analysing a wide array of business reports on the translation market, one can be nothing but optimistic about the present and the future

of translation and the translation profession. According to all the reports available publicly online, provided by numerous market research companies, the translation market is bound to grow globally in the coming years both in terms of market value and in terms of pages to translate. Discussing details of these reports falls far beyond the scope of this article, and hence only some general trends they mention are listed below:

- reportedly, the strongest indicated drivers for industry growth are content digitization requiring multilingual support (e.g. online services localization, remote interpreting) (*Proz.com*)
- more freelancers are expected to enter the market in the near and the mid-term future; (*Proz.com*)
- training options become and will become more and more available; (*Proz.com*)
- more and more platforms occur to facilitate service delivery (*Proz.com*)
- freelancers' professional outlook in 2022 was positive for over 50% of the respondents² (*Proz.com*)
- top areas of freelancers' specialisation include law, advertising, medicine and business (Statista.com) and the growth is forecast particularly for legal and medical translation (*MMR.com*).

It is relatively easy to observe that the reports referred to above depict a rather positive picture of the market and prove the relevance of translation as a communicative and business activity, also proving that learning to become a translator makes sense as an educational, developmental and career choice.

Translation as a profession: the caveats

Irrespective of the optimistic panorama presented above, individual choices of educational and career trajectories need to rely on more complex and nuanced factors. Firstly, there is no direct way to determine if the global or regional market growth is likely to produce increased translation freelancing opportunities. A lot depends on the national or regional market structuration (European Commission. Directorate-General for Translation et al., 2013), since it affect types of service provision models that are in demand

²Since the author uses publicly available excerpts of the Proz.com report, they are unable to provide details on how big the research pool was. The only remark concerning the number of participants uses the notion of 'thousands' (*Proz.com*). However imprecise, the expression suggests more than 1000 responses, which allows certain generalisations. Yet, let the author comment that the way the data is used in this article is hardly directly diagnostic or seeking representativeness. The point is to draw a general picture as a basis for further discussion focused on translation as of relevance to contemporaneity.

in a locality, region or a country. Secondly, individual education and career choices need to take into account personal resources (Pietrzak, 2022) that dictate a field of specialisation and types of translation a person can professionally engage into. These do not have to be in a direct match with 'big data,' and may call for translators' adaptive measures.

What is more, the reports quoted above contain data that may be disturbing for a person considering a language industry career. For example, irrespective of the general positive outlook for 2023 (see above), the same respondents (*Proz.com*) were asked about the likelihood of their recommending freelancing in translation or interpreting to someone. 40% of the respondents (*Proz.com*) acknowledged being very likely or likely to do so, but as much as 30% were unable to decide, while the remaining 30% were unlikely to issue a positive recommendation (9.5% very unlikely, 19.5% unlikely). Thus, there occurs a paradox where a positive view of one's professional future does not coincide with satisfaction about some crucial aspects of professional functioning.

Other such paradoxes can also be traced in the literature, including the extensive research by Dam and Zethsen. In a number of their research reports (e.g. Dam, Zethsen, 2008, 2011 or 2016a) they managed to establish (also relying on other research reports) that despite a general sense of job satisfaction, Danish translators found it difficult to define their job as either prestigious or well-paid. (see e.g. Dam, Zethsen, 2016b, p. 176) A similar, but comparative study of translators in Sweden and Finland is presented in Ruokonen, Svahn (2021), and it brings comparable conclusions and paradoxes.

Referring to these complex professional dilemmas is not meant to discourage anyone from a language industry career. It rather pinpoints educators' obligation to put these nuances in front of the students so as to equip them with tools for coping. The education-to-market transition is a multifaceted and complex task, irrespective of an educational profile or a planned profession. Choosing any career requires detailed analysis of pros and cons and it is an obligation of an educational system to make all individual choices best-informed.

The advantages of translation education and profession

The deliberations above are intended to illustrate the complexity of what it means to work as a professional translator or interpreter. These facts and trends are a knowledge resource in personal decision-making. The present section is to highlight the strongest advantages of translation education and career.

Translation as cultural mediation

From the cultural point of view, translation is and will remain part of culture-forming processes, as the majority of cultural trends are global, irrespective of local variation. Corollary to these '(g)localization' processes (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013; (Cronin 2013), (Cronin 2020) is a need for textual mediation e.g. in entertainment and multimedia industry (O'Hagan, Mangiron, 2013, 2014), which are bound to grow (*Proz.com*), offering vistas for future translators.

