**Designing a course in Translation Studies to respond to students' questions**

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*Abstract*: Working from the premise that Translation Studies concerns the production of knowledge rather than the elaboration of theories, we invited students beginning BA and MA courses in Translation Studies in Monterey and Vienna to formulate questions that they would like to see answered. Categorization and analysis of 662 questions shows that 1) by far the most questions concern financial and business aspects of the translation professions, 2) there is a widespread pessimistic discourse about the social status and future of these professions, 3) new technologies are predominantly seen as a rival rather than a set of aids, although this fear is less pronounced in the US context than in the European institution, 4) there is a persistent concern with the ways translation theory can help practice, with the widespread assumption in the US groups that it cannot, 5) there is genuine interest in the cognitive processes of translators and interpreters, and 6) the distribution of topics varies significantly between institutions and sometimes between different years at the same institution. When taking account of such questions, course designers should be aware of the areas where professional advice does better than any academic discipline, where hands-on experimentation is the most valuable form of learning, and where a few theoretical terms and concepts can be used to focus exchanges rather than being presumed to constitute a body of knowledge in themselves.

A recurrent feature of many translator-training institutions is the real or perceived tension between 'theory' and 'practice'. This is particularly so in situations where some staff are responsible for one kind of course, and others do the other: ideas and reflection here; applied practical skills there. In the less happy asymmetries, the ideas people look down on the practitioners, while the practitioners are convinced that only they know about the realities of their profession, sometimes falsely assuming that translation scholars have never translated. This forms a minefield of presuppositions and misunderstandings that we propose only to skirt around here: we are not going to spell out the pedagogical virtues of any one established approach (cf. Lederer 2007); we are not concerned with students' attitudes to what they think 'theory' is (cf. Hanna 2009; Shih 2011). Instead, we propose to sidestep the confrontations by adopting the following points of departure:

1. A course in Translation Studies need not be about 'theory'; it can more profitably be about the production and dissemination of *knowledge*, otherwise known as 'research'.

2. Research on translation should be able to respond, however indirectly, to what students want to know about translation, especially those students who are most concerned with the acquisition of marketable skill sets.

Our aim here is to substantiate those propositions through a piece of simple data-gathering: we have asked translation students at the BA and MA levels what they would like to know about translation (here taken to include interpreting, localization, and the rest). We have then sought to determine to what extent a course on Translation Studies can or should respond to those questions. Our aim is not to put forward any model of

what an actual course should look like, but to propose a way in which course designers might go about deciding what kind of material is appropriate for certain institutions, in certain countries, and at certain levels. As will be seen, what interests students is by no means uniform across the globe.

It is important to note that we asked students for their questions right at the *beginning* of the courses, specifically at the end of a first class that outlined the nature and scope of Translation Studies. This approach runs thus parallel to previous analyses of the kinds of research proposals that students formulate at the *end* of the courses, when they are more aware of what kind of work has been done (see Takeda 2010), and indeed parallel to studies that track, in various *post hoc* ways, what kind of theories are preferred by students (Shih 2011, Hanna 2009) or at different institutions at different levels (Ulrych 2005, Sakamoto 2013). In those previous studies, students were saying what they liked from a fixed menu, or course designers were presumably reacting from such perceived preferences; in our study, students were saying what they thought might best satisfy their hunger. As will be seen, this gives a far wider range of concerns than is indicated in the previous studies.

Of course, our two simple propositions did not entirely bring us to safe ground. As will become clear, no matter how much we refer to 'research' and 'Translation Studies', our respondents found it simpler to revert to 'theory' *tout court*. And no matter how much we hoped we might actually be able to help with problems that concern practitioners, the most frequent questions tended to concern money ('How much can I earn?', and the like), where Translation Studies is of limited use as a discipline and the voice of a non-theorizing practicing professional can indeed give good answers. But so perhaps can a little research by students.

**Methodology**

Between 2012 and 2015 Anthony Pym taught four different courses, all of them on Translation Studies. At the beginning of each course, immediately after an hour or so spent explaining the general history and nature of Translation Studies, the following request was addressed to the students:

> Please formulate three questions that you would like answered in this course. The questions should concern things you want to know about translation and interpreting. Only one of the questions can concern money (e.g. How can a translator get rich?).

The same request had been made in previous years, with the responses overwhelmingly dominated by financial and business concerns: students want to know how to make money. By now placing a limit on the financial issues, we thus willfully compromised the quantitative potential of our research. Our aim was nevertheless to encourage a qualitatively wider range of responses: our concern was with *what* issues we should address, rather than just *how much* of each (or indeed how much money translators can earn).

