

“Human soft skills and connection will never be replaced.” Perceptions of paraprofessional translational competence in a multilingual business environment

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ABSTRACT

Paraprofessional interlingual translation is a common and everyday task of contemporary white-collar workers. The aim of this article is to investigate whether the workers practising paraprofessional translation in their business environment are aware of the competences that they need for these translation and interpreting tasks, and how they describe and perceive these competences. In order to find the answers to these questions, six employees of a Finnish sports equipment company working in a multilingual business environment were interviewed. As the interviewed employees were not professional translators, the data were analysed using Byram's (2021) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model, which made it possible to describe not just translational, but also other aspects of their intercultural communicative competence. The results showed that the employees' perceptions reveal a receptive attitude towards otherness as well as experiential knowledge gained through living abroad. Their multilingual professional contexts pose challenges that prompt them to solve problems through empathic reflection. And finally, the research also suggests that, in general, the employees were not aware that they have translational and intercultural competences despite the fact that these prove to be very valuable, in both professional and personal contexts.

Keywords: paraprofessional translation, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Translation Competence, reflective empathy, workplace studies

“Človeških mehkih veščin in medčloveških vezi nikoli ni mogoče nadomestiti.” Pogledi na paraprofesionalno prevajalsko kompetenco v večjezičnem poslovnem okolju

IZVLEČEK

Paraprofesionalno medjezikovno prevajanje je pogosto vsakodnevno opravilo v sodobnem poslovnem okolju. Namen članka je raziskati, ali se delavci, ki se ukvarjajo s paraprofesionalnim prevajanjem v poslovnem okolju, zavedajo kompetenc, ki jih potrebujejo za to, da se lotijo paraprofesionalnih prevodnih in tolmaških nalog, ter kako te kompetence opisujejo in jih doživljajo. Odgovore na omenjena vprašanja podajajo intervjuji, opravljeni s šestimi uslužbenci finskega podjetja za športno opremo, ki delujejo v večjezičnem poslovnem okolju. Ker intervjuvani uslužbenci niso bili poklicni prevajalci, so bili pridobljeni podatki analizirani z uporabo Byramovega (2021) modela medkulturne komunikacijske kompetence (Intercultural Communicative Competence oziroma ICC), ki je omogočil opis ne le prevodnih, temveč tudi drugih vidikov medkulturne komunikacijske kompetence. Rezultati so pokazali, da uslužbenci v svojih opisih sprejemajo drugost, hkrati pa imajo tudi izkustveno znanje, ki so ga pridobili z bivanjem v tujini. Večjezično poslovno okolje prinaša izzive, ki uslužbence spodbujajo k reševanju problemov z empatično refleksijo. Iz raziskave je prav tako mogoče sklepati, da se uslužbenci svojih prevodnih in medkulturnih kompetenc ne zavedajo, čeprav se te izkazujejo za zelo dragocene, tako s poklicnega kot tudi s človeškega vidika.

Ključne besede: paraprofesionalno prevajanje, medkulturna komunikacijska kompetenca, prevodna kompetenca, refleksivna empatija, raziskave delovnega okolja

1. Introduction

In today's business world, multiple languages are naturally present in most workplaces. Not surprisingly, paraprofessional translation is commonplace in this context, and thus one finds skilled employees who are not translators by profession carrying out interlingual translation (Tuylenev 2014, 74–78). Although very common, and most probably not a new phenomenon, paraprofessional translation has received little attention to date in Translation Studies (TS). The research reported in the article investigates a workplace where employees are naturally engaged in paraprofessional translation and interpreting (T&I), and therefore provides an opportunity for improved understanding of modern business life and the competences it requires with regard to this practice.

The present research sets out to address the following questions: Are the workers practising paraprofessional translation in their business environment aware of the competences that they need for paraprofessional translation and interpreting tasks, and how do paraprofessional translators perceive the competences that they need for paraprofessional T&I? As paraprofessional T&I is dynamic and often tacit, i.e. not explicitly expressed and described as translational competence (see e.g., Piekari et al. 2019), this study adopts a broad understanding of translation to capture its diversity. The term translation here thus refers not only to interlingual transfer, but also to summarizing, elaborating or explaining information in another language in such a way that the meaning is conveyed successfully in the interlocutor's language and the target cultural setting (see e.g., Koskela et al. 2017). This study reports on six white-collar employees' perceptions of the competences they need for translational practices at work. Although none of them were hired as linguists, they all engage in T&I, making them paraprofessional translators.

The research was carried out in a Finnish sports equipment company whose business environment is multilingual. Employees engage in translation as a regular part of their daily work, seeing T&I as a necessity for maintaining the workflow. Typically, as the employees note, only texts of a formal nature or texts to be archived, such as annual reports, are sent to a professional translator, and in all other multilingual settings professional interpreters are not used. Everyday communication, which is global and multilingual, lies in the hands of the employees who have the necessary translation or mediation skills.

The daily working life of the employees can be described as a translation ecosystem (Westney et al. 2022); their communication across languages is both internal and external, occurring with colleagues, collaborators in subsidiaries, retailers and new business contacts. Since the employees continuously work in a multilingual environment and are quite successful in it, it can be assumed that the employees have translational competence. Consequently, they can be defined as paraprofessional translators.

