

## **Insights from EMT for Translator Training in Iran**

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### **Abstract**

The development of markets, as part of the globalization of trade, and of technologies is driving rapid development in professional practices and the quality criteria for translation services; the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 highlighted the difficulty of recruiting qualified translators in the nine 'new' EU languages and also emphasized the need to raise awareness of and disseminate more effectively the criteria and procedures for recruitment to the institutions. The EMT expert group under supervision of Professor Yves Gambier from University of Turku, Finland was set up in April 2007 with the purpose of making specific proposals with a view to implementing a European reference framework for a Master's in translation (European Master's in Translation – EMT) throughout the European Union. This paper aims at reviewing the findings of the EMT project and comparing the main competencies found crucial in educating translators by EMT expert group with those of English translator training program in Iran with a syllabus that has stayed put for quite a while, regardless of the varied translation market demands and the dynamic expectations from a professional translator presently. Furthermore, the qualitative data collected through interviewing professional English Persian translators trained in translation programs in Iranian universities will be shared to illuminate the missing ingredients in the current curriculum.

**Keywords:** translator education, EMT, market demand, competencies, syllabus design

## **1. Introduction**

Translator training, or from a more versatile perspective translator education, as one of the applied branches of Translation Studies in Holme's proposed paradigm of the discipline (1988) is starting to get into the spotlight since the self-taught translator who has worked their way through the market by trial and error, or the traditional college graduate with a degree in translation is no longer capable of fully supplying the services that the current market demands. The growth of markets, as part of the globalization of trade and advancement of technologies are driving swift development in professional activities and practices as well as the standard for translation products and services. Thus, scholars have criticized the current conditions of educating translators internationally on various grounds (Pym, 2005); likewise, translator education in Iran has been receiving critical comments for a number of reasons including the syllabus and curricular design which appears to require an update to keep up with the varying dynamicity of the market demands (Khazaefar, 1999; Miremadi, 2003; Mirza Ebrahim Tehrani, 2003). Following the realization of the need for a search for the missing ingredients, there has been a global upsurge in research on relationship between translator training and market demands (Li, 2001, 2007; Pym, 1993; Ulrych, 1996).

Pym (1993, p. 7) advises educational policy makers against a direct relation between training syllabus and what the market requires, maintaining that the important lesson to be learnt from the market should be that not many immediately applicable lessons from the market actually can be learnt. Then, he merely encourages for flexibility and watching out for change in given translator educating programs. Nevertheless, other scholars strongly advise for assessment, consideration and inclusion of market needs in the curricular design and taught syllabus of translator training. Ulrych (1996, p. 253) emphasizes that it is imperative for the translation students to be prepared for the conditions which they will face in the working world after graduation. Li (2007) also takes side with the fact that translation curriculum should respond to market needs and

changes and should be based on a systematic assessment of local and international translation markets. Regarding the sources of assessment and needs analysis, obviously a multidimensional investigation has to be conducted, so Li (2001) argues that the perspectives of all stake holders, including translation teachers and students, professional translators, administrators or translation services and even users of the translation services ought to be evaluated to draw up the societal needs for and of translators

In the Iranian higher education, from among the various competences that a prospective professional translator could use, competences in language and linguistics are the two overriding, beside that of translation which practically sum up what is eventually offered to the trainees to learn and acquire at such a degree program. In this regard, Venuti (1998, p. 1) argues that “translator training [has] been impeded by the prevalence of linguistics-oriented approaches that offer a truncated view of the empirical data they collect.” As Mollanazar (2003, p. 9) asserts applicability and availability of a range of job offers is one the main reasons of popularity of the degree in English Translation in comparison with English Literature or Teaching English as a Foreign Language. As such to fulfill the needs and expectation of the applicants or the ‘clients’ of such teaching services, it is crucial to deliver what is hoped for by people applying for a BA in Translation. It goes without saying that professionally-oriented translation qualifications can only be obtained when trainee translators are prepared for the various expectations for which the recent translation markets ask. Otherwise, the fledgling translators, just out of school, probably face serious challenges and/or limited job offers, especially in a world of rapid technological change and dynamic demands. Clearly translating, language, and linguistic competences can hardly be sufficient for an individual to maintain a career in translation services, in conditions that for having a consistent terminology throughout the work, and for having access to the electronic corpus of the target text in several formats for a number of reasons, included the recent methods of payment of many clients, and for managing extensive translation projects, the use of translation software environments and

translation memories (e.g. SDL Trados or memoQ) are becoming gradually integral and inevitable parts of working as professional translators.