Two of the courses were given at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey (as it is now called), which is a California institution that provides MA programs in Translation, Conference Interpreting, and Translation and Localization Management, among much else. The course in question was called 'Overview of Translation Studies' and was given in 2012 and 2014. All students enrolled in the Masters programs were required to attend the course in the third semester of their four-

semester curriculum, although waivers were granted to anyone who could show previous studies in translation theory or research. The Masters programs at Monterey currently cost a full-fee student some US$37,100 a year, which might explain the predominance of questions concerning money, probably as a return on investment. (Nevertheless, more than half the student body for the translation courses is from the People's Republic of China, and their fees are generally paid for by various Chinese institutions.) The Monterey programs are offered in a number of languages (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Russian, French, German, Spanish, with Portuguese in the 2014 cohort), each in combination with English.

The other two courses were given at the Center for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna in 2015. One course was at BA level and was called 'Ringvorlesungen zur Translationswissenschaft' (Lectures on Translation Studies); the other was at MA level and was titled 'Einführung in die Übersetzungswissenschaft' (Introduction to Studies on Written Translation). Both are obligatory in their respective degree programs. About a quarter of the students were from outside Austria, mainly from Italy and Central European countries. The students were invited to formulate the questions in English or German, and about a third did so in German (plus a few in Italian). Since university education in Austria is virtually free and there is no legal prerequisite restricting enrollment in these courses, many students sign up (443 in the BA course, 132 in the MA) but far fewer actually attend. This should explain the apparently low response rates in

Table 1. Despite the very irregular response rates, the resulting body of 662 questions comprises a respectably complex sample of concerns. Further, the two institutions, although both members of the CIUTI, are different enough in structure to allow some situational variables to be tested.

*Table 1: Details of the courses given and response rates*

| Institution | Year | Level | Course | Enrolled | Respondents | Questions |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Monterey | 2012 | MA | Overview of Translation Studies | 57 | 51 | 176 |
| | 2014 | MA | Overview of Translation Studies | 80 | 50 | 149 |
| Vienna | 2015 | BA | Lectures on Translation Studies | 440 | 82 | 246 |
| | 2015 | MA | Introduction to Studies on Written Translation | 130 | 31 | 91 |
| Total | | | | | | 662 |

In all cases the questions were collected at the end of the first 100-minute session, quickly categorized, then used as a basis for preparing the sequence of following seminars (i.e. the 100-minute sessions of lectures and activities that comprised the actual courses). At the beginning of the second session, the questions were shown to the students, discussed, and the proposed menu for the course was presented and also discussed – theoretically 'negotiated', although no actual modifications were made. Given this scenario and the virtually immediate use of the questions, the initial bottom-up categorizations were different in each case, as were the resulting sequences of topics and activities.

For the sake of the current analysis, where we are interested in comparing the different institutions and teaching levels, the questions have been re-categorized into four main bottom-up blocks: the translation profession, translation technologies, translation theory and research, and how to translate. As will become clear, these categories vastly simplify the actual range of questions and concerns.

In the following, we will we will briefly compare the percentages of questions that fell into each category in the various teaching programs (bearing in mind that the 'financial' questions was restricted in the same way in all cases). We will then discuss the nature of the questions themselves and how they relate to possible roles of Translation Studies in the actual training of translators.

**Initial quantitative comparisons**

Since we made the same request in all four cases, a few quantitative comparisons might be able to tell us something about the quality of the data (Table 2).

*Table 2. Comparison of question categories, as percentages*

| Institution | Program | Year | Profession | Technology | Theory | How to… |
|-------------|---------|------|------------|------------|--------|---------|
| Vienna | BA | 2015 | 52 | 6 | 17 | 25 |
| Vienna | MA | 2015 | 51 | 5 | 14 | 30 |
| Monterey | MA | 2012 | 37 | 10 | 22 | 31 |
| Monterey | MA | 2014 | 28 | 13 | 17 | 42 |

We can ask, for example, whether the MA groups are significantly different from the BA group, or whether the Vienna groups are different from those in Monterey. As it happens, the Pearson correlation of the two Vienna groups is a high and significant 0.98 (p=0.014), while the correlation between the two Monterey groups is considerably worse and not significant (0.747, p=0.252). Further, the Vienna MA group correlates positively with the average for the Monterey MA groups (0.827) but not at a significant level (p=0.172). In short, we note that the two Vienna groups are surprisingly alike (they are very concerned with issues concerning the professions), and that we have few grounds for claiming any statistical generalizability for the rest. We simply have to deal with the questions qualitatively, as they come.

Here we will discuss the questions within their categories.

**Questions on the translation professions**

The high numbers of questions about the translation professions (here including interpreting) indicate students' understandable concerns about their future and their worries about how to enter the labor market.

More than 50% of the questions asked in Vienna can be placed in this category and more than a third of the questions asked in Monterey. It could be argued that some of the technology-related questions should also come under this rubric, making the general concern even more predominant.

The questions about the translation professions can be organized into five sub-groups:

a) Money-related matters
b) Entering the translation market
c) Desirable skills and how to keep them updated
d) Daily routines of translators and their relationship to clients
e) Other.

The numbers of questions asked in relation to each sub-group in each program are shown in Table 3. We will look at them one by one.

