REGISTER AND TRANSLATION COMPETENCE ACQUISITION. INVESTIGATING STUDENT ATTITUDES

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ABSTRACT. *Register and Translation Competence Acquisition. Investigating Student Attitudes.* The paper discusses aspects of the translator training process in the context of translation competence acquisition (TCA), a newer field of research in the Romanian context, and focuses on a group of first-year students enrolled in a class on Introduction to Translation Theory and Practice. The course is meant to raise the students' awareness concerning issues of appurtenance of structures and vocabulary to formal and informal register, and to help students put these into practice in intra- and inter-language translations, with a particular focus on the formal register. The study is a small-scale qualitative research which, through the use of diaries as a research tool, zooms in on the changes of student attitudes towards the development of both register sensitivity and good practices for translators who find themselves at the early stages of their career. The students start from discussing in small groups different translation errors (which occurred in the formal end-of-semester evaluation) and continue with a process of reflection on difficulties to overcome, instruments they make use of and further strategies to develop their translation competence.

Keywords: translator training, translation competence acquisition, intra-/inter-language translation, reflection, deep learning, attitudes.

REZUMAT. *Registru şi dobândirea competenţei de traducere. Analiza atitudinilor studenţilor.* Studiul discută aspecte legate de procesul de pregătire a traducătorilor pentru dobândirea competenţei de traducere, un domeniu de cercetare mai nou în contextul românesc, şi se axează pe un grup de studenţi din anul I, înscrişi la cursul de Iniţiere practică şi teoretică în traducere. Cursul urmăreşte să îi conştientizeze pe studenţi cu privire la noţiuni de structură şi

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vocabular care aparţin registrului formal şi informal, pe care apoi să le aplice în traduceri intra- şi inter-lingvistice, cu accent pe registrul formal. Studiul reprezintă o cercetare la scară redusă care, prin folosirea jurnalului ca instrument de cercetare, aduce în prim plan modificările de atitudine ale studenţilor faţă de sensibilitatea la registru şi schimbul de bune practici pentru traducători aflaţi la început de carieră. Studenţii încep prin a discuta în grupe mici despre erori de traducere (apărute în evaluarea semestrială) şi continuă cu un proces de reflecţie asupra dificultăţilor întâlnite, a instrumentelor pe care le folosesc şi a strategiilor de dezvoltare a competenţei de traducere.

Cuvinte cheie: pregătirea traducătorilor, dobândirea competenţei de traducere, traducere intra-/inter-lingvistică, reflecţie, învăţare de profunzime, atitudini.

1. Introduction

One of the most difficult exams for the first-year undergraduate students in the Applied Modern Languages programme of the West University of Timisoara (WUT) is the class on Introduction to Translation Theory and Practice. This class was taught in 2018-2019 by Andreea Şerban in the first semester and by Valentina Mureşan in the second semester. The first semester aims to familiarize students with the eight registers of English, which students find hard to differentiate between, particularly in terms of formal versus informal distinctions. The academic year 2018-2019 has brought an unprecedented low in the percentage of students who succeeded in passing this exam at the first attempt (i.e. only 51% out of 79 students enrolled in the programme, studying English either as a major or minor language). This has prompted the two instructors to investigate the possible causes of the students' poor results by inviting them to participate in a research on strategies involved in translation competence acquisition.

This paper represents part of a small-scale research aiming to assist students in building and developing their translation competence in the general context of our university's increasing visibility and internationalisation, as we consider that cultural knowledge and comprehension, as well as sensitivity towards cultural issues are closely connected to translation studies (sub-competences of the intercultural competence model, cf. Deardorff). Moreover, the acquisition of a translation competence has received more attention in the particular context of the recent adoption (since 2016) of the European Master's in Translation model (EMT) by the Theory and Practice of Translation Master's programme at WUT, which many of the students in the Applied Modern Languages bachelor's programme will later follow.

