

# Integrating Intercultural Competence with the Translator Training

Sarra Mejri

ISLT, University of Carthage

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## ABSTRACT

The definition of an intercultural competent translator used in this paper is one who consistently exhibits a high degree of intercultural knowledge, abilities, attitude, and adaptability in all of his or her professional endeavours. I contend that in order to achieve this goal, intercultural competency must be formally and conceptually integrated into the curriculum for translation training. The importance of intercultural communication in the translator training curriculum has already been attempted, and in this paper, I relied on a questionnaire distributed to Tunisian university teachers to gauge their awareness about their students' intercultural communication (IC) in relation to translation classes. The data obtained from six-point Likert questionnaires were analysed via SPSS to reveal Tunisian university teachers' knowledge of Translation practice in line with their students' IC. This study culminated in showing the existing gaps in teachers' training and understanding about their students' IC in relation to translation. Thus, it calls for more focus on this area in future research works.

**Keywords:** intercultural competence; translator training; pedagogical development

## THE THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS ON INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

We believe it would be helpful to briefly discuss some pertinent theoretical thoughts on how translation and intercultural communication (IC) are strongly related to one another and can be understood in a reciprocal manner before discussing the topic of best practices in teaching and assessing IC for translators. Translation is viewed from a functionalist and communicative perspective as “a process of intercultural communication, whose end product is a text that is capable of functioning appropriately in specific situations and contexts of use” (Schäffner 1996, 118). Heidrun Witte emphasizes the need to compare and contrast cultures while attempting to produce appropriate behaviours that are in line with needs and circumstances. She adopts Schäffner's communicative approach and emphasizes the significance of situations and the context of use. Additionally, Witte describes IC as the capacity to intentionally acquire ideas from both one's own and other cultures. Witte's method emphasizes the important cognitive experiences that students go through that allow them to develop this consciousness throughout the learning process. The difficulty that intercultural competency training must overcome is enhancing this experience and encouraging the growth of this particular awareness and consciousness (Witte 2008, 143).

Kelly (2005) likewise views the awareness component as being essential to the intercultural communication process. This process begins with cultural characteristics that can be depicted in texts, but emphasis is also placed on the significance of students, who are familiar with their own cultures, a topic that is sometimes disregarded and implied in translator training curriculum. Scholars instructing students in EFL classes have frequently emphasized the necessity of stressing the need for experts in the language sector to be competent in their own culture, but we might expand this observation even more emphatically to the translation class where trainees are preparing to be intercultural mediators between a foreign language and culture and their own mother language and culture to make students aware that their understanding of their own culture is always limited and that communicating across cultures can necessitate learning much more about it than

they will typically require for their “domestic” discourses.

For instance, David Katan (2004), who presents the idea of communication based on cultural frames, describes the IC that translators must possess as well as the exchange process between the two cultures involved in the translation. In Katan’s thesis, the translator is viewed as a cultural intermediary because each culture is viewed as a lens or framework through which other cultures must be understood. Katan’s more recent study in the area of translator’s training develops the strategy of a cultural mediator must exhibit: the motivation, values, and beliefs involved in participating in another community are addressed by intercultural competency.

Therefore, the intercultural talents will either limit or advance the coming communicating abilities. The following succinct summary of Katan’s pragmatic definition of intercultural communication for translators is that “intercultural competence” is simply the capacity to recognize and manage difference (Katan 2009, 284). The different stages that students go through are also emphasized in Katan’s approach to teaching intercultural communication to translators. She also emphasizes how some specific abilities related to intercultural communication are to be taught especially at the Master’s level, including learning to be flexible and particularly “the need to acquire competence in “uncertainty management”” (Katan 2009, 295).

The IC consciousness of the translator needs to be strengthened during translator training in consideration of all the processes a translation process entails:

- The first interaction with a potential client after accepting a translation commission or task;
- The textual analysis that contrasts and compares, which can be founded on the multicultural knowledge, awareness, and self-consciousness of the translators;
- The adaptable negotiation of the translation tactics and decisions to be used on a textual level, while being conscious of theoretical issues and the pros and drawbacks of the judgments taken; and
- The necessity to demonstrate adaptability as well as a clear consciousness towards the end consumers and their interpersonal connection with the end product.