*Table 3. Profession-related questions, raw numbers*

| Institution | Program | Year | Money | Market | Skills | Routine | Other |
|-------------|---------|------|-------|--------|--------|---------|-------|
| Vienna | BA | 2015 | 25 | 56 | 18 | 14 | 8 |
| Vienna | MA | 2015 | 5 | 16 | 12 | 7 | 7 |
| Monterey | MA | 2012 | 7 | 13 | 10 | 13 | 6 |
| Monterey | MA | 2014 | 3 | 3 | 17 | 11 | 7 |

*Questions about money and the market*

A purely quantitative analysis indicates that, on average, money-related matters account for 20% of the questions asked by BA students but only half that percentage among MA students. This may be because MA students have gained some experience of the market, or perhaps because they have accepted that a course on Translation Studies is not likely to give them any useful answers on such matters. It should also be noted that the Monterey students all have a separate course on 'Translation as a profession' or 'Interpretation as a profession' in their final semester (i.e. *after* the course on Translation Studies), which could also explain why fewer profession-related questions were asked at MA level.

The questions related to money can be sub-divided into three sub-subgroups of similar dimensions: "How much does a translator/interpreter charge?", "Can I survive on the pay?", and "What is the secret to getting the most money?" (here and in the following we are giving actual questions, translated in some cases). It is somewhat surprising that, alongside neutrally-voiced questions like "What are the criteria to decide how much you charge for the service?" or "How much does the average translator earn?", we find very loaded questions along the lines of "Is it possible to be an interpreter and have a private life, or should I say, without working night and day and being completely stressed?". Indeed, the idea that translators can barely live on translation is implied in about a third of these money-related questions, in both Monterey and Vienna but particularly among the BA students in Vienna. There appears to be a common understanding that translators are unable to have "proper wages" or a "competitive salary", and that their work is apparently "underrated as hell [sic]". The questions on money-related matters in the Vienna BA also include how to avoid "price dumping". This trope of the underpaid translator is also present among some of the MA students in Vienna, who wonder "how difficult it is to make a living" and whether they will survive "without winning the lottery or marrying a rich person".

It is not clear how this very pessimistic discourse on the translation professions has actually reached the students, considering that these same students have signed up for courses that are, after all, on translation. The discourse would logically have entered somewhere between their enrollment in the program and their taking of this particular course; that is, it circulates within the training institution itself. One might assume that a certain fear comes from students' growing awareness that these are not 'officially protected' professions and from the idea that free online machine translation is taking good work away from professionals. Another possible cause might be the very novelty of the Vienna BA in 'Transkulturelle Kommunikation' (Transcultural Communication), which was a new title awaiting specific content in terms of employability. Whatever the case, the questions indicate real concerns that need to be addressed.

In general, the doubts about how fees are calculated and how to enter the market suggest a lack of quite basic information. The Vienna BA students ask for tips on how

to maximize employability, concerning either how to enter the translation market or what other career possibilities are available: "Are there any job opportunities with the 'smaller' languages like Italian [sic]?"; "Do you think there is a chance to end up [in the movie business!] with a Bachelor/Master in translation and interpreting?"; "Is there another possibility for interpreters and translators than being self-employed?"). Several questions reflect a sense of injustice for apparently being placed on unequal terms with bilingual speakers ("Do translators/interpreters who received bilingual education since childhood take advantage of this? And if so, what could the other ones do to also be successful?") and a fear of market imbalance ("How to get a job as a translator [rather than interpreter] today? – There is no sufficient need for this profession anymore.").

In Vienna, the perceived shortage of demand for translators might explain why nearly half the questions seek confirmation that signing up for this BA was a good choice ("If you could go back to the beginning of your career/studies, would you choose the same path or would you do something entirely different than translation?") or, as mentioned, they ask for advice on other possible professions ("As communication experts, do we have other options on top of interpreting and translation?"). All in all, the market-related questions can be summarized as 'Where can a translator start to work?' and 'What *other* jobs could be out there for us?'. As for the MA students in Vienna, some of them share doubts similar to those of the BA students ("In what areas other than translation are our skills needed?"), but most of their questions actually concern how to market themselves in comparison to the many other professionals out there. That is, either the pessimism wears off, or the particular source of the pessimistic discourse is positioned closer to the BA students. Either way, one senses that all these students would benefit from a little actual information about the labor markets.

Similar questions are less frequent in the Monterey discourse but they do occur. For example, a Monterey MA student wonders, "How can you start off as a freelance translator or interpreter with an income of at least $40,000, a.k.a. being able to survive?". This at least indicates an informed awareness of market conditions and a target starting salary, more so than is the general case in Vienna. That said, most of the money-related questions in Monterey actually concern why conference interpreters can charge more than translators. This is understandable enough, given that the MA students are divided into three distinct streams (conference interpreting, written translation, and localization with project management). The students studying written translation, some of whom had been moved *out* of the conference interpreting stream because of insufficient grades, are concerned that the big money is moving beyond their reach on both flanks: Monterey is next to Silicon Valley, which is where localization can indeed be associated with very healthy salaries. Not surprisingly, the numbers of students enrolled in the written translation stream have been dropping in recent years.