COMPETENCES	COURSE TITLE
TRANSLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Methodology and Principles of Translation</li> <li>▪ Theoretical Principles and Fundamentals of Translation</li> <li>▪ Applications of Idioms and Expressions in Translation</li> <li>▪ Study of Islamic Translated Texts</li> <li>▪ Audiovisual Translation</li> <li>▪ Translation of Simple Texts</li> <li>▪ Translation of Journalistic Texts</li> <li>▪ Translation of Literary Texts</li> <li>▪ Translation of Documents and Deeds</li> <li>▪ Translation of Economic Texts</li> <li>▪ Translation of Political Texts</li> <li>▪ Individual Translation Project</li> <li>▪ Interpreting Skills</li> </ul>
PERSIAN LITERATURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction to Modern Literature of Iran</li> </ul>
PERSIAN LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General Persian</li> <li>▪ Persian Essay Writing</li> <li>▪ Persian Sentence Structure</li> </ul>
ENGLISH LITERATURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction to English Literature</li> <li>▪ Samples of Simple English Poetry</li> <li>▪ Samples of Simple English Prose</li> </ul>
ENGLISH LANGUAGE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ English Conversation</li> <li>▪ English Essay Writing</li> <li>▪ English Grammar</li> <li>▪ Reading Comprehension</li> <li>▪ Reading Journalistic Texts</li> <li>▪ Oral Reproduction of Stories</li> <li>▪ English Business Correspondence</li> </ul>
LINGUISTICS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General Linguistics</li> <li>▪ Phonology</li> <li>▪ Morphology</li> <li>▪ Contrastive Analysis of Sentence Structure</li> <li>▪ Foreign Language Teaching Methodology</li> </ul>
ACADEMIC SKILLS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language Study Skills</li> <li>▪ Research Methodology</li> <li>▪ Language Testing</li> </ul>

**Table 1: Competences in the Syllabus of English-Persian Translation Undergraduate Programs in Iran**

Likewise, with the rapid development of lucrative subfields of localization, such as website or software internationalization (adaptation of websites or computer software for

non-native environments, especially other nations, languages and cultures) or dub localization (adaptation of a movie or television series for audience in a different speech community) which highly involve translation yet engaged with other technological and socio-cultural competencies (Pym, 2009), courses offered in BA Translation (table 1) exclusively on source and target languages and literature, linguistics, and translating merely would not furnish adequate expertise for English and Persian translation applicants to handle the present working demands, let alone in the coming years, unless revolutionary remedies and amendments would take place.

According to the majority of translation profession scholars, a fully functioning multilingual expert needs to possess a number of competences to successfully survive as an active participant in translation profession. According to Nord (2005, pp. 209-223) a functional translator has to have acquired several specifications for that matter; she defines a ‘functional translator’ (FT) as an abbreviated form of a professional who has the following qualities:

- FT knows that in today’s translation practice, translations are needed for a variety of communicative functions that are not necessarily the same intended function of the corresponding source text (Professional competence).
- FT knows that the selection of linguistic and non-linguistic signs which makes up the target text is guided by the situational and cultural [and ideological] factors (Metacommunicative competence).
- TF is able to spot the “rich points” where the behavior of the representatives of a particular pair of cultures in a given situation is so divergent that it may lead to communication conflicts or even breakdowns, and finds ways to solve the problem without taking sides. (Intercultural competence).
- TF knows that culture-specific conventions, apparently similar or analogous structures of two languages are not used with the same frequency or in the same

situation (distribution) by the respective cultural community and that use of wrong set of structures may severely interfere with functionality of the text.