2. Translation Competence Acquisition

Initially used as a language teaching approach, translation gradually evolved into a discipline in its own right (Translation Studies) in the early 1970s, influenced by the demands of the labour market, which required professional translators and thus dictated the need for specialized translator training programmes. Moreover, discussing the metaphor of the pendulum swing in foreign language acquisition – from a focus on language analysis to a focus on language use –, Gaballo (45-46) underlines that translation can be viewed both as a learning tool and, more recently, as a fifth skill. She posits that translation is a mark of linguistic proficiency and grammatical accuracy, but it also implies the development of related competences such as reflection and collaboration (cf. Gaballo 51-52, 59).

With the emergence of the field of Translation Studies, many academics and researchers have tackled the challenging task of defining the translation competence and organizing it into several sub-competences. For instance, Albrecht Neubert broke it down into language, textual, subject, cultural, and transfer sub-competences, of which the last governs all the others. Similarly, for Mariana Orozco, the transfer sub-competence groups around it the communicative, extra-linguistic, professional-instrumental, and psycho-physiological ones. In contrast to the complexity of these two models, Anthony Pym brought on a minimalist view which relies on two closely connected skills: the ability to produce several viable target texts for a given source text, and then to rapidly select the most viable option and justify their choice.

At the end of the 20th century, the creation of the PACTE group (abbreviation for Process of Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation) led to the emergence of a generally accepted model defining translation competence or its acquisition in the field of Translation Studies (cf. PACTE). This group of Spain-based researchers and academics (of which Orozco was a member) identified six core sub-competences: "a language sub-competence in two languages; an extra-linguistic sub-competence; an instrumental/professional sub-competence; a psycho-physiological sub-competence; a transfer sub-competence; and a strategic sub-competence." (PACTE 48) The first five sub-competences are organized around the strategic one, considered essential in decision-making and problem-solving. Upon later revision, these six sub-competences were later reduced to five, while the psychophysiological sub-competence was relabelled as "psycho-physiological components" (related to cognition, attitudes and abilities, cf. PACTE 57-58) because they were perceived as representing "an integral part of all expert knowledge" (PACTE 59).

Ten years later, the European Commission designated a group of experts to draw up a new model focused on increasing the degree of

employability of MA translation programme graduates in order to identify a set of learning outcomes that such academic programmes should consider when designing their curricula. Thus emerged the European Master's in Translation framework, which also defined translation competence as consisting of six fundamental (sub)competences, grouped around the translation service provision competence as follows: the language competence, the intercultural competence, the information mining competence, the thematic competence, and the technological competence (cf. e.g. Chodkiewicz, Thunnissen). To keep up with changes in education and language services industry, while also including new research findings in the field of Translation Studies, the EMT Board revised the initial model and reduced it to five principal areas of competence: language and culture (transcultural and socio-linguistic awareness and communicative skills); translation (strategic, methodological and thematic sub-competences); technology (tools and applications); personal and interpersonal (enhancing adaptability and employability); and finally, service provision (implementation of language services in professional contexts) (cf. EMT Board 4-11). This revision aimed primarily to provide a clear framework when "assess[ing] the delivery of a common set of learning outcomes by universities wishing to join the EMT network" (EMT Network 4).

Although not directly relevant for the present research, a notable mention here is the PETRA-E model, developed in 2016 in specific relation to literary translations. The group of experts involved in this European project identified a total of eight sub-competences necessary to develop the literary translation competence (transfer, language, textual, heuristic, literary-cultural, professional, evaluative, and research – cf. PETRA-E).

Furthermore, it should be noted that, although we are aware of the existence of other translation competence models developed by scholars (e.g. Gaballo, Göpferich, Malmkjaer, Kumpulainen, etc.), they do not represent the purpose of our present study. Nevertheless, we do align – to some extent – with Kumpulainen's study in terms of our bottom-up approach; we aim to look at the early stages of the translation competence acquisition process in a particular translation situation, which requires task-specific knowledge, and then to suggest ways in which this competence can be further developed in relation to the EMT framework and to lifelong learning. In our case, the specific situation is that of register transfer, while the task specific knowledge involves – but is not limited to – familiarity with the specific cultural backgrounds as well as the informal versus the formal and official discourses in both English and Romanian.

