

## **Intercultural Competence for Translators - Charting the future**

Between October 2011 and September 2013 a consortium from 6 EU countries, headed by the University of Westminster, has been investigating the current state of the teaching of intercultural competence for translators. The project has been co-funded within the EU's lifelong learning programme under the title Promoting Intercultural Competence in Translators (PICT). The consortium comprised universities currently involved in the teaching of postgraduate translation and a pan-European language network to assist in dissemination. An initial survey was implemented and both teaching and assessment materials designed, piloted and revised. This report represents the policy recommendations based on the work carried out.

The report sets out a number of recommendations on the teaching of Intercultural Competence to Translators. In parallel, policy recommendations for European and national level decision makers are being put forward. This is with the understanding that both the teaching and the policy recommendations would be adapted to local contexts.

### **Key Recommendations**

#### **For Practitioners:**

*Intercultural Competence is an important component within the postgraduate translation curriculum.*

*The intercultural component should address theoretical, textual and interpersonal aspects and should be clearly structured to suit the local academic ethos.*

*Teaching materials should be activity-based with a strong theoretical underpinning.*

*Assessment needs to reflect clearly defined levels of practical competence.*

#### **For Policy-makers:**

*A Europe-wide standardized framework of excellence in intercultural competence is crucial to a common understanding of translators' abilities.*

*The EU is and remains a key-player in exercising leadership and promoting synchronization across policy levels.*

*Policy-makers should encourage the inclusion of employability and entrepreneurship competencies derived from a multidisciplinary approach.*

*Communication with all relevant stake-holders remains paramount to success.*

## **1. Principles for the Teaching of Intercultural Competence to Translators**

### **1.1. The importance of including Intercultural Competence within the postgraduate Translation curriculum**

A majority of the EU Higher Education institutions surveyed as part of the PICT project supported the inclusion of Intercultural Competence as part of the curriculum for postgraduate students of Translation. At the same time many of them said that Intercultural Competence was not always explicitly taught at present. In other cases, whether it was taught depended on the preferences of the staff involved. (See Survey Report)

**It is, therefore, recommended that postgraduate Translation programmes explicitly incorporate intercultural competence whether this is in the form of a stand-alone module, whether it is integrated across a range of translation modules or whether it is via both.**

### **1.2. The structure of the intercultural component of the curriculum**

The curriculum framework produced by the consortium involved in the PICT project (See Curriculum Framework), on the basis of the survey of EU Higher Education institutions and the expertise of the consortium members, stresses the importance of *three* dimensions of Intercultural Competence for translators:

- Grasp of intercultural theory
- Application of theory in the production of translated texts
- Application of theory in interpersonal relations as a translator (with clients, colleagues etc.)

**It is recommended, as a result, that Higher Education institutions where possible find institutionally appropriate ways to incorporate all three of these dimensions into their translation programmes for postgraduate students.**

### **1.3. Teaching materials for promoting intercultural competence in translators**

The survey provided input from both students and teachers of Translation. Students were very clear that they wanted to work with a wide variety of types of texts and often stressed the importance of activity-based forms of learning, whilst teachers often stressed the need for all forms of learning activity to have solid theoretical underpinnings. The sample materials produced by the PICT consortium try to conform to these two principles. In addition the materials follow widely accepted principles of good educational practice and teach specific aspects of the curriculum. The learning outcomes of each activity are rooted in the curriculum framework with the aim of being clear to both teachers and students.

**It is, therefore, recommended that whilst respecting the pedagogical practices of the local context, teaching materials should have strong theoretical underpinnings as well as being activity-based and student-centred where possible. They should also be clearly tied to the aims of the curriculum. These aims should be communicated in a manner appropriate to teachers and students alike, so that both are aware of the purposes of the materials.**

### **1.4. Assessing intercultural competence in translators**

Within the survey, amongst practitioners and in the academic community, opinions are divided about the desirability of actually assessing intercultural competence. Nonetheless the widely-based EU consortium working on the PICT project tended to favour assessing it as a way of underscoring the importance of this competence to students of Translation. The curriculum framework already defines levels of achievement for each aspect of Intercultural Competence it specifies seeing learning aims and assessment as inherently connected. Accordingly, each of the assessment materials produced by the PICT consortium aims at assessing a particular range of aspects of Intercultural Competence specified in the curriculum framework (See ...) The actual assessment materials are varied not only because they assess different aspects of the

curriculum framework (theoretical and applied) but also because it is understood that institutions will have different assessment practices.