- FT has the ability to produce a target text serving the desired function, even though the source text may be poorly written or poorly reproduced. (Writing abilities).
- FT knows how to use both traditional and modern (i.e. electronic) translation aids and knowledge source texts (Media competence).
- FT has a good education and has a better specific knowledge of the topic that is dealt with in the source text—or knows how to compensate efficiently for any lack of knowledge (Research competence).
- FT works fast, cost-efficiently and to perfection, even under high pressure (Stress-resistance).
- FT knows what their translations are worth (Self-assurance).

Eventually, she states that a functional translator is but a versatile animal. To upgrade the syllabus of present translator educating curriculum in Iran, local empirical research, applicant and market needs analysis, and international reviews in the syllabus design of other high profile institutions involved in educating translators ought to be conducted in order to provide hints and prompts for the revision and betterment of the existing approach to help candidates acquire translation competence as well as translator competences which they require to qualify as full time translators in the Iranian and international translation market and to have all the fun they can possibly have. One of the large scale establishments which has set up an expert group and has been conducting purposeful research for achieving guidelines for an optimal syllabus to help obtain the specialist human resource needed is the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT), affiliated with the European Union.

## **2. European Master's in Translation (EMT)**

### *2.1. Background*

There are many European countries such as Italy, Germany or Spain with a long tradition of translation training and, consequently, well-established training programs, and there still are many others which lack such programs or have begun to develop them only lately. The European Union can be taken as a major employer of translators and a significant player in translation market in the European Union. It has been therefore in its interest to follow the developments in translator training in Europe closely and contribute to them, in order to make sure that there will be an adequate supply of highly-qualified translators available to meet its requirements and those of the wider translation market.

### *2.2. Justifications for EMT*

According to the *European Commission for Translation* (2009), the enlargement of the European Union in May 2004 highlighted the difficulty of recruiting qualified translators in the nine 'new' EU languages and also emphasized the need to raise awareness of and disseminate more effectively the criteria and procedures for recruitment to the institutions. It was also time to upgrade the working conditions of translators, who are essential players in facilitating all forms of exchange and integration and promoting linguistic diversity. Finally, the diversification of programs requires the definition of a true framework of reference, putting forward a minimum quality profile and specifying the competences necessary. In the light of the above considerations, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) set up a 'European Master's in Translation' program, to be able to serve as a reference for curriculum planning, assessment and comparison.

### *2.3. EMT Expert Group*

The EMT expert group was set up by the DGT in April 2007 with the task to make specific proposals with a view to implementing a European reference framework for a Master's in translation throughout the European Union. The DG Translation group comprises ten members with some renown names in Translation Studies, including Yves Gambier as the chair from University of Turku, Finland, Dorothy Kelly from University of Granada, Spain, and Christina Schäffner from Aston University, England among others. The respected academics involved in translator training meet at least four times a year, in a different university each time (ibid.).

#### *2.4. EMT Competencies*

It is emphasized that the proposed reference framework should be understood within the overall context of university education for translators, which goes beyond the specifically professional competences listed below. It merely sets out what is to be acquired and mastered at the end of training. It corresponds to second-cycle training of between 60 and 120 credits (ECTS), presupposing mastery of the working languages of at least level C1: 'Competent use of language (Effective Operational Proficiency)', according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Gambier, 2009).

The EMT expert group defines 'competence' as “the combination of aptitudes, knowledge, behavior and know-how necessary to carry out a given task under given conditions. This combination is recognized and legitimized by a responsible authority” (ibid., p. 3). The competences proposed in each of the six areas in table 2 are acknowledged to be interdependent. Thus, for example, the aptitude for taking reasoned decisions is horizontal; it applies equally to the provision of a translation service and to documentary research. They all lead to the qualification of experts in multilingual and multimedia communication. Together, they comprise the minimum requirement to which other specific competences may be added (for example in localization, audiovisual translation or research).