Following the cues of the updated EMT framework, register falls mainly under the newly revised competence area of language and culture (previously, intercultural competence), dictating the rules for interaction in the specific cultures (English vs. Romanian) and the necessary know-how to produce the

messages that are appropriate in a specific socio-cultural context. Register also partly overlaps with the revised translation area of competence through its thematic dimension: for instance, systems of concepts, specialized terminology and phraseology, specific constraints.

Our findings reveal that students find it hard to differentiate between levels of formality not only in English but also - and perhaps more surprisingly so - in their own mother tongue (i.e. Romanian for most of them). One of our main targets within this research was to raise students' awareness that register is not limited to vocabulary issues (as most of them initially believed) and that a significant role is played by the cultural component and the culture-specific formulaic phrases typical of the two languages in question.

3. Our Research in the Context of Tertiary Level Teaching Strategies

We claim that our research does not solely focus on investigating aspects related to competence acquisition, but that it serves a double function, our participants being also actively engaged in the instructional process. It is therefore important that we discuss here the pedagogical value of the students' participation in this research, from the point of view of learner outcomes in the context of higher education instructional practices.

More recently, effective learning and teaching in higher education has been defined in terms of outcomes. Thus, Biggs and later on Biggs and Tang view the main purpose of higher education to be the development of higher order learning processes reflected in an alignment of course objectives, class activities and evaluation methods. Furthermore, newer trends in higher education lately gravitate towards common principles belonging to the paradigm of the student-centered learning: active implication of students, contextualised learning, collaborative learning environments, increased learner autonomy (Devlin and Samarawickrema, Hattie, Hattie and Yates, Hattie).

Moreover, educational paradigms are also shifting to better reflect the changes in the workplace environment. The research of the Institute for the Future in California defines emergent working skills (Davies, Fidler and Gorbis) and highlights *transdisciplinarity, sense making, cross-cultural competency, adaptive thinking, virtual collaboration,* as essential competences that are not field specific. Taking into consideration the final goal, that our students are trained to become translators or to have jobs that include translation work, it is necessary that they develop both field-specific competences (translation competence in particular and linguistic competence in general) and other competences that respond to the current demands of the job market.

It is in this context that we make our claim, that the "diary", our main research tool, serves both as a data collection instrument and as a deep-learning

instructional tool to be used in translation classes in order to help students develop reflective skills and self-directed learning competence, in agreement with the above-mentioned principles. We consider that students need opportunities which encourage them to reflect upon their own translation competence at the beginning of a period of study, the learning strategies they have made use of and/or developed, future steps to improve these competences and sub-competences, but also to recognise flawed attitudes they may have previously adopted.

Our findings reveal that the students have indeed used diaries with this double function and some consider making use of diaries as a future learning strategy to keep track of changes, while others have appreciated the benefits of the reflection exercise as a means of identifying problem areas. In this part of the research we will focus on reporting the findings related to students' attitudes, while the learning strategies they employed will be discussed in a future paper.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. The specific context

The purpose of the class on Introduction to Translation Theory and Practice (ITTP) is to familiarize students with several levels of linguistic formality, among which the main distinction is made between the informal and the formal/official registers both in English and in Romanian. As regards the instructor's input, it only covered basic guidelines regarding the characteristics of the formal register, such as formulaic phrases and lexis (a preference for noun-phrases, Latin- and French-based words), grammatical structures (privileged use of the passive voice, inanimate subjects), and overall sentence complexity. It is worth mentioning here that, generally, students manifested no interest for additional individual research and were satisfied with the standard recommended bibliography.