So, while the questions in Vienna indicate a virulently pessimistic discourse on translation in general (in a country with relatively healthy employment numbers), the concerns in Monterey are more about *which* translation professions are making the money.

*Questions about skills and working conditions*

Although most questions at the BA level concern how much can be earned, those at the MA level focus more on what the student can offer in exchange for the money. The Monterey students particularly address issues of skills development, which account for no less than 40% of questions asked by Monterey students in 2014 (albeit much less in 2012). The need to keep up with skills is also of more interest in the answers from MA

students in Vienna when compared to the BA students in Vienna. That is, students come to realize that they actually need skills to offer in exchange for a salary.

The Monterey students have a clear focus on a "potential employer", "localization companies", "the industrial sector" and "clients". One students asks, "What is a good way to get across that I am worth the money I intend to charge for my translation services?". Others wonder whether it is possible or advisable to specialize in more than one field, or they wonder how to start in a new field: "How many specializations are too many?"; "If I become a freelance interpreter or translator, should I limit myself to only taking assignments I am familiar with or should I just take any assignments that are open to me?". Some questions specifically address language combinations: "Have you tried adding new languages to your skill set after you finished your studies? If so, how did you go about doing it?"; "How important is it to translate only in your native language?". There is also an interest in whether the skills needed by translators and interpreters are that different: "If someone is a good translator, could he be a bad interpreter?".

There are several questions across all groups about the daily routine of translators ("Is there a typical working day for a translator or do they vary day by day?"), on etiquette ("Interpreting dress code?") and on lifestyles ("Are freelance translators bound to be loners?"; "How do you manage physical stress?"). The Vienna MA students seem particularly interested in translator-client relations: "What should you ask the client when you accept a translation job?"; "How can we make clients appreciate what we are doing?"; "Are readers or clients able to distinguish good translation from bad ones as they can't read source texts?". Then there is some free imagination at work: "Dinner setting when escort interpreting. What do you interpret and what do you not interpret and when do you eat?", or even, "Do clients prefer women over men?".

*Other questions about the professions*

The 'other' category here was a box of even more surprises: "Most practitioners are women; is it also in Muslim countries?"; "Do we have a legal system that defends us and our decisions?"; "Should one lie – if need be – to get a job?"; "How to define good? Acceptable by the clients, acceptable by the translator [...], or both, or there is just no such a thing as 'good'?". The answers here could come from sociology, law, ethics and philosophy, at least. But one suspects these students are most in need of some good old practical advice.

Within this group, several questions relate to the status of translation in terms that go beyond mere money. A Vienna BA student asks, "How can we, as translators, achieve the goal that people respect our job more and create sensibility on how important our job is?" This is echoed by an MA student in Vienna: "How can we make ourselves more visible through our work, and more importantly, more valued in society?" And again in Monterey: "What can be done to increase the awareness of the needs for and of translators in all industries?" The presence of such questions usefully challenges the perception of a "me" generation that is just looking for personal gain, and might give some heart to those who see university education becoming a glorified employment agency. The questions that concern something like a 'higher mission' are nevertheless still in a clear minority.

In general, the questions about the professions indicate a surprisingly worried set of students, many of whom see themselves on the verge of entering an unappreciated, underpaid and undervalued profession with an uncertain future.

**Translation technologies**

All groups demonstrate awareness of the importance of technology and its growing influence. Comparing the percentages (Table 2), we find that, on average, technologies are the topic of more questions by US-based students (11.5% of all their answers) than Europe-based students (5.5% of all their answers).

Most questions can be classified under four main categories:
1) Will machines replace translators?
2) Which translation tools are most useful for translators?
3) What new forms of translation will new technologies encourage?
4) What research is there on localization and machine translation?

The distribution of the questions across these categories is shown in Table 4.

*Table 4. Questions on technology-related questions, raw numbers*

| Institution | Program | Year | Replacement | Use | Future | Research |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vienna | BA | 2015 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| Vienna | MA | 2015 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Monterey | MA | 2012 | 3 | 10 | 3 | 1 |
| Monterey | MA | 2014 | 12 | 3 | 4 | 0 |

Given the closely interrelated nature of these topics, here it is convenient to deal with them together.

Comparing the numbers, a certain fear of technology (the issue of 'replacement') appears both in Vienna and Monterey, with much variation. There is nevertheless a marked discursive difference between the institutions. A Vienna question like "Is it possible that human translation is unnecessary in the near future?" entertains the supposition that translators are in peril of extinction as an entire species. The US-based students similarly asked questions like "Will machine translation replace humans in the near future", but their main fear is generally not about being 'replaced' but of seeing themselves 'relegated to' a new status, becoming "glorified copy editors" or "computer engineers". This might be explained by their obligatory first-year courses in translation technologies and their keen awareness that many translators are being asked to post-edit machine-translated texts, which could indeed mean that all translators will become post-editors. The Monterey questions are thus of lesser or more relative apocalypses, as in: "Which language combination will it happen to first / the fastest?"