The following section will present the Translation Competence (TC) models of the PACTE (Proceso de Adquisición de la Competencia Traductora y Evaluación) research group (Hurtado Albir 2017) and the EMT (European Master's in Translation) Expert Group (EMT 2022). These models of translation competence will then be compared to the competences needed for the successful work of the employees in the observed Finnish company, whose translational work is not shaped by the norms of professional translation. Because of the paraprofessional nature of the observed practice, the PACTE and EMT TC models will be complemented by Byram's (2021) Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) model. The ICC model will then be

used as a methodological tool for analysing interview data to see which competences the employees believe they need for paraprofessional T&I.

2. Theoretical underpinnings

This section provides an overview of the theory on paraprofessional translation and translators. It first presents TC as described in the models of the PACTE research group (Hurtado Albir 2017) and the EMT Expert Group (EMT 2022) and then proceeds to summarize the framework for ICC put forward by Byram (2021). The section concludes with a discussion of overlaps between TC and ICC.

2.1 Paraprofessional translation and paraprofessional translators

Paraprofessional translation was identified in TS over a decade ago (e.g. Pym 2011; Tuylenev 2014, 74–78). Since then, the phenomenon has been further explored through research on the translational flows of meetings (e.g. Koskela et al. 2017), and on journalistic translation (see e.g. van Rooyen's (2018) study on the daily life of a radio station). More recent work is that by Pisanski Peterlin (2019) on self-translation, by Muñoz Gómez (2020) on multilingual office life, and by Penttilä et al. (2021) on translatoriality in academia. Interest in translatoriality has risen not only in TS, but also in Management and Organization Studies. For example, Piekkari et al. (2019) have conceptualized the act of moving organizational practices across language boundaries as metaphorical translation. And more recently, Westney et al. (2022) have proposed a model of translation ecosystems in business highlighting the role of paraprofessional translators.

Paraprofessional translators are employees who are not hired as translators but who, often for practical reasons, end up carrying out translational tasks – and accepting them as their proper responsibilities. Paraprofessional translation is ubiquitous in modern business and has doubtless existed as long as the international trade itself. In fact, one may claim that the phenomenon dates back at least two thousand years, when people plied ancient trade routes traversing different linguistic communities (Izdebski et al. 2020; Wood 2002), as this naturally required communication across languages. These routes ranged from Asia to Europe (Wood 2002) and from the Roman Empire and Ancient Greece to the Black Sea (Izdebski et al. 2020), and the languages used included, at the very least, Latin, Ancient Greek, Aramaic, and Chinese. Paraprofessional translation must have been practiced in its early forms then, and to no surprise it remains a core capability for doing international business today. Despite its long historical presence, Tietze et al. (2022) notice that the lack of research on

paraprofessional translation has been “a serious omission” in Organization Studies, therefore the present research aims, at least partly, to fill this gap.

2.2 Translation Competence (TC) according to PACTE and EMT

Since paraprofessional translation is a form of translation, different definitions of Translation Competence (TC) will first be briefly presented. TC has been discussed in TS, in terms of training and professional practice (see e.g. Quinci 2023). This section will present TC as theorized by the PACTE research group (Hurtado Albir 2017) and further refined for translator training by the EMT Expert Group (EMT 2022).

Based on long-term empirical research, the PACTE group has determined TC as consisting of six interrelated sub-competences: bilingual sub-competence, extralinguistic knowledge sub-competence, instrumental sub-competence, knowledge of translation, strategic sub-competence, and the sixth sub-competence which comprises a series of psycho-physiological components activated in translating (Hurtado Albir 2017, 39–41).

The bilingual sub-competence refers to the ability and procedural knowledge required for communicating between two languages, including the sociolinguistic dimension of comprehending proper formality in a given situation and acting accordingly (Hurtado Albir 2017, 39–40). The extralinguistic knowledge sub-competence includes bicultural knowledge and “encyclopaedic” (Hurtado Albir 2017, 40) knowledge about the world in general. This sub-competence includes field-specific knowledge, pivotal when translating texts in special fields.

The third is the instrumental sub-competence (Hurtado Albir 2017, 40), which is manifested in the translator’s skills of knowing the appropriate dictionaries, grammar and style guides, search engines and machine translation tools for a given translation task and, secondly, of the ability to use them. The fourth sub-competence is the knowledge of translation, an understanding of what translation is, of how translation functions and of the problems the process of translating typically poses. This sub-competence also requires knowledge of the translation market and its target audiences.

The fifth component is strategic sub-competence, that is, knowledge of the translation process and the ability to strategically plan and devise the optimal method for carrying out a translation project. This means that a translator should be able to dynamically evaluate the text to be translated, foresee problems and, when a problem is identified, solve it – and repeat this routine until the end-result, a translated target text, is produced. A very important function of the strategic sub-competence is to

activate and sustain the operation of the aforementioned four sub-competences in a balanced way (Hurtado Albir 2017, 40–41).

The sixth sub-competence contains psycho-physiological components which are psychomotor, cognitive and attitudinal skills. Examples are reading and writing, attention span and memory, and intellectual curiosity and rigour.

In addition to the PACTE model discussed above, another influential TC model was created within the European Master's in Translation network (EMT 2022), a network of institutions offering MA-level translation education, established in collaboration with the European Commission to ensure that certain shared educational standards are met. Their most recent TC model (EMT 2022) comprises five areas: language and culture, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal, and service provision competence.