4.2. Diary studies and focus group in research

The present research is a small-scale qualitative research grounded in the interpretivist paradigm "concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted" (Mason 3), relying on the ethnographic method of investigation (the researchers being part of the micro-culture under investigation), using the Grounded Theory framework in data analysis and employing diaries and a focus group as research instruments. Furthermore, Goşa highlights the strength of the diary studies method in language learning research, which lies in its "potential for serendipity in terms of the data, or, to put it differently, the potential for the discovery of the unexpected. While the researcher is looking for certain, anticipated data,

participants will also report on events, feelings, views that are unexpected and fresh, and this can render depth to the study and, even more, can generate new insights and angles" (Goşa 83). The focus-group was used to account for the trustworthiness and credibility of data analysis for the present research, although chronologically it took place after diary submission; it asked participants to clarify and expand on both reported attitudes and strategies.

4.3. Research questions

Adopting the strategy of inquiry proposed by Mason, Hesse-Biber and Creswell, the underlying questions of our research influence our ontological view (according to which social practices shape society) and our epistemological view (which holds that by examining the attitudes and strategies students use to perform translation we can identify different aspects of social reality).
The research addresses the following questions:
● Is there any change in the attitudes of students regarding the process of developing a translation competence? (Are students aware of what translation competence involves? What are the students' attitudes at the beginning of the course? How about after discussing exam papers?)
● What are the attitudes of students related to the learning process? (How do students feel about developing the translation competence? How do they feel about using diaries?)

4.4. Participants and data collection

In the first meeting of the second semester, during a class on textual analysis, the instructor discussed with all first-year students the major errors in the ITTP exam papers. As a result of their interest in the causes behind those errors, students were invited to participate – on an informed and voluntary basis – in a research aiming to identify strategies to help them and future learners develop not just translation competence but also sensitivity to linguistic registers, especially the formal/official ones. As the purpose of the research was to encourage reflection on past feelings and attitudes, on the one hand, and actions and strategies used to prepare for the exam, on the other hand, students were invited to report on these, over five weeks, in five diary entries. Since they had not previously used this research tool, the participants were provided with some guidelines concerning the number of entries and some reflection cues: the experience of the ITTP class in the first semester, followed by three entries focused on identifying individual attitudes and strategies used to improve their language skills (not limited to English), while the last entry addressed students' short-term plan for improving translation competence. To formulate a more accurate description of the type of diary that

we required, we can say that we resorted to semi-structured, solicited diaries, intended for research purposes (McDonough and McDonough 133).

The 33 diarists were self-selected and represent less than half of the 79 first-year students enrolled in the Applied Modern Languages programme, studying English either as a major or a minor. What is especially noteworthy is the fact that four of the participants have an extensive non-Romanian background, having spent many years abroad with their families and are thus not fully aware of the differences in registers and their significance. Three diarists spent long periods abroad, between seven and 14 years, in Spain (Diarist 12 and Diarist 33) and Greece (Diarist 9) respectively, only speaking Romanian at home, or just listening to their parents' conversations in Romanian, without being able to actually formulate sentences. Diarist 32 comes from Ukraine, where s/he was born and has lived all her life before joining our BA programme; s/he studied Romanian as a foreign language in school. Following research ethics principles (cf. Robson), the 33 volunteer students gave their written consent for participation in this research. The language of diary keeping was English (with one exception - Diarist 26) and the diaries were handwritten.