Among the US-based students we also find curiosity – and not so much fear – about the new forms of translation that are emerging thanks to new technologies. For example, "What do you think about crowdsourcing? [...] Is this the way to go in the future?" or "Will globalization eventually dictate uniformity of rules, and therefore, a unified translation format?". In that sense, there seems to be concern about the future of 'conventional translation software' like Trados and MemoQ (which are enhanced translation-memory suites, rather than machine-translation tools). There is also interest in the positive future uses of certain technologies. A couple of students wonder about speech recognition: "Could the Dragon Naturally Speaking system someday be put into use in simultaneous interpreting so as to reduce missing information to the minimum?" The optimistic phrasing of the question implies that such a technological application will indeed benefit the translation profession.

Further imbalance between US-based and Europe-based students is clear in the thirteen US-based questions about how machines can *help* translators, with no substantial counterpart in Vienna. The Monterey students also ask for recommendations on certain tools, as in "How many CAT tools/licenses should a freelancer have?" or "Will you choose cloud-based translation software over conventional translation software? Why?". These recommendations also extend to how and where to use tools, as in: "How do we best utilize translation memories or other CAT software when translating literary texts?" There are also two questions asking about research on the quality achieved when using translation technologies, although the greater demand is, once again, for some practical advice from a professional.

It would seem that the greater familiarity with technologies in Monterey leads to less fear of how those technologies will influence the future of translators.

**Translation Studies**

Questions about Translation Studies itself were asked in all groups, with similar frequencies: BA in Vienna (15%), MA in Vienna (13%), Monterey (22% and 17%). There is a great deal of variation in the questions, but most can be classified under one of six main rubrics:

1) How theory can help practice
2) What main theories need to be learned
3) How valid a science Translation Studies is
4) What the future of Translation Studies will be
5) How research is carried out
6) Questions Translation Studies could help explain.

The distribution of the questions is shown in Table 5.

*Table 5: Questions related to Translation Studies, raw numbers*

| Institution | Program | Year | Theory vs. practice | Future | Main ideas | Science | Research | Explain? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vienna | BA | 2015 | 8 | 2 | 10 | 6 | 1 | 14 |
| Vienna | MA | 2015 | 1 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| Monterey | MA | 2012 | 16 | 0 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| Monterey | MA | 2014 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 9 |

Not surprisingly, the Vienna BA students often ask for a general overview of Translation Studies, as can be seen from the ten questions requesting an introduction to 'main ideas' or authors: "What are the basic or principal models of translation studies which we absolutely have to know about?" or "What are your top five books on translation studies/translation theory for beginners?". We can assume the BA students had little background in Translation Studies. Some questions nevertheless do imply an understanding of certain theories ("Who were the most important scientists of Translation Studies in other countries outside Germany and Austria?") or a desire to know more about other traditions ("Who were […] those Russian linguists and writers who created translation studies in the USSR?").

At the Vienna MA level we find only a request to "explain Translation Studies in a few sentences to a person who has no idea of what it is", and an informed inquiry: "What's going on in translation sociology?". The Vienna MA students clearly had more than a passing acquaintance with the perceived nature of Translation Studies. This

would explain several questions about what the next 'turn' in Translation Studies could be. The corresponding questions at the BA level concern future centers for *training* translators, or the future of *translation*, not of Translation Studies.

The Monterey students, on the other hand, do not seem at all concerned about developments in Translation Studies. This would concord with their very profession-oriented approach, which is sometimes focused on very particular fields: "I am a TLM [Translation and Localization Management] student and I want to know whether there are theories for studying localization." And the one question that does concern the future of Translation Studies is actually specific to interpreting: "What are the hottest and newest topics in interpretation studies?"

*Questions on theory vs. practice*

What concerns the Monterey students most is how (or whether) translation theory can help practice. The questions here do indeed refer to 'theories', even though they followed a seminar that consistently used the terms 'Translation Studies' and 'research'. The same fundamental questioning of the role of theory is found in more than 50% of the Monterey questions, in both 2012 and 2014. Sometimes they look like sincerely open questions, as in "How can theory help us? In what way?" or "How do translation theories guide translation practices?". On other occasions, though, the questions could be seen as having a sarcastic overtone, or as conveying their own answer: "How can we manage to bear theories in mind and carry out interpretation at a fast pace at the same time?", or, with an obverse presupposition, "Can I be a successful translator/interpreter without knowledge in this matter?". All these questions generally address two main issues: Are there any practical lessons to be learnt from translation theory?, How helpful can theory be for translators?