The first area, language and culture, encompasses the ability to comprehend the function of social, geographical, or historical language variations, as well as the ability to identify cultural elements, values and references in written or spoken genres. These entail the ability to produce a target text or spoken language "in accordance with cultural conventions and conventions of genre and rhetorical standards" (EMT 2022, 6).

To continue, the area of translation (EMT 2022, 7–8) constitutes a description of expertise in the practice of translation. Understood broadly, in addition to meaning transfer the translation component encompasses "the strategic, methodological and thematic competences that come into play before, during and following the transfer phase per se – from document analysis to final quality control procedures" (EMT 2022, 7). Here the framework mentions specific intra- and intercultural contexts (EMT 2022, 8).

The area of technology (EMT 2022, 9–10) comprises knowledge of and the ability to use sources and tools, including familiarity with machine translation and its application. The personal and interpersonal area (EMT 2022, 10) includes soft skills, such as the ability to manage workload, stress, cognitive load and critical professional situations. The other skills in this area are generic soft skills such as time management and the ability to work independently and in groups, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

The service provision area covers skills relevant for providing language services "in a professional context" (EMT 2022, 11). These encompass abilities such as awareness of the translation market, codes of ethics and good practice, having evaluation processes in place and participating in professional networks of service providers.

If these definitions of TC are applied to paraprofessional translation, it may be assumed that the bilingual and extralinguistic components of PACTE are foundational for paraprofessional translators as well. One may also assert that field-specific knowledge – in the PACTE extralinguistic component – is one of the strengths of paraprofessional translators. Similarly, the EMT’s language and culture component seems to largely cover both the bilingual and extralinguistic components of PACTE, and could also be considered as a necessary component of translational competence of paraprofessional translators.

However, the instrumental sub-competence of PACTE, similar to the EMT’s technology component which defines how extensively translators use translation aids and tools, is perhaps the sub-competence that is not as fundamental for paraprofessional translators as it is for professional translators. The PACTE component of knowledge of translation is focused on both practice-based and theory-supported perceptions of translation, largely corresponding to the EMT’s translation component, which has relevance for paraprofessionals as well.

The EMT’s personal and interpersonal sub-competence contains soft skills. To a limited extent, it corresponds to PACTE’s strategic sub-competence. These sub-competences have a clear relevance to the work of paraprofessional translators, in particular when they dynamically evaluate the need for translating/interpreting and initiate a translatorial procedure when they see it fit.

2.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Paraprofessional translators’ work is embedded in intercultural¹ communication. To further explain this connection between intercultural communication and paraprofessional translation and to provide more details on theoretical underpinning needed for the analysis of the paraprofessional translators’ competences, this section will present the core definitions of ICC as provided by Byram (2021). Byram (2021, 84–90) divides ICC into five areas: starting from the attitudes and knowledge of an intercultural speaker, he moves on to the skills of interpreting and relating, discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness/political education.

Although Byram (2021, 84–90) admits that there are overlaps between the areas, since they are inevitably intertwined in real-life situations, he offers the following core definitions for each of them:

1 In this study, the concept of “culture” refers to ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, passed on through generations in a cultural setting and absorbed through socialization in an organizational setting.

1. Attitudes: Curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
2. Knowledge: Of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.
3. Skills of interpreting and relating: Ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.
4. Skills of discovery and interaction: Ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
5. Critical cultural awareness/political education: An ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of a systematic process of reasoning, values present in one's own and other cultures and countries.

According to Byram's (2021, 84–90) definitions, areas 1 and 2 (attitudes and knowledge) are foundational for the intercultural speaker and need to be present for the subsequent competence areas. An open attitude towards otherness is a prerequisite for learning about intercultural matters, while having essential knowledge of "social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram 2021, 85) enables interaction between the parties.

Byram (2021, 87) underlines the importance of being able to "to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own". Indeed, this allows the paraprofessional translators to see their subjectivity in the intercultural world and help others find a constructive solution in a potential cultural clash or a conflict. This is the core of area 3, the skills of interpreting and relating.

In area 4, the skills of discovery and interaction, one has the "ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (Byram 2021, 88). This means that one is acquainted foreign culture well and is therefore able to act appropriately and in a timely manner in real-time communication.

The essence of area 5, critical cultural awareness/political education, is the ability to think critically, to evaluate, to make quick analyses and act appropriately in the jumble of conflicting ideologies that one may find in documents or situations. In operational

terms, it means that one is able to discern subjective ideologies while communicating, comprehend the big picture and go on to find a constructive solution through systematic reasoning and interacting with others. In sum, the first two areas, attitudes and knowledge, are foundational, but an interculturally well-versed expert must have a command of all five (Byram 2021, 84–90).

2.4 Translation Competence (TC) vis-à-vis Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Translation and intercultural communication are interrelated, therefore, unsurprisingly, both TC descriptions described above partially overlap with the areas of ICC. However, since PACTE and EMT descriptions of TC focus on professional translation, some of the sub-competences are completely different from certain areas of ICC.

Since both TC and ICC are relevant for paraprofessional translators, the frameworks will be compared below. Table 1 provides a visual juxtaposition of the three models.

Table 1. The partially overlapping ICC areas and TC components.