Table 1. Numerical overview of the students' diaries

Diary number	Language of writing	Number of entries	Estimate number of words per handwritten diary
Diary 1	English	5	1,610
Diary 2	English	5	1,220
Diary 3	English	5	675
Diary 4	English	5	1,080
Diary 5	English	1	940
Diary 6	English	1	840
Diary 7	English	5	710
Diary 8	English	5	640
Diary 9	English	1	1,055
Diary 10	English	5	1,160
Diary 11	English	5	1,480

Diary number	Language of writing	Number of entries	Estimate number of words per handwritten diary
Diary 12	English	5	780
Diary 13	English	5	715
Diary 14	English	5	950
Diary 15	English	5	980
Diary 16	English	5	685
Diary 17	English	5	560
Diary 18	English	5	755
Diary 19	English	5	1,030
Diary 20	English	5	460
Diary 21	English	5	302
Diary 22	English	5	1,000
Diary 23	English	5	695
Diary 24	English	5	520
Diary 25	English	5	500
Diary 26	Romanian	5	710
Diary 27	English	5	1,460
Diary 28	English	5	505
Diary 29	English	5	670
Diary 30	English	5	940
Diary 31	English	5	580
Diary 32	English	5	1,550
Diary 33	English	5	865

In order to preserve the authenticity of the collected data, the most representative diary quotations that we have chosen to illustrate our findings were preserved as in the original, including occasional mistakes, since participants are learners of English who find themselves at various levels of language proficiency. Furthermore, while the bolded words and phrases highlight the most important issues recorded by the diarists, the parts of text between square brackets within the quotations are clarifications we added to link what diarists said with the wider context of the whole diary entry from which the quotes were retrieved.

5. Data and Analysis

The data was manually processed by both researchers, who took turns to do separate readings of the diaries, perform their own content analysis and establish their own data generated category system. Subsequent discussions between the two researchers led to the following emerging categories: exam related attitudes, attitudes concerning learning and diary keeping as a process, and attitudes towards the learning context. These three main categories actually reflect the students' attempts at coping with a new learning environment, with different practices and requirements.

5.1. Attitudes towards the exam

5.1.1. Preparing for the exam
Diarists perceived the ITTP class as one of the most difficult in the first semester of their academic experience. Most of them write about the high amount of work required by the class and about building lexical glossaries for both registers. Overall, preparing for the exam was stressful, while the exam itself was seen as a daunting challenge.

The difficulty of preparation work is described in words such as "most intensive courses", "work, work, work", "lot of work" for the two classes (Diarist 4), "a lot of time" invested in the preparation and in "planning how to study" (Diarist 22). Diarist 8 comments on the level of difficulty of the exam, labelling it "hard", and explains that this reaction came from an awareness of the need to have a "rich vocabulary". Diarist 27 discusses the difficulty of the content and of dealing with formal language issues, which were seen as "the biggest problems", but s/he also frames it in positive terms as "challenge accepted", stressing a strong emotional response to the preparation for the exam.

> ...some of my **biggest problems** were using words at passive voice and using a formal language. I didn't have the opportunity to work with this

type of exercises, and after the **Stress Tornado** went by, **I put myself together** and was like "**challenge** accepted". (Diarist 27)

5.1.2. Sitting the exam

The most frequent emotions experienced by diarists at the beginning of the exam refer to high levels of stress, insecurity, and worry about succeeding in passing it. For instance, Diarist 4 reports that s/he felt "very stressed, so stressed" that s/he "stressed out [other] colleagues", whereas Diarist 22 mentions s/he "felt really insecure". Other diarists write about the insufficient effort in preparing for the exam (Diarist 13), and the wrong impression that "it would not be a difficult exam" (Diarist 15).

> ...the exam came and **I wasn't prepared**... I thought it would not be a difficult exam, but **I was wrong**. (Diarist 15)

When writing about passing the exam, diarists identify success with pride (Diarist 10: "I was very proud to pass"; Diarist 11: "passing it [...] really made me proud"), and a fully merited reward for the hard work they did (Diarist 1). Moreover, Diarist 23 emphasises an improvement in self-esteem as a result of learning progress and of managing to pass the exam at the second sitting.