To different degrees, these doubts also surface in Vienna. The questions again tend to highlight two opposed poles, be it 'theory' vs. 'real help' ("Which parts of the theoretic stuff will really help us?", Vienna BA) or 'isolated theory' vs. 'everyday practice' ("How can Translation Studies be useful for the professional translators? All the theory seems to be isolated from what happens in everyday practice", Vienna MA).

One of the questions asked in Monterey in 2014, with an indeterminate touch of irony, could be one that a few course designers might want to ask themselves: "What is the easiest way to convince a translator theories are significant?"

*Questions on Translation Studies as a science*

The proverbial gap between theory and practice appears to work against the image of Translation Studies as a science. This is a concern in Monterey, where one student asks, "Why is it necessary or why are there so many different theories and research approaches in such a practical science as translation studies?". The Vienna BA students pose a similar concern rather more directly: "Is translation a science?" From the same BA program we also have an invitation to alternative disciplines: "Why do you think it is important (if you do) to continue to deal with Translation Studies and theories, when we have a similar valid discipline like Comparative Linguistics and Literature (as far as I understand it)?" At the MA level in Vienna the concerns are more related to scientific validity as such: "Is the contribution of Translation Studies quantifiable?"; "Do you think that translation theories, or more generously linguistic theories, are scientific? Because most of them seem open to interpretation." As if science were not a set of interpretations.

*Questions on Translation Studies as addressing specific issues*

A heterogeneous set of questions then broadly concern the ability of Translation Studies to deal with issues that go beyond translation. For example, we are asked, "What would be a perfect language?", or a student seeks information on the "importance of English in a globalized world". Other questions concern the ethics of the workplace: "How ethically accepted is it to reject a project or co-translator to work with for their political views?" Then there are questions that are highly specific to subfields of translation: "Are there any studies done on translation of humor-related stuff?" or "What is the relationship between translation and localization?". And there are quite a few on the development of the profession: "How have perceptions of translation changed over time, and how they do vary from culture to culture?" or "What would happen if all translation ceased?" These are all good questions, although there is no guarantee that Translation Studies is in any position to answer them.

*Questions on research*

As noted, there was a worrying lack of reference to 'research', despite our best prompting: of 112 questions on Translation Studies or that could be answered by Translation Studies, only six across the three groups relate to research in any way, and of these only three them do so directly: "What scientific methods are used to conduct research in the field of Translation Studies?" (BA Vienna), "What are the most efficient research methods?" (MA Vienna) and "How to conduct interpreting research more effectively?" (MIIS 2014). The two more indirect questions were: "How can I find a good topic for my Master's thesis?" (MA Vienna) and "I plan to write a thesis this semester, how can this class help me?" (MIIS 2012). And then we have one critical question, albeit perhaps not well informed: "Why has so much research been on translation studies but still we cannot find many data concerning translation practices?"

**How to translate**

The questions on how to translate are the most common after questions about the translation profession. They account for 25% of all questions by the Vienna BA students, 30% of all questions in the Vienna MA, and 34% of all questions by the Monterey students. Most of them can be arranged under six main categories (Table 6):

1) How to measure translation quality
2) What to do with a start text that has mistakes
3) How to translate humor, dialects, idioms, and culture-specific items
4) How to find a balance between the start and target texts
5) What happens in the brain of a translator or interpreter
6) Other.

The 'Other' group here includes questions related to error handling, ethics, localization, literary translation, language combinations, how to work faster or better, and the like. Some of them could easily have been placed with the questions concerning Translation Studies.

*Table 6: Questions on how to translate, raw numbers*

| Institution | Program | Year | Quality | Bad ST | Culture | Balance | Cognition | Other |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vienna | BA | 2015 | 12 | 4 | 10 | 4 | 9 | 19 |
| Vienna | MA | 2015 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 1 | 6 |
| Monterey | MA | 2012 | 7 | 2 | 6 | 9 | 25 | 6 |
| Monterey | MA | 2014 | 11 | 0 | 9 | 12 | 7 | 14 |

Comparing the numbers, it would appear that the four groups are more or less similar, while the differences between the two Monterey groups suggest that there is no strong patterning to be expected. We could say that these questions represent the problems habitually faced by inexperienced translators (and occasionally by experienced translators as well) and are thus to be expected.

*Questions on translation quality*

Students seem to be looking for some standard of quality: between 10% and 20% of all the questions here more or less ask 'what is a good translation?'. This is certainly a good question to address. There is some empirical research available (particularly in the field of conference interpreting) and it is a topic in which students have a clear personal interest. For these very reasons, some care should be taken: bearing in mind that these students have practice classes where their translations are being evaluated all the time, anything you say risks stepping on the toes of your colleagues.

*Questions on the balance between start texts and target texts*

A few questions approach the balance between the start text and the target text from various theoretical perspectives, for example by referring to 'literal translation vs. contextual translation', 'creating vs. reproducing' or 'professional vs. expectancy norms'. There are also some quite practical questions that nevertheless display a fairly sophisticated degree of conceptualization: "What are the best strategies for translators to justify themselves when a part of their translation is considered a mistranslation, when actually it is intentional domestication?"