PACTE TC sub-competences	ICC areas	EMT TC competence components
bilingual	attitudes	language and culture
extralinguistic knowledge	knowledge	translation
instrumental	skills of interpreting and relating	technology
knowledge of translation	skills of discovery and interaction	personal and interpersonal
strategic	critical cultural awareness/political education	service provision
psycho-physiological	-	

As Table 1 demonstrates, three PACTE sub-competences overlap partially with areas of the ICC model, namely those entailing bilingual knowledge, extralinguistic knowledge and psycho-physiological processes. The bilingual sub-competence encompasses procedural knowledge on how to communicate in two languages, including sociolinguistic knowledge (Hurtado Albir 2017, 39). As such, the bilingual sub-competence and area 2 of ICC (knowledge) overlap.

The extralinguistic knowledge sub-competence of TC includes bicultural knowledge and knowledge about the world in general (Hurtado Albir 2017, 40). It therefore partially overlaps with ICC area 2 (knowledge). The extralinguistic knowledge sub-competence of TC differs from ICC in that it includes field-specific knowledge, which is important when translating texts in special fields.

The psycho-physiological sub-competence of TC includes attitudinal qualities (Hurtado Albir 2017, 40) that to a limited extent overlap with area 1 in ICC (attitudes). In ICC the focus is on openness and curiosity towards otherness, whereas in the psycho-physiological sub-competence of TC the attitudinal qualities mentioned are intellectual curiosity, critical spirit, confidence, motivation and rigour. The two frameworks clearly overlap in highlighting openness and curiosity towards otherness as essential qualities.

The comparison of competence models, however, also shows that the instrumental, knowledge of translation and strategic sub-competences are unique to TC (Hurtado Albir 2017, 41). From the viewpoint of paraprofessionals, it should be noted that these sub-competences are not irrelevant, as their focus is on the processes of T&I. The strategic sub-competence would seem to have affinities with ICC area 3 (skills of interpreting and relating) as both entail responsibility for recognizing and solving T&I problems. Paraprofessional interpreting situations may pose unexpected challenges that require the paraprofessional to mediate between parties where a conflict arises between them. This may cause ethical stress, particularly when it is not clear which role the paraprofessional should take, that of organizational expert or that of a language service provider.

The five main areas of the EMT (2022) model – language and culture, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal skills, and service provision competence – were defined with translator training in mind, and they seem to lean on the empirically created PACTE model (Hurtado Albir 2017). There are partial overlaps between two of the five main areas of the EMT (2022) and ICC (Byram 2021) models.

Table 1 shows that the EMT's area of language and culture and the area of personal and interpersonal competence partially overlap with two areas of ICC: the area of

language and culture overlaps with areas 2 (knowledge) and 5 (critical cultural awareness/political education). The area of language and culture includes comprehending the function of social language variations and identifying cultural elements, which are also core elements of ICC area 2 (knowledge). The area of language and culture also entails the ability to identify cultural values and references in a text or speech and to produce a target text or speech “in accordance with cultural conventions and conventions of genre and rhetorical standards” (EMT 2022, 6), which is similar to the key idea of ICC area 5 (critical cultural awareness/ political education) (Byram 2021, 85, 89–90), with the exception that Byram (2021, 89–90) refers to interaction and mediation.

The personal and interpersonal area of TC (EMT 2022, 10) includes the ability to manage critical professional situations. For a professional in T&I this may mean, for example, managing stressful interpreting situations. In a similar vein, ICC area 3 (skills of interpreting and relating) includes the ability to “mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena” (Byram 2021, 87). Paraprofessional interpreters could face conflicting loyalties in a bilingual meeting where they have the dual role of interpreter and company expert.

The three remaining areas of TC – translation, technology and service provision – are related to professional translation and do not overlap with the areas of ICC (Byram 2021, 84–90). After considering the descriptive adequacy of the models for the description of paraprofessional translation and on the basis of the observed practice in a company where employees work in a multilingual environment, ICC seems more applicable as an analytical tool for studying paraprofessional translators’ perceptions of their translational competence.

3. Research design: Material and method

The research setting was a Finnish sports equipment company with a multilingual business environment. The employees interviewed see paraprofessional T&I as a necessity for maintaining their workflow. They have not been hired as linguists but, nevertheless, have translation or mediation skills.

The data consist of interviews collected between 17 January and 26 April 2023. Six employees consented to be interviewed. Each interview took approximately one hour, resulting in some six hours of audio data. Five interviews were conducted online, and one took place face-to-face; each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed.

The interviewees were selected based on a discussion in autumn 2022 with a contact person in the company. Each interviewee:

- is in a white-collar position,
- has lived abroad,
- has a multilingual daily routine at work, speaking and writing in several languages,
- is an organizational expert in sales, communication or accounting,
- has been hired primarily for work other than providing linguistic support.

All interviewees, profiled in Table 2, work at the company headquarters or its other office in Finland. Pseudonyms protect their identities but reflect their nationalities. She/her has been used throughout as a generic pronoun, including in the interview excerpts.

Table 2. Interviewees' profiles.