> I considered my **success** [passing the exam] as **natural** because **hard work** always pays off and I did not imagine how it is to fail your university exam. (Diarist 1)
> I was very **pleased** with my mark and also **amazed by my progress** [for the resit] (Diarist 23)

On the other hand, failing the exam is associated with many negative emotions, of which shame is the most frequently mentioned, particularly in sharing the exam news with family members and friends. For example, Diarist 14 writes about being "too ashamed to tell" friends and family about failing the exam because of insufficient studying and practice, while Diarist 24 recorded his/her insecurity about informing the parents of the failure, as it would result in an argument. Diarist 28 was extremely upset to disappoint a supportive parent but s/he also reflected back on the experience with a somewhat dark sense of humour:

> I did not pass the exam, I was **devastated** and started crying. I **felt terrible to disappoint my mother** but I was glad she went over shortly, she thought that I will pass the exam the second time but I did not [...] **Passive won, S. lost**... (Diarist 28)

Other emotions mentioned are shock (Diarists 13 and 29), pain (Diarists 28 and 32), frustrated expectations (e.g. Diarist 14: "was not expecting to fail", or

Diarist 19: "i thought i was doing a great job [...] enought to pass the exam"), and even depression (doubled by a separation from the home environment and everything familiar, for Diarist 32).

> ...time passed, **I felt that I was doing everything wrong**, at that moment I just wanted to cry [...] I didn't pass the exam for the first time in my life, again **depression**. (Diarist 32)

5.2. Process-related attitudes

5.2.1. Language learning
Sensitivity to register related issues is generally associated to language learning and most often diarists talk about lower language performance as the cause of failing the exam. Predominantly, diarists identify a higher initial self-efficacy level which was later disproved by the exam results. Thus, students mention a series of negative feelings associated with sitting the first exams or the beginning of the academic year, ranging from surprise ("I thought I know better English", Diarist 4) to disappointment ("I realised I lived a lie", Diarist 2) and even confusion, as Diarist 19 describes the beginning of the semester when s/he felt "disoriented" because of the higher level of English in the academia.

Moreover, some diarists display a certain level of self-irony when discussing their overconfidence in connection to linguistic performance - "my linguistic arrogance has begun to cure itself" (Diarist 3), or "I thought that I knew English at a pretty high level... my assumption had been shattered" (Diarist 6). However, Diarist 11 also mentions this realization in positive terms, focusing on future strategy.

> I **had been sure** that I could not have problems regarding this language [English], but I **realized there are plenty of things I need to learn** even though they seem simple (Diarist 11)

Additionally, a few diarists also reported positive attitudes about learning the language and enjoying its active study - "I find [it] very exciting to look for words in a dictionary and learn them, I like my English is getting better everyday" (Diarist 10). Diarist 7 discusses finally learning the language "not just from films and TV series", as was the case in secondary school, while Diarist 18 describes not resorting to L1 translation (subtitles) when watching films as an act of "courage".

5.2.2. Register in translation
Regarding the content covered by the two courses, most of the diarists underline an increased awareness of register related issues such as specific terminology, lexical variation, familiarity with text types, the different dimensions involved in rendering the equivalence of meaning, or a greater realisation of

different content related elements. The choice of verbs that the diarists use to describe their learning experience in dealing with register issues mostly coincide with the initial stages of learning, reflecting lower order thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson et al.) such as "**know** as many words as possible" (Diarist 10), "**understand**" (Diarist 15), "**familiarise** with various types of translation", "**comprehend"** (Diarist 1), "**distinguish** formal from informal" (Diarist 6).

However, one diarist (5) describes the learning experience on this topic as linked to higher order thinking skills, using the verb to "**analyse**" to refer to a type of classroom activity; it is also important to remark here that the activity is associated with a positive learning attitude.

> But **I like** it because you have to **find the mistakes in translation** and **prove** that they are mistakes [...] ... now I **realize how focused** you have to be and how many characteristics you have to analyse ... (Diarist 5)

Moreover, this progression from a lower to a higher order is also identified by other diarists either in terms of an implicit opposition of practices over time, starting with the indefinite adverb "before": "before, I was using [...] but [...] I learned how to [...]" (Diarist 6), or in the case of Diarist 1, in terms of a repetition of the adjective "complex" to refer to the learning process.