In conclusion, the authors argue that a translator who consistently exhibits a high degree of international knowledge, abilities, attitude, and adaptability is intercultural competent. A major item on the agenda of numerous translation research groups in Europe and beyond is the subject of IC training for translators. One simply needs to look at active research organizations like PACTE to observe how this extremely complex subject has been developed. In their essay for this special edition, Tomozeiu and Kumpulainen highlight a variety of techniques and competence models that have been created in this field. They mention a potential “settling phase” for this study goal in the article.

Whether we have reached this stage is up for debate, but in any event, advancements in the future must take the following theoretical factors into account: Which IC sub-competences are pertinent to translators who work professionally? – How can IC as a textual skill and IC as an interpersonal competency be balanced? What theoretical foundation should IC sub-competences be conceptualized on given the practical nature of translation? Since European training providers must adhere to its overt and covert goals and ideals in order to receive its seal of approval, the European Master of Translation (EMT) is a crucial structuring and institutionalizing element of translator training in the European setting.

Thus, it is important to consider how the EMT framework defines translator competences. Socio cultural and textual competencies are separated into intercultural competence in their competency diagram, with a clear emphasis on the knowledge component in (Gambier 2009). There is no denying that textual skills are

essential to translation as a text-based and socio-culturally embedded activity, but one could argue that this conventional understanding leaves out important interpersonal and reflective components as well as theoretical or meta-level knowledge. According to us, intercultural competence includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes (PICT 2012a). Yarosh(2015, 161) asserts that it is challenging to distinguish between intercultural competence and other competencies, and we concur. One possible explanation for the difficulty is that it is incorporated into many of them, if not all of them.

## **PEDAGOGICAL AND OPERATIONAL ORIENTATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING IC**

If we accept the assertion that intercultural competence permeates every translation-related work, it becomes urgent to figure out how to educate this all-encompassing competency. As of right now, it seems that the knowledge- and skill-based components of IC are better handled in the classroom than the interpersonal component (PICT 2012b). However, the researcher believes that there are a number of important areas that need greater study. – Reflectiveness on one’s own culture – attitudes: how to assess as IC sub-competences and how to educate them – the transition from translation proficiency to translator’s proficiency the degree of explicitness of IC teaching in the classroom; the integration of classroom and extracurricular IC activities; the promotion of inquiry and adaptability as learning objectives.

The teaching of intercultural competence on translation programmes has been mainly done through text-based activities. The results of the PICT survey (PICT 2012b) indicate a clear reliance on text-based approaches in teaching IC. These approaches are certainly valuable to translation students as they increase the awareness of the strong links between translation and intercultural communication. However, these text based approaches are, in the view of the authors, far from sufficient. In order to ensure not only an enhanced level of IC understanding but the development of the full range of IC sub-competences, a range of pedagogical approaches and activities are needed.

In translation programs, intercultural competency has primarily been taught using text-based exercises. The findings of the PICT study (PICT 2012b) show a blatant reliance on text-based teaching strategies for IC. As they raise awareness of the close ties between translation and intercultural communication, these strategies are unquestionably beneficial to students studying translation. However, the authors believe that these text-based techniques are far from adequate. A variety of pedagogical strategies and activities are required in order to guarantee not only an improved level of IC understanding but also the development of the whole range of IC sub-competences.

The PICT consortium claimed in 2012 (PICT, 2012a) that, as a result of this change in emphasis, the focus of competence models also needed to change from intercultural communication translation competence to intercultural communication translator skills. Yarosh (2015) adopted a similar strategy while developing her competency model, including two distinct learning dimensions that specifically target the translator (learning dimensions 5 and 6). Despite the fact that translation is a practical endeavour and that IC sub-competences, or abilities and performance, are therefore extremely important, it is important to recognize the value of the theoretical basis.

In a classroom setting, translation theory and intercultural communication theory can complement each other. However, theoretical cross-breeding has been relatively limited until now, and while translating is generally understood within translation studies as a practice related to intercultural communication, approaches directly linking translation studies and theories with intercultural communication theories have been scarce. The same may be true of intercultural communication literature, which has typically avoided discussing translation concerns extensively. Another significant study path is the development of appropriate educational resources for this theoretical cross-over, providing students with a sound theoretical

grounding for their professional development.