Interviewee	Position	Education	International mobility	Working history in company	Mother tongue(s)	Other languages used at work	Further languages at more elementary level	Interview language	Interview duration (min:sec)
Raija	manager	linguistics & communication, economic sciences	yes	15 years	Finnish	English, Swedish	German, French	Finnish	57:05
Olivia	manager	cultural management, programming	yes	circa one year	Portuguese, Russian	English, Spanish	Italian	English	55:05
Aino	manager	business administration	yes	11 years	Finnish	English, Estonian, Swedish	Swedish, French	Finnish	56:26
Angela	coordinator	linguistics	yes	2.5 years	German	English, Spanish, Italian	Portuguese, Finnish	English	52:19
Kaja	manager	IT, logistics, international business	yes	15 years	Estonian	English, Russian, Finnish	German	Finnish	57:05
Martina	manager	international business	yes	3 years	German	English	French, Swedish, Finnish	English	53:50

As Table 2 shows, five interviewees are managers, and Angela is a coordinator. Their work history in the company varies from one to 15 years. Their mother tongues are Finnish, Portuguese, Russian, German, and Estonian. Olivia had a bilingual, Portuguese–Russian, childhood. Kaja grew up in a monolingual Estonian-speaking home but she was also significantly exposed to Russian in the wider society. Others had monolingual childhoods. All have lived abroad. The interviewees' linguistic repertoire

extends beyond their mother tongues and English. Those at the beginning of their careers are learning additional languages, as they believe this knowledge could be helpful in the future. The interviews were conducted in Finnish or English, depending on the strongest shared language with the researcher. Raija and Angela have education backgrounds in linguistics and were therefore able to spontaneously verbalise and describe their translation practice. All have moved abroad from their home country at some point in their lives.

The interviews were semi-structured, with 10–15 minutes set aside for each part. Key examples of the questions are presented below:

- 1/4 Introduction and background

Shall we begin by you telling a bit about yourself first: What kind of work do you do and how did you come to work for the company? How long have you worked here? How long have you worked in your current position?

- 2/4 Tasks and stakeholders

What are your duties? How does your team work? Do you meet clients? Other stakeholders? Has your work changed over the years?

- 3/4 Multilingual situations and cooperation parties and a typical para-professional translation process

In what kind of situations do you use other languages? With whom do you use other languages? How is the language selected? Do you or someone else engage in translating – summarizing, repeating or explaining – in these situations? Give me an example.

Describe your typical translation process. What aids do you use (tools, dictionaries, MT)? What do you think translation is?

- 4/4 Language ideologies (roles) and possible language policies.

How do you feel about conveying messages between languages and your organizational role in your work community? What words would you use to describe it? Do you feel your role has changed over the years? Do you think it will change in the future? Elaborate.

Are there guidelines for working across languages or translating? Are there any company-specific vocabularies? If yes, where are they produced? Are they official or unofficial?

Feedback and quality. Successes and setbacks: discussion on a successful multilingual situation on the one hand, and a situation where things went awry on the other.

The structure and implementation of the interviews were planned to mirror Pienimäki's (2021, 66, 286–291) procedure in her ethnographic dissertation on language professionals as discourse regulators. First, time was allowed for the interviewees' linguistic awareness to unfold (parts 1 and 2), then their perceptions of ICC and TC were discussed (parts 3 and 4).

The transcribed data were subjected to a thematic analysis using the ICC areas as a tool. The analysis sought to discover the employees' perceptions of their translational competences. Using a concept-driven approach, the data were manually examined for excerpts representing each ICC area. Naturally, the expressions used by the interviewees differed from the wording of the theoretical concepts, whereby it was necessary to go below the surface level and determine what the interviewees meant with their responses vis-à-vis the theory.

The position of the researcher inevitably affects the research design (see e.g. Berger 2015). Therefore, openness about the researcher's role has been regarded as crucial in the present case. In an approach similar to van Rooyen's (2018, 265), an internal bulletin describing the aim of the research project was circulated in November 2022 to familiarize the potential interviewees with the study.

4. Results

This section reports the findings from the analysis of the interviews. It will first establish how the interviewees perceive translation, because translation as a practical activity in their work is at the core of this study. The second focus is the implicit nature of paraprofessional T&I. Lastly, the section describes the interviewees' perceptions of their competences.

4.1 Premise: Interviewees' translation concept and the invisibility of paraprofessional T&I

When asked how they perceive translation, the interviewees answered without hesitation that they see it as transfer. They also mentioned cultural considerations and the intended affective tone. Raija's view is provided in Excerpt 1, below.²

Excerpt 1. Translation concept, Raija.

Raija: Well, in my opinion, it's about making the message understandable in the relevant language and in a way that it works in that culture.

2 The Finnish transcriptions were translated into English by the author of the article.

Raija's view of translation reflects a practical need to transfer meanings. Martina, on the other hand, defines translation as conveying "the same thing from one language to another", that is as a transfer of meaning, much as the others did. Raija, Olivia, Aino, Kaja and Martina also mention the importance of conveying the intended affective tone.

It was also observed that the interviewees had not paid particular attention to their translational competences. In fact, in many cases, language transfer was not even given conscious thought in the process. Olivia verbalized this implicit role of paraprofessional T&I by saying that she just goes "with the flow"³ across languages, and other interviewees made similar comments.

4.2 Competence area 1: Attitudes

Competence area 1 encompasses the attitudes of an interculturally seasoned person (Byram 2021, 84–85). Having moved and lived internationally, all the interviewees have gone through different stages of relocating and adapting to another cultural setting, and thus have developed their skills in dealing with otherness, including communicatively. All the interviewees regarded translation as a positive way to engage with otherness, which gives their work added value. Angela's open attitude and appreciation for translation is illustrated in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2. Attitudes, Angela.

