

# Teaching technology in translator-training programs in Turkey

VOLGA YILMAZ GÜMÜŞ

*Anadolu University, Turkey*

*This paper investigates the ways technology is taught in undergraduate translator-training programs in Turkey, from the perspective of various stakeholders. The main aim is to find out whether there is a gap between what is offered in training programs and what is expected on the market with regard to technological skills of graduates. In the survey of graduates, half of the respondents said technology was dealt with rarely or not at all during their undergraduate studies, whereas about 65% found technology either extremely important or fairly important for their profession. The curricula of most undergraduate translation programs presently include a technology component. Current debates concentrate on how and to what extent these skills should be taught in training programs. This paper first discusses the graduates' viewpoints on technology in translation, and then provides other stakeholders' arguments on teaching and using technology in translation. The curricula of translation programs and course descriptions are also surveyed to see how translation technology is incorporated into training programs.*

*Keywords: translation technology, translator training, translation curriculum*

## Introduction

Translation technology has become one of the most popular topics in translation research as its importance in translation practice increases. Technologies have been a common research topic in Translation Studies with reference to their use in translation processes (e.g. Quah 2006, Yamada 2011), their relationship with the human factor (e.g. Olohan 2011, Teixeira 2013), their effect on Translation Studies (e.g. O'Hagan 2013) and their integration into translator training (e.g. Alcina 2008, Alcina, Soler and Granell 2007, Doherty and Moorkens 2013). Because technology has already become a significant part of translation practice, today almost all models of translation

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competence involve technology as a competence in its own right (see for example Kelly 2005, PACTE 2005, 2008, Tan 2008, EMT 2009, Rico 2010). Arguing that technology is a necessity rather than an option in translation practice, Biau Gil and Pym (2006: 6) specify three main effects of technology on translation: effect on communication (with clients and colleagues), on memory (amount and speed of information storage) and on text production (word processing). In the translator-training literature, there are differing views on how and to what extent technological skills should be taught in training programs. For instance, Mossop (2003: 21) argues that students need basic skills to use Windows, Internet, e-mail and Word, and that they can learn the rest later. On the other hand, some translator profiles require students to graduate with advanced computer and technology skills, ranging from advanced word-processing skills to the ability to use translation memories and terminology management tools (see for example Mackenzie 2004, Aula.int 2005, OPTIMALE 2012). Pym (2013) suggests that the technology is not a separate component of translation competence but should be integrated into the whole training process. As a result of this integration, technology is expected to affect all other components of a training program and thus the final professional profile of learners.

This study, a part of my PhD thesis on translator training for the market, reports on the teaching of technology in translator-training programs at the undergraduate level. The paper is based on a questionnaire survey of graduates, as well as interviews with graduates, a translation company owner, and one of the founding members of the Turkish Union of Translation Students (the TÜÇEB). Furthermore, the curricula of undergraduate translator-training programs in Turkey were surveyed to gain an idea about the actual changes related to teaching technology, particularly after the recent revisions governed by the Bologna process.

## **Methodology**

Translator training at the undergraduate level is taken into consideration for the purpose of this study, although the higher education institutions in Turkey offer translation programs at all levels. Undergraduate programs in translation have a longer history in the Turkish higher education system, and provide the majority of the workforce for the translation market. The population for the survey is comprised of individuals holding a four-year undergraduate degree in Translation and Interpreting from a Turkish university. Within this relatively large population, the participants were restricted to the graduates of two translator-training programs in Ankara: Hacettepe University and Bilkent University. These cases represent the two types of universities in Turkey, i.e. state and foundation universities. Questionnaires were completed by 125 graduates that graduated between

1996 and 2010. The number of respondents that answered all questions in the survey was 89. The respondents were not required to answer every question, since not all of them were working as translators when surveyed. The survey design has two main aims: 1) to define the curricular components that are useful in preparing trainees for professional life, and 2) to define the degree and forms of interaction between training institutions and the market. The link to the online survey was distributed through various methods, including personal contacts, social media and snowball sampling. Additionally, in-depth interviews were conducted with twelve graduates, who represented the three main professional activities of translation graduates, i.e. in-house translators, freelance translators, and language teachers. The interviewees were selected on the basis of maximum variation and criteria sampling. Further interviews were conducted with a translation company owner (i.e. an employer) and one of the founding members of the TÜÇEB. Before presenting the results, we should first grasp the place of technology in translator-training curricula in Turkey.