**It is, then, recommended that assessment tasks be clearly linked to the curriculum framework being used and that this curriculum framework should include a range of competence statements allowing the assessment of level in relation to the relevant aspect of Intercultural Competence. As with teaching materials students should be clearly aware which aspects of Intercultural Competence the task is testing. Beyond this, it is expected that assessments will be set which allow demonstration of theory through its application in the production of translated texts or in the management of intercultural relations as well as assessments of a more theoretical kind.**

## **2. Policy Priorities for Promoting Intercultural Competence in Translators**

### **2.1. The importance of standardization and frameworks of excellence**

Through the survey carried out and the conversations had with teachers at different dissemination events the need for sharing of good practice and standardization across the EU has been emphasized repeatedly. The piloting of the produced materials across a number of different European academic environments has also pointed to significant diversity that sometimes hinders the sharing of good practice. The European masters in translation (EMT) has been indicated a positive initiative in standardizing the teaching of translation across the EU. Academics pointed to the need take the standardization forward by building upon the EMT foundations. One of the areas of strategic importance for this growth has been identified as the integration of Intercultural Communication theory and pedagogy within translation studies.

**In order to maintain the leading position of the EU postgraduate translation teaching programmes, issues around fragmentation need to be addressed and a comprehensive frameworks of excellence put in place. The EMT is an important and EU-wide recognized step in this direction. The EMT acknowledges the importance of intercultural communication as one of the 6 key competences for translators (see Competences for professional translators, p. 4). In the view of the consortium the understanding of these key competences needs to be expanded (a three dimensions model is put forward in the Curriculum Framework) and standardized pedagogical materials need to be developed in order to support teaching and assessment.**

### **2.2. Leadership and synchronization remain key requirements**

During the project, through discussions with academics and policy-makers across different EU member-states certain trends of the translation market and its needs were emphasized. One of the identified trends is the increased flexibility and dynamism of the EU translation market. In the view of the project consortium, this offers a number of opportunities for decision-makers to shape the EU translation market and to enhance its standards. Another important trend, that was mentioned repeatedly, was the perceived lack of synchronisation across policy levels (local, regional, national, and European) when it came to the developments in the field. This was obvious also when looking at the efforts to integrate Intercultural Communication in Translation programmers in different institutions/countries.

**With the European translation market becoming more flexible and dynamic, the European Union and its institutions are in a strategic position to lead on the process of standardization and mobility enhancement for translators. The EU institutions have in the past acknowledged their role in the sector**

and have put forward initiatives (such as the EMT) that have instigated academic and policy changes and realignments. The EU, in the view of the consortium, should continue to play a central role in the process, at the same time ensuring that the relevant stakeholders at various policy levels are engaged in a process of standardization and priorities synchronization. The EU is uniquely positioned to engage with stakeholders at different levels, to ensure communication, agreement-finding and to drive forward the agenda.

### **2.3. Employability and entrepreneurship derived from a multidisciplinary approach**

The interest of the students in learning more about intercultural communication during their postgraduate translation studies is obvious from the survey undertaken by the project. At the same time one of the prime motivations for this interest has been identified, by both students and teachers, as being increased employability for the recent graduates. This view is also shared by the consortium members. At the same time the survey has signaled the uneven provisions currently existing across the EU-member states. Even where such provision existed they focused primarily on intercultural understanding of written texts rather than intercultural competences as transferable skills that improve employability and entrepreneurship. The consortium has tried to address this, in its view, skewed perspective by proposing a curriculum framework containing three dimensions with a clear employability emphasis (see interpersonal dimension in the Curriculum Framework).

**As entrepreneurship and employability are rightly, in our view, becoming the focus of the EU higher education policy, the consortium believes both undergraduate and postgraduate programmers of study should embrace student-centred multidisciplinary approaches that emphasize the development of skills for professional life. This can be achieved by reforming key-programmes and frameworks of excellence, such as the EMT when it comes to translation studies, to transform the EU employability- focused agenda into academic policy across European universities. By addressing key-programmes it is hoped that the uptake of the EU priorities will be replicated and accelerated.**

### **2.4. Communication across policy levels by facilitating informed discussion and debate**

The views collected through our survey and the dissemination events attended by consortium members pointed to the interest and timely discussion on enhancing intercultural competences in translators. Students, lecturers, heads of programme and department seem to be in agreement that this area is of particular interest and should be developed as a priority. At the same time many lecturers and even some heads of department pointed to the lack of information sharing both horizontal (across universities) and vertical (across different policy level).

**The EU's engagement with education policy (and higher education policy in particular) has proved a success both for the EU and EU citizens. Initiatives such as Erasmus exchanges have facilitated the development of European cultural awareness, while sector specific initiatives, such as the EMT, have provided much needed initial standardization and agenda setting. In the view of the consortium the EU should continue to facilitate and enhance horizontal and vertical communication with the relevant stakeholders. The Rethinking Education Initiative provides the right platform for this. The discussion should allow for both the improvement of existing instruments and frameworks and the development of short- term product-focused projects such as PICT.**