Angela: And I think not many people can just come here to Finland not speaking their language so well and really work in the profession what they had before. So, I consider myself kind of like, lucky. [...] I think it's a really cool work what I do because, of course, the task somewhere is always the same, but every day is so different. [...] You are in touch, like, with many people from all around the world and this is always what I wanted to do in my professional life – to be with people from abroad, from around the world. And, yeah, now I'm even living abroad. [Laughs] Yes.

Interviewer: So clearly you're enjoying this role, really blossoming in it.

Angela: Yeah. Mm-m. Yes, of course, if there would come a bit more translation, then I would be super happy. [...] So, I had to check with my direct supervisor "If there is any need of translating the website, let me know." [Laughs]

3 Excerpt 4, shown in section 4.3, presents this quote in context.

Excerpt 2 shows that Angela genuinely likes to engage with otherness, particularly by doing translation. While her main task is in sales, it became evident that translation contributes to her satisfaction at work. The next excerpt is from the interview with Aino, who even turned down a job offer from another company because it entailed a more limited range of linguistic tasks.

Excerpt 3. Attitudes, Aino.

Aino: Then I came to the conclusion that I don't want to be in a workplace where you only speak Finnish all the time. You're kind of used to use those languages and it's a nice aspect of this job.

Aino states the use of different languages is an added value and an element of work satisfaction for her, as it is for Angela. Both interviewees seem to experience self-efficacy through using different languages. In this context Raija also mentioned cost savings, as the company seldom needs professional T&I.

4.3 Competence area 2: Knowledge

All the interviewees also have essential knowledge of their interlocutors' social settings in general (Byram 2021, 86, 97), which they acquired by living in different cultures, although not in all the countries where their interlocutors are situated. Their familiarity with these different cultures, traditions and history makes it possible to better connect with their interlocutors.

Following a discussion on her competence, Olivia – a bilingual with a Portuguese-Russian childhood – quite vividly explains the implicit nature of such knowledge in her intellectual toolkit, as shown in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4. Knowledge, Olivia.

Olivia: It's something that comes with you on a natural basis; you don't, just, you don't think about that at all. You just go, you go with the flow. But when you speak and when you think about it, it's actually incredible [laughs] at the same time, because you can learn so many things about other cultures, other people, even how people think, emotionally speaking. Erm, emotions are different per language, I feel sometimes as well. So I think. So it's a very interesting tool. But the awareness of people who speak different languages, we don't actually think about that so often.

Olivia had not paid particular attention to her knowledge of the two languages and cultures gained by living in both Russia and Portugal as a child. Her skills are deeply ingrained in her consciousness, and during the interview one could observe how she became more aware of her knowledge competence and started to see herself differently. The exact moment when Olivia becomes aware of this competence is clear in Excerpt 4, when she laughs for a moment. The interview thus also represented a form of self-reflection for Olivia.

The other interviewees have lived in different countries as adults and acquired their knowledge over time. Raija lived in Sweden for a decade, building a robust knowledge of the society. She is also very competent in Standard Swedish⁴, as Excerpt 5 shows.

Excerpt 5. Knowledge, Raija.

Raija: I worked in Sweden for ten years [...] and then in the early 90s I returned to Finland. [...] At the moment, I mainly use three languages: Finnish, Sweden Swedish and English. And the language then changes as needed [Laughs]. When we're dealing with, for example, the Swedish subsidiary, then I use a lot of Standard Swedish, because it's a bit like my second mother tongue. And I also exchange letters or emails or chat in Teams in Swedish as far as possible, but of course if there are people in the group who don't know Swedish, then one must use English.

Undoubtedly, working and studying in a country for ten years means that one also gradually gains extensive experiential knowledge of the way of life and language of that country. Communicating in Standard Swedish enables Raija to maintain the feeling of belonging to her former country of residence, in addition to adding to her feelings of self-efficacy.

4.4 Competence area 3: Skills of interpreting and relating

The skills of interpreting and relating (Byram 2021, 87–88), that is, area 3 of ICC, include an ability to mediate in a conflict or, as Byram puts it, “to help interlocutors overcome conflicting perspectives” by aiding them “to identify common ground and unresolvable difference” (Byram 2021, 88). The interviewees highlighted that they typically encounter collaborative situations more often than conflicts. However,

4 Raija makes a distinction between Sweden Swedish, i.e. the variant spoken in Sweden in particular (the term used by Raija in Finnish: *riikinruotsi*), and Finland Swedish, i.e. the variant spoken in Finland (*suomenruotsi*). This highlights Raija's identification with Swedish culture.

Martina reported a case illuminating the role that language may sometimes play in conflicts (Excerpt 6).

Excerpt 6. Skills of interpreting and relating, Martina.

Martina: The owner speaks only [language A], like only [language A], nothing else. [...] And that definitively causes some issues. [Laughs briefly] Umm, because my [language A] isn't that good that I could communicate with [business owner] and with [business owner] only speaking like one language also limits any other options. So, then, for example, me and [identification removed] were visiting them and we just couldn't, we just couldn't get our message out and [business owner] couldn't get [business owner's] message to us. It was lost in translation between us talking to [business owner's] colleagues, them translating back, and then going back. And to us again. So that was a very difficult situation. And I think that harmed or that is harming our relationship because we don't understand each other. [...] our main contact person, he speaks [language B], but there were some messages we should have been getting across to the owner of the company to get also [business owner's] commitment and, like, engagement. So that was, yeah, that's still difficult and they don't perform as we want them to perform, but that might be exactly because of the language issue.