COMPETENCES	DEFINITIONS / COMPONENTS
TRANSLATION SERVICE	INTERPERSONAL dimension
PROVISION COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being aware of the social role of the translator</li> <li>• Knowing how to follow market requirements and job profiles (knowing how to remain aware of developments in demand)</li> <li>• Knowing how to organize approaches to clients/ potential clients (marketing)</li> <li>• Knowing how to negotiate with the client (to define deadlines, tariffs/invoicing, working conditions, access to information, contract, rights, responsibilities, translation specifications, tender specifications, etc.)</li> <li>• Knowing how to clarify the requirements, objectives and purposes of the client, recipients of the translation and other stakeholders</li> <li>• Knowing how to plan and manage one's time, stress, work, budget and ongoing training (upgrading various competences)</li> <li>• Knowing how to specify and calculate the services offered and their added value</li> <li>• Knowing how to comply with instructions, deadlines, commitments, interpersonal competences, team organization</li> <li>• Knowing the standards applicable to the provision of a translation service</li> <li>• Knowing how to comply with professional ethics</li> <li>• Knowing how to work under pressure and with other experts, with a project head (capabilities for making contacts, for cooperation and collaboration), including in a multilingual situation</li> <li>• Knowing how to work in a team, including a virtual team</li> <li>• Knowing how to self-evaluate (questioning one's habits; being open to innovations; being concerned with quality; being ready to adapt to new situations/conditions) and take responsibility</li> </ul>
	<p>PRODUCTION dimension</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to create and offer a translation appropriate to the client's request, i.e. to the aim/skopos and to the translation situation</li> <li>• Knowing how to define stages and strategies for the translation of a document</li> <li>• Knowing how to define and evaluate translation problems and find appropriate solutions</li> <li>• Knowing how to justify one's translation choices and decisions</li> <li>• Mastering the appropriate metalanguage (to talk about one's</li> </ul>

	<p>work, strategies and decisions)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to proofread and revise a translation (mastering techniques and strategies for proofreading and revision)</li> <li>• Knowing how to establish and monitor quality standards</li> </ul>
LANGUAGE COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to understand grammatical, lexical and idiomatic structures as well as the graphic and typographic conventions of language A and one's other working languages (B, C)</li> <li>• Knowing how to use these same structures and conventions in A and B</li> <li>• Developing sensitivity to changes in language and developments in languages (useful for exercising creativity)</li> </ul>
INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE (the dual perspective – sociolinguistic and textual – is in the comparison of and contrast between discursive practices in A, B and C)	SOCIOLINGUISTIC dimension
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to recognize function and meaning in language variations (social, geographical, historical, stylistic) - Knowing how to identify the rules for interaction relating to a specific community, including non-verbal elements (useful knowledge for negotiation)</li> <li>• Knowing how to produce a register appropriate to a given situation, for a particular document (written) or speech (oral)</li> </ul>
	TEXTUAL dimension
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to understand and analyze the macrostructure of a document and its overall coherence (including where it consists of visual and sound elements)</li> <li>• Knowing how to grasp the presuppositions, the implicit, allusions, stereotypes and intertextual nature of a document</li> <li>• Knowing how to describe and evaluate one's problems with comprehension and define strategies for resolving those problems</li> <li>• Knowing how to extract and summarize the essential information in a document (ability to summarize)</li> <li>• Knowing how to recognize and identify elements, values and references proper to the cultures represented</li> <li>• Knowing how to bring together and compare cultural elements and methods of composition.</li> <li>• Knowing how to compose a document in accordance with the conventions of the genre and rhetorical standards</li> <li>• Knowing how to draft, rephrase, restructure, condense, and post-edit rapidly and well (in languages A and B)</li> </ul>
INFORMATION MINING COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to identify one's information and documentation requirements</li> <li>• Developing strategies for documentary and terminological research (including approaching experts)</li> <li>• Knowing how to extract and process relevant information</li> </ul>