### **Technology in the curriculum**

I went over the curricula used in undergraduate translator-training programs in the academic year 2013-2014 to gain a general idea of the incorporation of technology teaching into training. Here I first describe the general situation in undergraduate translator-training programs in Turkey, and then the situation in the four-year translation and interpreting programs at Bilkent and Hacettepe universities, from a historical perspective.

#### *An overview*

In the recent past, information technologies were involved in some of the training programs only to allow students to acquire basic computer skills. The 2013 ÖSYS (Student Selection and Placement System) Guidebook of Higher Education Programs lists twenty-three undergraduate translator-training programs in Turkey. My overview does not cover the programs at Avrasya and Kafkas universities, which started admitting students in the academic year 2013-2014. However, the program at Marmara University, which did not admit students in the academic year in 2013-2014 but is an active program, is taken into consideration. Thus, the overview is based on the curricula of twenty-two undergraduate programs in Translation and Interpreting.

Technology specific to translation has been offered as a separate course component in sixteen undergraduate translation programs. These translator-training departments offer technologies for translators, including translation memories, as an obligatory or elective course. The courses are obligatory in ten programs and elective in the others. The ECTS credits of these courses,

offered under names such as “Translation Tools”, “Information Technologies for Translators” and “Computer-Aided Translation”, range between four and fifteen over the four-year study. The remaining programs offer generic courses such as computer literacy or information technologies, in most cases not specifically designed for translators.

#### *Bilkent University*

In the Department of Translation and Interpreting at Bilkent University, an obligatory course on “Computer Literacy” has been offered since the launching of the program. Furthermore, “Computer Literacy II” is offered as an elective component. In these courses, students acquire basic computer skills such as word processing, Internet use, webpage building and the use of spreadsheets. These courses are offered by the department and for translation students only. It is worthy of note that the first curriculum of the program also included a course on “Translation and New Technology” as an elective. However, that course was then removed and, in the 2009-2010 academic year, “Technology for Translators” was incorporated into the curriculum as an elective component. The six-ECTS credit course has a comprehensive content, including computer-assisted translation systems, use of online materials and resources, translation project management and terminology compilation techniques.

#### *Hacettepe University*

In the English-Turkish translator-training program at Hacettepe University, there was no technology-related component in the curriculum until the 2009 revision, when two obligatory courses were added to the curriculum: “Information Technologies for Translators” in the first semester and “Translation Tools” in the fourth semester. The former covers word processing tools and software that supports the translation process, while the latter focuses on time and project management, translation memories and software used for preparing budgets and invoices. Two further technology related courses are offered as electives: “Machine Translation” and “Localization”.

### **Survey results**

My questionnaire survey included a question on the importance of items in a list of course components offered in translator-training programs in Turkish universities. The list involved 15 items, including translation technology. The other components in the list were communication skills in A language, communication skills in B language, discourse analysis and pragmatics,

intercultural communication/cultural issues, knowledge of linguistics, professional work procedures and professional ethics, research techniques, specific field knowledge, terminology management, text analysis, translation criticism, translation history, translation practice and translation theory. The respondents were asked to rate each item based on a five-point scale with regard to their importance for professional work as a translator. In another question, the respondents were asked rate each item based on a five-point scale with regard to the frequency of being dealt with during the training. As mentioned above, 89 subjects answered both questions. Half of the respondents said technology is *rarely dealt with* or *not dealt with* during their undergraduate studies, whereas about 65% found technology *extremely important* or *fairly important* for translation work. Juxtaposing these two results related to technology, we see that there may be a gap between the (assigned) importance and the (perceived) frequency of learning technology in translation-training programs. However, given the replies to the question regarding the importance of technology for professional work, the ranking of technology among other components shows that it is listed as one of the least important components for professional work. It ranks tenth in the list of importance, with an average score of 3.89 out of 5. This suggests that although graduates see technology as an important component for professional work, they tend to regard components such as language skills, field knowledge, cultural issues, and text analysis as being more important. The graduate interviews showed that translators employed in competitive environments are vigorous defenders of using and learning technology, while others use only word processors and the Internet and are less inclined to defend teaching technology as a main concern of translator-training programs.