What is more, cultural competence developed when (training) translating can be an asset for those who are likely to engage in culture-related activities like multilingual business relations, international cooperation in NGOs, or multinational connections at cultural institutions. Even though a person choosing this career trajectory may hardly be engaged in 'regular' translator or interpreting jobs at their workplace, their intercultural competences put them in a position of a culture-sensitive communicator (Bassnett, 2011), relying on code-switching and translanguaging (Sato, García, 2023) as regular tools of the trade.

Text analysis as part of the translation process

There is abundant literature on how complex translation tasks engage translators' cognitive resources. This research topic is devoted a decided subdomain in translation studies and interpreting studies: *translation (interpreting) process research*. Since discussing this research field fall far beyond the scope of this article, the author confines themselves with a mention of few most recent contributions e.g. Marín García (2019); Milošević, Risku (2021); Risku, Rogl (2022) or Tra&Co Group (2021). One such task is advanced text comprehension: far more detailed and meticulous since oriented towards enabling the 'transfer of nuances' that for a 'default' text reader can be a matter of interpretative option or redundancy. Thus, learning to translate equips with excellent text comprehensions skills, which are both an educational added value and a professional asset. Being able to comprehend and analyse texts with sensitivity to textual nuances, including terminology use and its contextual variation, can be of professional value in and beyond the language industry framework as it can prepare for careers such as media specialists, industry analysts or for broadly understood occupations in the creative economy sector. (UNCTAD, 2022)

This sensitivity (advanced analytical skills, information management strategies) can also give more general, developmental assets by preparing young adults to be effective information analysts, skilfully managing perso-

nal and professional media content, avoiding misinformation and fake news impact: the latter are becoming a civilisation hazard that can lead to grave consequences for one's private and professional life. In fact, the skills described here are vital for effective cultural and social participation now and in the foreseeable future.

Translation service provision as a transversal competence

Translation competence includes skills necessary to provide services on the translation market. (see e.g. EMT, 2017; Gouadec, 2007) These include skills in building a service portfolio, knowledge and decision-making skills as regards market interaction, business and financial management or customer relation management. Thus, students of translation learn to understand the nature of the translation market and service provision. (see e.g. the concept of Service-Dominant Logic in Kujamäki, 2020; for more on the concept of service, see e.g. Brax, 2013) However, service provision is a transversal competence (UNESCO International Bureau of Education, 2013): it can be used in variety of provision contexts and for diverse services. Hence, graduates of translation studies are capable of extrapolating their service provision skills on other industries or service provision activities. This is because most services indispensably rely on attractive and flexible service portfolios, effective communication and marketing strategies, long-term business thinking or quality and customer satisfaction. One of the crucial aspects of service provision is that it teaches to seek business opportunities and market niches – irrespective of industry.

Conclusions

Translation has played a fundamental role in guiding modern culture and civilisation to where it is today. As a cultural, educational and professional activity, translation is likely to keep its relevance in the foreseeable future. Irrespective of the innumerable transformations that translating has gone through, there is and most likely will be a need for “a certain of interpretation by the translator” (Nida [1964], 2000, p. 126) when negotiating texts among cultures. In fact, any act of human communication understood as a meaning-making act will always provoke diverse interpretative avenues. To make this picture even more complex, we need to consider how many of these acts are and will be taking place across languages and cultures. Thus, language to language communication – involving code-switching and trans-languaging – is a daily reality of a growing number of workplaces. However

advanced the technology, 'language facilitators' are and will be needed for long. The translation skills acquired through translator education can be used in whole array of professional, textual and communicative purposes and contexts – not necessarily in the form of 'regular' translation tasks. Another advantage of a translation graduate is a profound understanding of the concepts of service and service provision. Irrespective of industry or content, services require relation-building, communication skills, time and resource management etc. This catalogue is among the qualities defined as most desirable in all industries in the modern labour market. (employability skills, see e.g. Brüning and Mangeol, 2020)

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Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to Dr. habil. Konrad Klimkowski, Professor – The Institute of Linguistics and Literature, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (Poland)
E-mail: konrad.klimkowski@mail.umcs.pl