	<p>for a given task (documentary, terminological, phraseological information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to use tools and search engines effectively (e.g. terminology software, electronic corpora, electronic dictionaries)</li> <li>• Mastering the archiving of one's own documents</li> </ul>
THEMATIC COMPETENCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to search for appropriate information to gain a better grasp of the thematic aspects of a document (cf. Information mining competence)</li> <li>• Learning to develop one's knowledge in specialist fields and applications (mastering systems of concepts, methods of reasoning, presentation, controlled language, terminology, etc.) (learning to learn)</li> <li>• Developing a spirit of curiosity, analysis and summary</li> </ul>
TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE (mastery of tools)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how to use effectively and rapidly and to integrate a range of software to assist in correction, translation, terminology, layout, documentary research (for example text processing, spell and grammar check, the internet, translation memory, terminology database, voice recognition software)</li> <li>• Knowing how to create and manage a database and files</li> <li>• Knowing how to adapt to and familiarize oneself with new tools, particularly for the translation of multimedia and audiovisual material</li> <li>• Knowing how to prepare and produce a translation in different formats and for different technical media</li> <li>• Knowing the possibilities and limits of MT</li> </ul>

**Table 2: Competences in the syllabus of European Master's in Translation (Gambier, 2009)**

#### 2.4. Admission Criteria

The admission criteria are advised are almost similar to those applied in the EMCI program. To be eligible for admission an applicant mainly must:

- hold a recognized university degree or equivalent
- have an excellent command of their mother tongue (A-language) over a wide range of topics and registers
- have an in-depth knowledge of their working languages (at least 2 languages, B and C);

- be well-informed about the economic, social and cultural background of the countries in which their working languages are used
- have basic computer skills.

Admission is affirmed to be subject to an aptitude test.

### *2.5. Criticism on EMT*

Pym (2008) argues why EMT framework makes no reference to any training prior to the Master's level, and thus assumes that translators are only to be trained at the Master's level. As such all the competencies have to be put in after the completion of the undergraduate studies. This is simply a way of imposing a French model on the whole of Europe. In addition, he indicates to some other minor points of interest in the following:

- The “interpersonal competencies” concern only business relations. There is no reference to personal ethics, citizenship or career planning.
- No mention is made of area studies (i.e. studies of a specialized field of knowledge). It seems to be assumed that Master's programs are not to be specialized in this way.
- No mention is made of the levels at which the competencies are supposed to be acquired (novice, professional, expert, etc.).

He also criticizes the negligence to e-learning in the program. As EMT is established in one specific field, it can draw students from far and wide. Such a program should logically involve significant doses of distance learning, since student mobility at this level is limited (we are often talking about professionals who want to upgrade their skills, and for whom distance learning is a clear preference). This whole area of education needs to be catered to at Master's level (ibid.).

### **3. Qualitative Interview Data**

Having reviewed the status of educating translators in Iranian higher education and the highlights of the European Master's in Translation, to facilitate our understanding of the realities of working as a full time translator with the language pair of English and Persian, the needs of the current active translators were sought by interviewing five freelance full time translators with a degree in translation to find out what are the missing ingredients in the existing syllabus of BA English Translation in Iranian tertiary education from their viewpoints. The qualitative data obtained through the interviews is summarized and categorized in the following:

One of the deficits pointed out by the participants with the existing approach to training translators is the problem of directionality. The absolute majority of practices in translation courses and workshops in university programs are from English to the mother tongue, Persian, this being in stark contrast with what the current market requires; namely, a major portion of translation work offer is into English.

The participants also mentioned that to survive in the progressively expanding translation market, it has been imperative for them to acquaint themselves with computer assisted translation (CAT) tools, such as translation memories, word processing programs, terminology management systems, multilingual dictionaries, or even at times raw machine translation output. Since such expertise is not offered as part of the existing syllabus in training programs, the graduates have to take the necessary measures on their own after leaving school and obtain the needed skills and knowledge.