### **Interview results**

For the purpose of this study, I interviewed twelve graduates, one translation company owner, and one of the founding members of the *TÜÇEB*. The graduates were asked about any gaps between training and the market and to what extent their training met their needs as a translator. The employer was asked which technological skills he expected from recruits and what he expected them to learn during university training and on the job. Their responses may be summarized as follows.

#### *Graduates*

Asked about the use of technology in translation, without making any specifications about the kind of technology, the interviewees mentioned the following five points: 1) using word-processing tools to type a translation, 2) using the Internet for information mining, 3) using social media to keep up-to-

date on both global events and news about the translation world, 4) using technologies to communicate and exchange information with clients and colleagues, and 5) using technologies specifically designed to be used for translation (i.e. translation memories).

When asked about the use of technology, the relatively older graduates tended to refer to the use of word processors in translation, and complained about the lack of a computer laboratory where they should be able to type their translations and use the Internet. However, recent graduates are expectedly more inclined to use terms such as CAT (computer-assisted translation) tools or TMs (translation memories). Interviewee 12 drew attention to the inconsistency between trainers and professionals regarding the use of technology in the profession. She reported that trainers tend to associate technology with basic computer use, especially the use of Microsoft Office, while professionals talk about specialized translation tools that the trainers are usually not familiar with.

The professionals interviewed reported to be using the Internet for information seeking before and during the translation process. In this respect, training should play a role in familiarizing students with how to make effective use of the Internet in the translation process. As suggested by Enriquez Raído (2011: 484), a successful query on the Internet requires “a highly applied and contextualized approach to the teaching of (online) information skills within translation practice courses, thus enabling students to develop and/or enhance said skills through meaningful and experiential learning”. Furthermore, it is important to inform students of the risks as well as potentials of the Internet. The Internet, as a very free zone, presents unreliable or misleading information in addition to a huge amount of valuable information. The effective use of the Internet during training may help students distinguish between reliable and unreliable information on the Internet under the supervision of instructors.

In addition to the use of the Internet for information mining, some graduates also touched upon the use of social media to catch up with the agenda and the use of communication technologies to interact with both clients and colleagues. For instance, Interviewee 3, an in-house translator employed in the Turkish office of an international organization, mentioned that social media (in her case, Twitter) may be used effectively in translation classes to ensure that students keep up-to-date and improve their foreign language skills and expand their vocabulary. Interviewee 2, with experience as a freelancer and translation company owner, also mentioned that translators need to use social media effectively to learn about the profession and become familiar with the advantages and challenges. Among the platforms she suggested using were special portals for translators, blogs, Twitter and Facebook.

Most of the current discussions focus on translation-specific technologies. Although most interviewees mentioned the need to teach CAT

tools in training programs, only one reported using CAT tools extensively. Interviewee 6, as a freelancer, mentioned that the use of technology, mainly TMs, is one of the most important demands on the translation market. The remaining interviewees were not using TMs frequently. They said that it was important to be familiar with CAT tools, but most of them were personally using only word processing tools and the Internet.

The graduates employed in more competitive settings, especially on the freelance market and in translation companies, used translation technologies more intensively. They strongly agreed that translation and communication technologies should be learned during training. Based on his experience both on the market and as a translator trainer, Interviewee 5 argued that technology should be mostly learned during university training because “colleagues, supervisors, or bosses would be reluctant to help the novice translator learn these skills”. The only translator that saw freelancing as a career option among our interviewees, Interviewee 6, was a vigorous defender of the use of technology in translation and the teaching of technology to students during their university training. In his view, prospective translators should be equipped with technological skills in addition to language proficiency from the beginning of their training. He mentioned that technology is useful not only in the process of translation (improving the speed of the translator and the quality of translations, thus responding better to market demands), but it also plays a role in the choice of profession. He had been able to pursue a career as a freelance translator because of technology. It was interesting to hear him state that the market does not need translators with excellent language competence any more, but seeks professionals that have perfect command of “how the sector functions”, which includes effective use of technology. This freelance translator did not see rapidly changing technologies and new technologies entering the market as a challenge, since behind all new technologies there are a few basic algorithms, which students are required to learn.