Excerpt 6 describes a conflict in the company's network of collaborator companies. The conflict occurred with a business owner who would communicate in only one language, her mother tongue. The lack of a shared language with the business owner seems to be the key problem hindering fruitful collaboration, despite the presence of helpful colleagues providing paraprofessional interpreting. Later in the interview, Martina said there was going to be another meeting but that she would then bring along an employee who speaks the same language as the business owner. This was planned in the hopes of improved interaction and smoother collaboration. The employees have thus faced problems with regard to area 3, and worked together to come up with constructive solutions.

4.5 Competence area 4: Skills of discovery and interaction

Area 4, the skills of discovery and interaction (Byram 2021, 88–90), highlights the contextuality and difficulty that real-time human encounters entail. Given the immediacy of such situations, it is more challenging to consistently come up with appropriate solutions. Here, Olivia has found background work helpful (Excerpt 7).

Excerpt 7. Skills of discovery and interaction, Olivia.

Olivia: I think the added values as well are perhaps understanding cultural background, because if you want to do business, for instance, in South America, you have to understand and connect with people there. Otherwise it's almost impossible.

Interviewer: So in order to be successful in, let's say, making sales?

Olivia: Yes. The connection is different. If you work with South America, as I mentioned with Spain, we speak about [Spanish collaborator's] family first and [Spanish collaborator's] personal life. It's the same with South America. We connect through, I don't know, we can speak about things that are happening in the country, for instance. This is something that I also do. I try to do a research of the country and see what's going on there so that I can have some conversation topics.

As Olivia explains above, she navigates between small talk and shop talk as a way of building trust across cultures and, when necessary, initiates a conversation on topics outside the business issues at hand as a way of maintaining and building trust. She reported that she prepares by reading the news about her business contacts' countries and by reflecting on discussion topics that may be suitable for upcoming business meetings. Thanks to her competence in area 4, Olivia is undoubtedly a valuable worker when negotiating new business deals or building on existing ones with interlocutors from the cultures and languages she is familiar with. The other interviewees did not report making such preparations, but of course they may very well do so.

4.6 Competence area 5: Critical cultural awareness / political education

Competence area 5, critical cultural awareness / political education, is analysing cultural ideologies or values relating to situations or documents via systematic and conscious reasoning. Such reflectiveness was demonstrated by several interviewees, whose reports were characterized by a sense of empathy toward their interlocutors and peer paraprofessional translators.

In Excerpt 8, Kaja reflects on situations where mediation through the lens of critical cultural awareness was necessary; sometimes through trial and error. An immigrant from Estonia who has lived in Finland for two decades, Kaja can engage in ontological reflection, perhaps partly because of her background, in which otherness was, and still is, ever-present.

Excerpt 8. Critical cultural awareness/political education, Kaja.

Kaja: So, of course, most of the world knows the Finnish way of doing things. It's a very straightforward and honest way of doing things. But there are so many different cultures in the world, where someone's feelings might get hurt because of this straightforward way of working. There have been cases in my career when customer relationships have gone awry if certain people write in the Finnish way, in a way so direct; you've had to soften the approach, so to speak, to approach the customer carefully step by step with an issue, not just cold email them. Some require you to be there in person when you bring a more important message. Others read that message in their email and that's it. They feel that they've received enough attention from you. Others require more attention and a different approach. We are aware of that and know how to react to them. But it's not just a matter of the language. Of course, it's about possible misunderstandings if a Finn writes in English, let's say, to Mexico. Just because of cultural differences. There may be problems just understanding the language as well.

Demonstrating critical awareness of herself and her ways of communicating, Kaja calls such reflectiveness "sensitivity" (in Finnish: *herkkyys*). Kaja is retrospectively talking about her personal growth in her 15-year career, emphasizing the relevance of empathy in intercultural communication and also its importance when building an empathic workplace culture.

In her observations, Kaja stresses the need of possessing a sense of empathy towards peer paraprofessional translators and target readers, as she acknowledges that consistently conveying the intended affective tone is difficult and misinterpretations are commonplace. Competence in area 5 of ICC has enabled her to identify and to reflect on the difficulty. Maybe such awareness diminishes emotional stress experienced by Kaja, as she can see beyond the primary affective reaction, prompting herself to adopt an empathic approach.

5. Discussion

The research question of this study was: How do paraprofessional translators perceive the competences that they need for paraprofessional translation and interpreting (T&I)? Interviewees' perceptions of their translational competences were categorized in terms of Byram's (2021) ICC descriptions, informed by TC descriptions of two TC

models (Hurtado Albir 2017; EMT 2022), which only partially cover paraprofessional T&I competences. An overview will be discussed in 5.1, followed by a discussion on competence in reflective empathy in 5.2.

5.1 Overview of perceptions

The interviewees regard their TC and ICC as key to their expertise, typically arguing that this competence allows them to save time and costs, manage business relations well, and create new contacts. Paraprofessional T&I can be perceived as a virtuous cycle in which the employees gladly participate, because it generates feeling of self-efficacy and work satisfaction and maintains their impression of belonging to a culture different from the one they now live in and they had once experienced at some length. The pride employees take in their work nourishes this cycle. Through “reflective empathy” (Persson and Savulescu 2018), they have recognized contexts where sensitivity and foresight are needed regarding languages, communication style and pace.