The extensive culturally oriented TS research tradition, with its numerous case studies from various cultural and historical contexts (for an overview, see Tymoczko 2007, Part II), provides a wealth of material for intercultural oriented readings; however, the links to intercultural communication theories are often implicit and must be made transparent to aid students' learning processes. To use second language acquisition terminology, learning, as opposed to acquisition, necessitates deliberate interaction with concepts and processes (Krashen 1988). We would like to advocate for a method that makes learning outcomes obvious and encourages students to reflect on what they are learning and how it will benefit them in their future careers.

In addition to fostering self-reflection and independent learning, this should be done in order to prepare students for becoming reflective practitioners in the future. The view among translation students that their IC is being improved outside of class through activities like traveling, seeing foreign films, and browsing websites in other languages was another significant finding of the PICT survey. These activities are now more readily available than they were before due to globalization and digitization.

Teachers should be encouraged to take advantage of the IC-enhancing activities students participate in outside of class and to potentially incorporate some of these activities into their learning activities given the new challenges to translation training due to diversity on the one hand and education budget cuts on the other. Creating curriculum and pedagogical tools that promote the "blending" of in-class and extra-curricular activities can have a positive impact on student learning. In fact, learning as it occurs in formal and informal settings, in organized and unstructured environments, should be taken into account when developing curricular designs, teaching strategies, and assessment tools (see, for example, Werquin 2007).

It is crucial for translation teachers to consider the advantages and disadvantages that non-formal and informal learning in this area can bring, given the large number of students who have identified IC sub-competences as an area that they are actively developing outside of their translation classes and the growing opportunities for them to do so. In a perfect educational setting, non-formal and informal learning that takes place outside of the classroom will be integrated with the formal curriculum and educational experience in the classroom.

This is currently widely accepted in regard to job-related skills, and organizations are currently promoting student job placements and internships as best practices. However, we also make the case for a more deliberate engagement with students' unofficial intercultural experiences. These assignments will also offer chances for reflection on intercultural abilities and attitudes. In addition to the immediately apparent learning benefits, a strategy that recognizes learning opportunities outside of the controlled environment of the classroom can encourage a reflective approach to learning, which leads to the development of reflective professionals, as well as a propensity for continuous learning, whether it is through continuing professional development (CPD) or in a less controlled format.

For both IC and translation, curiosity and adaptability are crucial, and classroom time should be devoted to developing these skills. In the literature on intercultural communication, both competencies are acknowledged. Although curiosity is a nuanced, instinctive idea, it is also a talent that can be found and enhanced. Curiosity and openness are defined by Humphrey (2007) using the paradigm created by Byram (1997) as "a willingness to relativize one's own values, beliefs, and behaviors, not to assume that they are the only possible and naturally correct ones" (Humphrey 2007, 27).

To aid in the development of this IC sub-competence, teaching and assessment activities might be created for translation classes. Students may be urged, for instance, to take into account many sources in order to comprehend a given cultural background. All translators must develop and continually maintain a critical

skill: the ability to interact appropriately with both traditional research sources. Teachers may desire to incorporate audience visualization exercises into their instructional method at the same time. For more information on the capacity to decentre, (see Byram 1997, 38, for example). This will encourage students to improve their capacity to deceive, or their capacity to explore and grasp a different perspective. The significance of audience visualization techniques has recently been highlighted by work in the user-centered translation field (Suojanen, Koskinen, and Tuominen 2015).

Through activities that embrace curiosity as a trait extending beyond instinct and recognize it as a constantly changing competency, a high level of engagement with the cultural context in which the source text and the target text exist can be promoted. Intercultural communication should be viewed as a “metacognitive ability,” according to Katan, who also notes that being bicultural is insufficient for this skill: “Students need to know “why,” and justify translation decisions” (Katan 2009, 289). Katan emphasizes the need for postgraduate students to manage their competencies, knowing “how” they will be approaching a translation in a specific way and “why,” thus constantly reconsidering and negotiating their perceptual position and mediation competencies. She does this by making reference to Benjamin Bloom’s (1956) taxonomy of cognitive domains.