In the interviews, both recent and older graduates complained that the teaching of technology was limited by the instructors’ knowledge, and acquiring the skills was due more to individual efforts by students than to a systematic offering in specifically designed courses. Most of the graduates believed that they needed to acquire basic technology skills in order to enter the market more confidently. This would allow them not to waste time learning basic technologies after they entered the market.

#### *A translation company owner*

Technology was one of the main topics discussed during the interview with the translation company owner and two project managers working at the company. The company owner, also a translator at the company, contended that the most important requirements on the translation market today are

quality and speed. Technological knowledge and skills, if used effectively in translation practice, add speed and quality to a translator's work. The employer first addressed the importance of word processing skills, suggesting that every student planning to be a translator on the market should take advanced training in Microsoft Office, which allows translators to work with the most frequently encountered file formats. This requirement results from the need for not only speed in typing but also management of various file types. He argued that translators must be able to solve the formatting problems they encounter in the translation process and submit work in the required format. Source texts are usually provided in un-editable formats and translators must be able to convert these documents into editable ones and manage formatting as required by the client. A four-year training program may not include a component that covers these skills, due to lack of competent trainers or time constraints related to the curriculum. However, the interviewees highlighted that trainers should at least inform students that such skills are among the main requirements of the contemporary translation market.

The employer's second relevant contention was that translation technology is an integral part of translation practice today. As each client demands the use of a different software program, students probably cannot master all translation software during training. Nevertheless, they are required to graduate with basic knowledge of the functioning of translation technologies so that they can adapt to the market more easily. This argument finds support in the literature:

In most cases it would suffice to train students in the use of one specific tool for translation activities (more would be welcome, but two would be enough), with the idea that it would be better to master one or two tools perfectly well and on the basis of this mastery be able to familiarise oneself with other tools fairly quickly. (Thelen 2011: 173).

The employer provided training in technology for new recruits. However, the interviewees mentioned that not all companies provide this opportunity and freelancers may not have employer support to learn and use technologies. In such cases, translators have to learn how to use the programs by themselves, if the university training program had not covered them.

#### *A founding member of the TÜÇEB*

The final interview was with one of the founding members of the Turkish Union of Translation Students, who is currently an actor on the market. One of his most significant arguments is that technology should be taught in translator training just because it is now a part of translation. He challenged

Mossop's (2003: 21) argument that if you cannot translate with pencil and paper, you cannot translate with the latest technology. For him, pencil, paper and print dictionaries were means of translating in the past, whereas computers and technologies are means of translation practice today. Thus, if training programs set out to teach the practice of translation, they are required to teach computer and technology skills as well. He also maintained that translation practice should not be associated only with the translation profession: translation practice is a part of Translation Studies, and translation technology is a part of translation practice. Therefore, not only practicing translators but also practicing translation scholars need technology. Additionally, he mentioned that training programs fail to meet students' need for technology. This is mainly because trainers are not sufficiently aware of how the market functions.

## **Conclusions**

This study reports the viewpoints of different stakeholders on teaching technology in translator-training programs and the use of technologies in translation practice. Given that translator-training programs define their objective as training qualified translators for the market and that technology is defined as one of the main market requirements, translator-training programs are expected to furnish their students with the technological skills required to work efficiently as professionals. My survey and interviews show that graduates take different roles even when they are employed on the translation market, which means they have different needs. The graduates reported using technology to varying degrees. The simplest form of technology used in translation is apparently for the purpose of word processing. The translation company owner I interviewed highlighted the importance of this simple but fundamental technology, suggesting that every prospective translator should receive thorough training in word processing programs.

The work experience of the interviewees also draws attention to mobility on the translation market. Translators move between freelancing and in-house employment, or from a state institution with one text type to a translation company that deals with a great variety of text types. Employment in each professional context has specific requirements, which requires training translators for a global market with diverse technological requirements. This brings us to the conclusion that, although translator-training programs cannot allocate time to teach every single TM tool, they may incorporate in their curricula the basics of TMs and how they are used in producing translations. Today technologies are taught in the majority of undergraduate translator-training programs. The question is whether they are integrated into the training program or just offered as individual courses. As verified by the employers interviewed in this study, time "is a very important, if not the most

important, factor in the practice of professional translation” (Nord 2005: 171). Translator-training programs are thus required to teach students how to make effective use of technology to respond to the time and quality needs of the translation market. This means seeing technological skills as complementary to translation practice and integrating them into courses on translation practice.

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