Specific cases for imbalances bring in many issues, which could also be categorized under ethics. Students ask about badly written start texts: "How is a translator allowed to improve/change a bad writing style of an author in literary translation?" or "How to deal with speaker's rambling in simultaneous interpretation?". Culture-specific items are also of interest: "How to translate humour?"; "Some words just cannot be found with equivalent translation in certain culture, how should we deal with that?"; "How to translate a source text in (e.g. Vienna) dialect to e.g. English?"; "How far does a translator/interpreter have the moral right to attenuate a harsh, sexistic [sic] or even violent statement?"; "What is the role of an interpreter in an emotionally tensed situation?"

*Questions on cognitive processes*

There is genuine curiosity about the cognitive process of translators and interpreters, the differences between the written and spoken modes, how to improve skills, and general influence in life ("Is there any research data that prove translators have a lower chance of getting Alzheimer's?" – yes there is, apparently, see Merluzzi 2015).

*Other questions on how to translate*

Finally, in the "Other" box, BA students have several concerns about ethics in situations of conflict and how to deal with errors; MA students in Vienna are more concerned with how to deal with distant languages; MIIS students ask about literary translation and localization. All groups, however, seek advice on how to translate better, and all four groups ask the following two questions in various ways: 'Is it more efficient to read a source text in its entirety before translating, or to start translating immediately?' and 'How can I translate faster?' A few in-class cognitive experiments should provide answers to both (for examples, see Pym 2009).

**How to answer the questions?**

So much for the questions. We have offered occasional pieces of advice on how to answer a few of them, as passing comments during the trip, but how should we go about answering the questions in some kind of general way? Could the answers perhaps guide us toward some wider principles for a course in Translation Studies?

*When not to try*

The first point to make, perhaps contrary to expectations, is that an academic discipline should *not* set out to answer every question that is in the head of a beginner student. Here are some reasons why:

1. The beginner cannot know the full range of the discipline, or what it contains that might be of interest. A university course should be designed to widen the learner's horizons of engagement, introducing *new* areas of inquiry and modes of intellectual experience. If we do no more than answer the initial questions, we risk failing in our far more valuable educational mission.

2. Translation Studies, in its present state, is unable to provide sound information or tested models for many of the questions posed. Or better, the kind of knowledge that the students seek is often local (for particular markets or particular language combinations), whereas an academic discipline by its very nature seeks to incorporate such local knowledge into *general* principles or orientations.

3. For the same reasons, many of these questions are best handled by some homely advice from experienced professionals, as we have had occasion to mention above. The master-apprentice model of teaching is certainly better suited to anything concerning a specific market niche or recommendations on career development; those questions can adequately be dealt with by someone close to those areas of experience. Of course, that person may be an academic at the same time as they are an experienced translator or interpreter: our survey of 305 translation scholars (Torres-Simón and Pym, forthcoming) found that 96 per cent of them had translated or interpreted 'regularly', and 43 per cent of them had had translation or interpreting as a paid primary activity in the past. In effect, what this means is that many teachers can speak from their own prior experience, and should feel free to do so. That is indeed what students tend to get in the best of their practical classes. And if the teacher's experience is too far in the past or too specialized to be indicative of current general trends, then working professionals can be invited into classrooms (they usually love being listened to – especially if they are

former students of your institution). Alternatively, show students how to find information online, especially from the various translator forums, associations and online job markets. Will the students be doing Translation Studies as they chase down those links? Probably not in any strict academic sense, but they will certainly learn how to find answers to their questions.

For the questions we have categorized under money, market and working conditions, there thus seems little need for the kind of wide-scale empirical and/or conceptual research that Translation Studies has to offer. When the knowledge students seek is local, generalizations tend to be singularly unhelpful.

There is nevertheless a caveat worth repeating: Even the best-intentioned advice from professional experts risks being locked into a certain technological generation and career pattern. Not everything that worked for the generation of the expert can be expected to work for the newer generations, many of whom will create new forms of employment using new technologies in new communication niches. Sooner or later, some creativity and critical thought is called for. And stimulations for inquiring minds, from research or theory, can nudge those processes along.

*When to use research*

Now, assuming that there remain a group of questions that *can* be addressed by Translation Studies and that effectively go beyond the dissemination of professional advice, how should we address positively the inquiring minds of our students?

Since those questions are clearly different in each group, it makes some sense to tailor each course to what the students at that specific time, place, and level are most interested in. Of course, life is never that simple: there are always more questions than time available (some have to be left out), many questions can be dealt with better in other courses (as mentioned above), and then there are the course designer's own interests and purposes (which do constitute a legitimate factor).