For this reason, various titles have been used to recognize flexibility as an essential IC sub-competence. The World Work model refers to it as “flexibility” and identifies three of its components (World Work 2008); Helen and Franklin (2009, 76–79) go into great length about the benefits and drawbacks of this specific strategy. Another name for the idea is “tolerance for ambiguity” (Lustig and Koester 2010, 76), and they list it as one of the eight requirements for cultural competence. Without discounting the various theoretical interpretations of the idea, the current paper makes the case that adaptation and flexibility are crucial intercultural abilities, and as such, they are important for translators.

The lecturer can create a variety of teaching and evaluation activities in the classroom to aid in the development of this specific competency. To meet this need, several PICT resources were created (PICT 2012c). Activities like asking to have the same content translated for several audiences, for instance, can aid in the development of flexibility. At the same time, asking the students to think about what other media besides text might be appropriate to make the source text’s message appropriate for the target audience (such as drawings or brief videos) can encourage them to consider the possibilities and to modify their strategy to best suit a particular translation project.

## **Research Instruments**

The current study used a questionnaire to gauge the teachers’ views about their concerns with their students IC in Translation courses.

The questionnaire had been piloted with two university English teachers in the Department of English and Linguistics at a university of Garthage before it was finalized into its current form. None of the participants in the pilot study was involved in the study. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to examine the accuracy of the scales used, and the statistical analysis (via SPSS) revealed that the alpha coefficient of the piloted survey was 0.78.

## **Procedures**

The six-point Likert questionnaire was administered to all participants in person during a month. A total of 69 were distributed, and 63 were returned. All teachers agreed to participate in the study prior to data collection.



## Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics 23 was used to analyze the piloted questionnaire's results to examine the validity of the scales. SPSS was also used to perform descriptive statistics, including frequency, mean, and standard deviation.

## Theoretical framework

This study is empirical in nature since it focused mainly on the collection and analysis of empirical data such as the questionnaire. It is called the methodological framework as well. The philosophical assumption of this framework is informed by the ontological and epistemological stances about giving credit to the exposed knowledge at hand through understanding and explaining it. This is exactly what has been highlighted and focused on in this study at hand.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from six-point Likert questionnaires were analysed to reveal Tunisian university teachers' knowledge of Translation practice in line with their students' IC. The scoring for all adverse questions was reversed before the analysis of the data. Tunisian university teachers' overall awareness of dealing with negative feelings and stereotypes among their students scored an average of 4.05 (62.33%). That is, Tunisian university participants have partial knowledge of their students' feelings. This is in line with (Young & Sachdev, 2011) who highlighted the existing shortage of teachers' knowledge with their students' IC and what do they feel about it.

More specifically, the four statements about teachers' commitment about what should be done to increase the IC among their students are items 2,3,4,and,5 respectively, suggesting these concepts are coherent and comprehensible among them. Wright (2010) goes hand in hand with this study's findings through approaching how teachers act to increase their students' IC in the EFL classroom. By the same token, Wu (2010) seems critical to the cultural content in the EFL textbooks and he claims that the lack of knowledge among teachers may affect their students' level of IC.

In contrast, the degree of agreement on items 6, 7 and 8, which are about the translation and IC among learners, appears to be low, indicating these conceptual principles remain problematic among Tunisian university participants. These findings provide empirical evidence to support previous studies that ESP teaching is a complex and challenging task. The two last items are about the existing relationship between teachers' training and learners' IC and the results showed the existing awareness in this respect. These findings correlate with previous studies such as Yajima, and Toyosaki(2015) and Yarosh, M. (2015) who highlighted the challenges faced by students in dealing with translation and the importance of valorising the textual and cultural aspects to the students.