Among a number of other neglected skills, they could name the principles of editing the translated text and proofreading. Although a bachelor's degree program is viably limited with the number of courses it can incorporate, as long as courses like Foreign Language Teaching Methodology and Language Testing are offered, there should be room for at

least a course for the principles of editing, or it would even make sense to replace it with one of the two mentioned.

Another drawback that was mentioned is the fact that the translation classroom is suffering from the dissimilarity of the applicants with regard to their foreign language competence in general and English paragraph and essay writing skills in specific which may be one of the reasons that directionality of practices is limited to the mother tongue. They believe that the initial deficient placement examination (The Iranian Nationwide University Admission Examination) on the one hand and the less than effective English writing courses offered on the other hand results to such a challenge.

#### **4. Conclusions**

It is given that every curricular program comes with certain shortcomings and limitations, though at varying degrees, with regard to the locale and purposes. Besides, irrespective of how well an approach or a curriculum works or has worked earlier or elsewhere, it does not provide enough reasons to expect that it should or would necessarily be a successful way to go about it in a different socio-cultural discourse. However, it goes without saying that the Iranian translator training syllabus and components which have gone unrevised for twenty years, could certainly use some updates and improvement to meet the present demands and keep up with the recent changes. The decision to make such changes, if any, is reminded to be even more significant in the lights of knowing that unlike the rest of the world, the framework and the guidelines designed by the ministry of higher education will be prescribed with every detail to all the tens of universities and institutes of higher education active in educating translators.

To design or redesign a program particularly aiming at training translators, Pym (2008) recommends seeking input from all the students and teachers that have been in the previous program and short-term courses in the past years, plus feedback and desiderata

from the employers who participate in the job placements, plus advice from those of the teachers and former students who are presently professionals in the regional translation industry, plus what there is to read about current technologies and trends in the localization industry, plus what is being done by the direct competitors at the national and international levels.

Nevertheless, as for the challenge of syllabus of translation programs in Iranian setting, the problem comes with the fact that the applying students, leaving high school, did not use to be operationally let alone fully competent at their foreign language, English language, (supported by a predominantly linguistics-oriented approach to translation) that was why the four-year program is largely filled with courses on language and linguistics, as such leaving no room for any other to be taught and learnt. In this regard, Khazaefar (1999, pp. 9-11) holds that assuming that candidates for translation starting from any English language level after having gone through the first two years would have acquired a decent language competence is too optimistic and unrealistic. He asserts that the need for language knowledge is rather relative and a minimum accepted language level could be operational ability in critical reading comprehension and problem solving skills for independently facing and removing language challenges for the purpose of translation. So, it only makes sense not to sacrifice other significant competences needed by a translator for language knowledge.

As advised by scholars, an analogy of several curricular programs can shed light on a pathway towards the improvement of the current syllabus of training translators. Based on a comparison between the existing syllabus of the English translation programs in Iranian universities and the EMT competencies and components plus considering the gist of the comments from the former translator trainees and present professional translators a few points can be indicated.

- By removing some of the courses on languages, the syllabus ought to be revised in a way that there would be more room for the missing competences and skills, such as technical writing, editing, and intercultural competences.
- Computer literacy as admission criterion and/or focus of instruction would make sense to be taken into consideration and eventually incorporated.
- The present language proficiency examination system during the admission process needs to be improved to be able to screen the applicants' command of language more effectively and at a higher standard, given that in the past few years, the applicants have achieved a considerably better English knowledge and performance.
- Measure should be taken so that too low language competence of students would not lead to one-way directionality of the translation practices in classroom.
- Technological and information mining competences ought to be emphasized by incorporating courses on the application of software translation environments, translation memories, electronic dictionaries and encyclopedias, corpus-based automated translation programs and online websites as well as some basics of project management.

It is crystal clear that to improve the curriculum, the update of the syllabus is only part of the change, and methods of teaching and assessment, the instructors' mindset and how they approach and evaluate the concept of translation, in addition to practical facilities and societal setting of the training programs play fundamental roles in the big picture and all have to be considered, studied and promoted for the betterment of the field.

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