An important sub-category here is that of attitudes related to the difficulties diarists had to overcome when focusing on register related translations. Most often the challenges of the diarists revolve around lexical competence in connection with specific terminology or register. For example, Diarist 2 mentions that s/he "can't decide between the right words and phrases to use when translating", while Diarist 3 explains that for him/her it is "quite hard to transform texts from one register to another (especially from informal to formal)". Diarist 3 mentions that the difficulty is connected to a personal reaction and mentions that s/he is "not fond of technical texts".

However, the majority of diarists reported a rather low linguistic competence as the underlying difficulty, but this was rather linked to different aspects concerning teaching activities - "I found pretty difficult the [...] course [...], because you have to find the mistakes in a translation, so it means you need to know English at a very high level" (Diarist 6), or "the hardest thing [...] was when teachers talked in English" (Diarist 8). An unexpected finding came from Diarist 11, who linked difficulties with L1 lexical competence and this s/he qualifies as disappointing.

> My biggest wonder was that I also have **lacks** of information in terms of **using Romanian words**, which really **disappointed** me. [...] - The problem is regarding the specific terms from each area ... (Diarist 11)

5.2.3. Learning about learning (tools and activities)

An important step in the student's development as a future translator is to reflect upon one's own work and to build a sense of awareness both of personal limitations and of possible solutions to ease future work, as reflected in most diary entries. Additionally, diarists were able to form a more objective point of view regarding translation training and put forward specific working strategies, learning objectives or decisions they have made as a result of participating in the present study.

As a result of this introspective exercise, some diarists identified flawed learning practices: "I realized my problem was that **I did not do anything** to develop my vocabulary and formal language" (Diarist 13), or the "lesson was to learn to **be more careful** in the future and **not to hurry** with the translation of a text" (Diarist 5). Others discuss strategies they plan to put to use, such as the decisions to "follow the development and research in the field" (Diarist 1), to "create a new habit which consists in staying in contact with well-written English" (Diarist 2), to read field-specific literature (Diarist 3), to do work daily on developing linguistic competence (Diarists 8, 11), to learn vocabulary (Diarist 10), or to learn from previous mistakes (Diarist 11). An important finding here is not just that the participating students discuss about their proposed strategies, but that, as a result of this reflective exercise (highlighted by a frequently used "realised"), their attitudes to learning highlight their determination to succeed, learn, be in charge of their own learning, while the learning experience is linked to positive connotation verbs: "like", "enjoy", "succeed", "pass" (the exam), or adjectives such as "pleased" "proud", "happy".

Two diarists (10,19) expressed their preference for the organisation of translation activities as group work, Diarist 10 formulating explicitly the long term effects of this form of organisation – "I think working together helps us for the future, when we will have to work with different types of people" (Diarist 10).

Participation in this research was also felt by some to be an opportunity for them to improve on various aspects, as well as to reflect on one's own mistakes or other people's. Diarist 31 concluded that "one has to discover his own strategies in making a good translation", whereas Diarist 32 reported on the need to "develop the wisdom and sense to make good decisions and choices". Some negative emotions like pain, depression (Diarist 32) and disappointment (Diarist 33) were perceived as springboards for students to appreciate what they had struggled to achieve so far.

> In my opinion, everyone makes mistakes in life, this is normal, but **how you learn** from them is how you develop your judgement. […] at the moment **I am proud who I am** and I am grateful this day when I chose this university, because the best feelings it is to enjoy the **inexorable pain**. (Diarist 32)

> I am **not totally dissapointed** of what happened in the first semester because I learn new words, I learnt new translation techniques and many other [...] somehow I am **proud of myself** and **my realizations** so far and I am sure I will now pass my exam. (Diarist 33)

An exciting finding during our research is related to the diarists' realization of the benefits of using the diary as a learning tool. Some diarists explicitly mentioned the enjoyment derived from participating in the research (e.g. Diarist 2 reported that "I enjoyed participating in this research. I think other teachers should do the same because it's for our own good"), or from using diaries as a way to help them develop useful skills for their future career through recording their progress. Thus, we can argue that the use of a reflective instrument in the learning process is beneficial, as it fosters deep learning experiences, a few diarists appreciating the benefits of reflection.