### Teachers' self-Rating agreement

Item	Statement		S.D.
1	I believe I will be able to deal with negative feelings in a cross-cultural situa-tion (e.g., being stereotyped or misunderstood).	4.05	1.51
2	I believe I can develop my own way of teaching a foreign language and its culture	4.86	1.24
3	The choice of my translation texts should match the IC of my students.	4.33	1.27
4	I need to work harder to boost my students IC	4.48	1.38
5	Focusing on the textual clues helps me to increase the IC among my students	3.51	1.37

6	Translation involves the combination of English language teaching and content-specific knowledge.	3.79	1.22
7	It is necessary to collaborate between a language teacher and a content-specific teacher to boost effectiveness.	3.65	1.38
8	Translation teachers should work collaboratively to increase their knowledge.	3.81	1.28
9	EFL learners should be intrinsically motivated to increase their IC.	3.81	1.23
10	Teachers should be professionally trained to meet their students needs and expectation.	4.11	0.86

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Bicultural (or multicultural) identities and a variety of cultural affinities have long been recognized as characteristics of the hybrid professional group known as translators. However, in an increasingly transnational world, target readers and writers of source texts are frequently also hybrids with fluid identities. This has an impact on their writing style and the books they like to read. Translators need to be trained to approach their professional activity reflexively and to change their behaviour in an agile manner in order to function effectively in the diverse modern situations (see also Koskinen 2015).

Translation pedagogy must abandon ideas of imparting knowledge in order to better prepare students for the new challenge of diversity. This means that it must focus on improving students' intercultural learning skills, specifically their capacity to acquire, adapt, and use cultural and linguistic knowledge in real-time communication (Messelink and Ten Thije 2012, p: 81). The students need to expand their sensitivity, flexibility, and ability to modify and adapt to new and unexpected scenarios, in addition to drawing on their previous cultural knowledge. They also need to improve their creativity in order to come up with fresh answers to unexpected communication situations.

Teachers can provide opportunities for students to practise empathy, or the capacity to recognize, comprehend, and relate to the feelings of others, in order to encourage this sensibility and adaptability. We contend that empathy is an essential and teachable capacity in written translation as well. The critical role of empathy has been best recognized in the field of community interpreting (e.g., Merlini 2015). There are numerous ways to accomplish this. For instance, literary translation, which is frequently a genre that students enjoy, can be used for this goal by choosing source works that require students to enter unfamiliar worlds: For instance, translating an elderly character's monologue will provide young students with an inside look at their thought processes.

Artificial intelligence is not yet able to handle the sensitivity and empathy required for successful multilingual communication in diverse and emotionally charged texts, but computers are becoming more and more adept at tackling routine translation tasks and will eventually replace those where the stakes on emotional dissonance are low. According to Katan, who also explains how the function of machine translation and of web translator communities will develop and become more and more acceptable in the future, human translators will still be required in this sector for the foreseeable future. The translator's position will therefore need to be re-evaluated as that of a "trans-creator," or a member of the translation community who must demonstrate.

In the end, translators who understand their role in taking risks and are capable of taking into account "the impact of cultural distance when translating" should receive training to develop their IC in order to be ready to handle all the challenges of a globalized society and market, where demonstrating empathy for otherness is increasingly important. We emphasize empathy while also addressing a recurring issue in translation: power. The issues of hierarchy, hegemony, and the cultural, political, or economic standing of both entire

lingua-cultures and their individual users cannot be ignored by anyone working across interlingual and intercultural contacts.

As Yajima and Toyosaki (2015, 101) summarize, translation is a participant in the global hegemony of languages. Issues of power have long been discussed in translation studies; Yajima and Toyosaki argue for linking this tradition to critical intercultural studies. They identify reflexive self hood as the vocal element of critical intercultural studies that we need to integrate into our thinking about translation. Reflexive translators come to know how their cultural identities are implicated in the process of translating and world-making—that is, participating in the global hegemony of languages, the global economy, and the global circulation of knowledge. In narrating their coming to know, reflexive translators can identify both the good and the bad and that which sits between.

## CONCLUSION

This paper presents a range of intercultural competence development strategies for translators. It highlights that theoretical traditions in translation studies and intercultural communication research are both extensive and occasionally intricate. Making students aware of the connections between these two traditions can be very beneficial. The practical field of translation makes use of a substantial and diverse corpus of theoretical knowledge. Intercultural communication has also expanded to incorporate a wide range of various theoretical stances at the same time. As was previously indicated and extensively covered by writers like Katan (2004, 2008), some of these views are extremely important for translators. Students can be inspired to become more educated, more reflective professionals by demonstrating how the theory of translation studies and the philosophy of intercultural communication are intertwined and together establish a sound theoretical foundation for translation practice.

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