The interviews indicate that ICC areas 1 and 2 (attitudes and knowledge) are the foundation of the interviewees’ ICC. As was to be expected, they felt areas 3, 4 and 5 to be more complex and demanding, prompting them to engage in collaborative problem-solving to overcome difficulties. The results imply that nourishing foundational areas 1 and 2 may be crucial to ensure that the employees thrive when called upon to use the more advanced competences in areas 3, 4 and 5.

The employees had largely overlooked the knowledge they had gained through mobility, and their awareness of that asset was raised in the interviews. This finding could mean that translational expertise is more extensively present in the company but in a tacit way. In other words, paraprofessional T&I is overlooked as a basic competence, being harnessed by the company in an agile way when needed. I argue that this valuable paraprofessional translational competence – in financial as well as human terms – is also not visible enough in the ICC model. In order to more adequately reflect the observed competence, I therefore suggest that the following points be added to ICC areas 3 to 5:

- Having a shared language with stakeholders has been found to be pivotal (area 3: skills of interpreting and relating).
- Building trust through non-business topics is expected in cultures that value social relations (area 4: skills of discovery and interaction).
- Empathy is vital in particular because it is difficult to consistently convey the intended affective tone in paraprofessional translation (area 5: critical cultural awareness / political education).

5.2 Reflective empathy vis-à-vis translational competence

Based on the data, it seems that the employees' work requires empathy, a skill necessary in taking a different world-view (Koskinen 2020, 167–172) or an "ability to negotiate otherness" (Koskinen and Kinnunen 2022, 20). Koskinen (2020, 167) defines empathy in translation as follows:

a set of skills or practices that one can use in situations that evoke compassion. [...] being attentive to the affective "temperature" of oneself and others, taking the other's perspective, withholding judgement, understanding how the other is feeling, communicating that understanding, and being reflexive about one's feelings and the overall situation.

Empathy enables the translator/interpreter to see the other's viewpoint, their emotional state, while remaining focused as a professional. Persson and Savulescu (2018, 183–86) make a clear distinction between spontaneous empathy and in their view a more justified form of empathy that is reflective, thus informed by reasoning gained through voluntary reflection (Persson and Savulescu 2018, 191–192).

In the work of the paraprofessional translators interviewed as part of this study, empathy skills are an asset when harnessed to gain the optimal outcome in negotiating a business deal, or foreseeing, avoiding or mitigating an expensive conflict. This amplifies the importance of life-long learning as an opportunity to develop and automatize empathic thought processes, enabling the employees/paraprofessional translators to respond more easily to complex communicative challenges in real life (ICC area 3). Importantly, training in reflective empathy could perhaps even diminish the "emotional stress" (Koskinen 2020, 161–162) of paraprofessional translators, as problem-solving in intercultural situations would take up less cognitive capacity. In a line of work such as translation, which is very much based on human interaction, reflective empathy cross-cuts daily encounters, highlighting the importance of soft skills. Olivia crystallized this aptly in the interview, as evident in Excerpt 9, below.

Excerpt 9. Empathy, Olivia.

Olivia: Human soft skills and connection will never be replaced. Even by technology, because I think we [humans] are more compassionate, we need each other.

The way professional translators ethically empathize (see e.g., Chesterman 2018) as part of their work may differ from the approach taken by paraprofessionals. However,

paraprofessionals, in general, possess more in-depth knowledge of their target audience and working environment than professional translators, who may be less familiar with a particular business setting if they are not employed by the company. Moreover, professionals have been trained to stay focused in stressful interpreting settings, whereas in such a setting paraprofessionals are likely to try to manage the overall situation and, when necessary, step into their dual role as organizational experts and language support providers. Here too, the existing ICC or TC models fail to capture an important aspect of what is a distinct feature of the paraprofessional profile.

6. Conclusion

This study has outlined and analysed six paraprofessional translators' perceptions of their translational competences. All had a similar conception of translation as an activity primarily focused on meaning transfer but also entailing an ability to negotiate cultural differences, which includes conveying the intended affective tone. The data did not reveal whether the similarities in their conceptions was due to the organizational culture of the company, where the need for paraprofessional T&I is constant.

The data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically using Byram's (2021) ICC descriptions. While none of the interviewees were hired as a linguistic service provider, all engage in paraprofessional T&I at work. The results indicate that all have an open, empathic attitude towards otherness and that using different languages generates the feeling of self-efficacy in paraprofessional translators and contributes to their work satisfaction. The analysis also reveals that the interviewees had a limited awareness of the competences required by their dual role. Significantly, the interviews served to improve this awareness. Moreover, the interviewees' approach to their work was found to be particularly empathic. Although empathy is a facet of human nature, it was surprising that it plays such a considerable role in paraprofessional translation practice in a business context, and this is a finding that deserves further investigation.

The employees' reports prove that their paratranslational competence creates a virtuous cycle, as they enjoy their translation work. This finding suggests that nourishing their paratranslational competences could help maintain or enhance their work satisfaction.

The analysis of the interviews also reveals that there is a gap in the theoretical literature, inasmuch as neither the ICC nor TC models prove to be directly applicable to paraprofessional translational competence. An expanded model would help in better understanding the requirements of modern business life.

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