5.3. Attitudes towards the learning context

As mentioned earlier, by privileging the confessional mood, the diaries also allowed for the collection of serendipitous findings. Thus, the unexpected data emerging from the diaries were grouped into two sub-categories: students' attitudes towards the teacher, and towards the learning environment and the overall academic experience.

5.3.1. towards the teacher

Some diarists reported on the teacher's attitude, accent and way of teaching, as facilitating the students' learning process, stimulating class activity, or raising the students' awareness about the useful hard work the class presupposed. They appreciated the teacher's dynamic and engaging attitude and her efforts in facilitating their understanding, as they wrote about loving the class because of the teacher's "way of speaking, of communicating aspects" (Diarist 9), or because the teacher's accent "is very clean, loud and clear, very nice to listen to" (Diarist 21).

> I always liked the **teacher's attitude**. The way she teaches **makes me interested**, makes me pay attention and **participate not just sit there**. (Diarist 22)

5.3.2. towards the learning environment

As students were invited to reflect on a class in the first semester of their academic experience, most of them reported on the difficulties they faced in adjusting to the new environment and its requirements: timetable, teachers, colleagues, language level required, and amount of homework. For example,

Diarist 7 recorded his/her false expectations in terms of time and workload, both at school and at home: "I didn't expect to have so many classes. Neither did I expect to get so much homework", while Diarist 16 had mixed feelings about the first year of academic training, which was seen as both "beautiful" and "one of the most complicated stages of life". A few diarists commented on their initial confusion and slow process of getting used to all the new aspects brought on by the academic environment: "it was very difficult the transition from High School structure and schedule to the University ones", "I was confused [...] but slowly I discovered the light at the end of the tunnel" (Diarist 6).

> **The first semester [...] in the university was so hard**, because of the new teachers, new colleagues and a totally different city. [...] **it was hard to accomodate** with the new schedule at all. (Diarist 19)

The emotional difficulty in coping with the transition from upper secondary school to university was occasionally doubled by a darker outlook caused by the change of the familiar cultural environment.

> First day at the university, first courses of English… They [teachers] spoke only in English, honestly this was **difficult** for me to understand all. **I started to have a depression**. (Diarist 32)

6. Conclusions

At the end of this part of our research, the following main conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, students mainly identify translation competence with linguistic competence, while language proficiency is seen as essential for doing efficient translation work. Secondly, most of the participants underline that they have developed an increased awareness of register-related issues in translation, although for them these realisations are mostly limited to mastering vocabulary and specific language structures (e.g. passive voice). From the completed diaries we can conclude that most of the participants were not aware of issues of intra-language and inter-language register difficulties, and do not seem to take into account the cultural specificities of each language.

Moreover, an added value of the students' participation in the research is that they consciously developed their reflective thinking competence which enhances deeper learning. An unexpected finding was the fact that students identified diary keeping as a potential learning tool and pointed out its beneficial outcome. As a data collection instrument, the diary favours a confessional mood, being prone to elicit attitudes and feelings, thus minimizing power gap and helping to create better student-instructor rapport.

Finally, an emerging micro-theory can be postulated as follows: reflexivity is not a naturally occurring skill and opportunities should be created for students to develop it not only during tertiary education but also at secondary education level. Diaries could therefore become a deep learning instrument to be used regularly in teaching/learning activities, as part of a larger learning competence toolkit. Such theory could be acted upon and further tested in future research.

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