It is easy enough to say that a course in Translation Studies should simply sift through the published research and offer the findings as answers to the students' questions. In some cases, this can indeed be done. Questions about how to translate faster, for example, can be addressed by (summaries of) quite a few empirical studies on the speed variable, and most of the empirical process-study comparisons between novices and experts can show, with data, the kinds of skill sets that students should be developing. In our own courses, we have also been able to address quite a few of the more sociological questions, thanks to the work carried out on the status of the translation profession (Pym et al. 2012). For many of the other questions, though, one senses not only that empirical research has little to offer, but that it is not what the students are really looking for in the first place.

The same risk is partly at stake in the use of fine-grained workplace studies, which can show how translators are employed in some particular places but certainly cannot promise that students will reach those particular workplaces, and in some cases they might act as a disincentive for the more ambitious students. In many instances, that kind of information is probably better gained first-hand, through the actual experience of work placements. A published workplace study might then be used to trigger and focus students' accounts of their own experiences.

Our own approach to the many questions about employment has actually been a combination of all the above: a few anecdotes from professional experience are hard to avoid (every lecture needs some funny stories), data on the current employment market for translators and interpreters are something that students themselves can be made to

find (although they tend to enhance the doomsday narratives), and data on the major communication trends can be presented in an exciting way (inviting students to revise their professional expectations and look for new modes of employment, in new spheres of communication).

*When to do research*

There remains a whole set of questions on how to translate, which ideally should be dealt with in the translation practice courses. There are nevertheless general models and principles that Translation Studies can propose as bases for hands-on experimentation, in an approach that has been championed by House (1986, 2000). Basically, you present a question (for example, 'Is it worth using machine translation?'), you ask for ways to test this (perhaps to record the time spent on translating from scratch and compare it with the time spent postediting machine translation output), and you do the actual experiment in class (the example and findings are elaborated in Pym 2009). The students thus do a piece of empirical Translation Studies in order to discover things about their own translation practice.

That should not mean that the Translation Studies course simply becomes additional practice. The focus first has to be on a discussion of the major problem to be addressed, with models, data, findings, and so on. This often involves the selection of a text *fragment* in which that particular problem is in some way present, whereas work on whole continuous texts is more for the practice class. In the Translation Studies course, the students translate as a process of testing and discovery, not as a training practice in itself.

*When to use theorization*

Very few of the questions asked by students refer to anything called 'translation theory', except in the context of an assumed conflict between 'practice' and 'theory'. The concept of theory as a set of abstract interrelated concepts generally has a bad press in this particular world, and very few students actually asked about the content of any particular theoretical approach.

In keeping with this situation, and to counter the supposed uselessness, it makes some sense not to begin from any particular theory or exposition of principles. It is possible to use hands-on research, translation criticism or discussions of experiences in such a way that the various discussions reach points, perhaps inevitably, where the one word is being used in several different ways (probably the word 'translation') or certain translation decisions are being evaluated from radically different perspectives. Whenever those kinds of misunderstandings or conflicting perspectives occur, *then* is the time to propose a few concepts, or new terms, or clear principles that summarize the opposed positions. This is the sense of 'theorization' (rather than 'theory') here: the collective discussions are *theorized*, made clearer, focused, in a process that need only be pursued for as long as the learning collectivity has interest and energy. When the Translation Studies class is tackled in this way, theory is no longer a set of irrelevant things to learn but becomes, in the more optimistic scenario, a way of enabling discussions, reasoned dissent, and the students' awareness that the problems they are trying to solve have mostly been tackled by translators before them – we are not alone!

When the discussions of this kind are fairly sophisticated, we have tended to introduce terms and concepts drawn from indeterminism, risk management, effort analysis and translation use (i.e. what people actually do with translations). Of course,

similar kinds of discussions could be stimulated by a whole range of concepts, if and when they can help in addressing authentic translation problems.

This, we suggest, should be the limited role of theory in responding to questions: when there is no clear answer or consensus available, feel free to present whatever most effectively focuses thought and discussion. That could be the best way to address the many questions for which Translation Studies has no clear answers but can nevertheless offer a small discourse, if not occasional guidelines.

One final comment on teaching method: whatever you do, it has to be fun. Our last recap class in Vienna had the students translating Eurovision songs (we tried to get them to sing the translations), and all good teachers have a repertoire of extreme examples, amusing anecdotes, and exercises that surprise students' expectations. When you set out to answer questions, the point is not to provide correct answers (at least not when the questions are good): the aim should be to spark off a process of discovery, theorization and entertainment, some of which will congeal into skills.

**Conclusions**

We have presented and categorized questions asked by students when they begin a course in Translation Studies. The more surprising findings from this analysis might be listed as follows:

1. Beginner students are overwhelmingly worried about the financial and business aspects of the translation professions, to the extent that there appears to be a widespread pessimistic discourse about the future of those professions.

2. Students predominantly see new technologies as a threat rather than a set of aids, especially in the European setting.

3. Translation theory is generally seen as having an antagonistic relation with practice, especially in the highly professionalizing United States context, and there is scant awareness of research, understood as the production of knowledge, as bringing in a third term.

4. The distribution of the questions across the various topics is quite different not only between institutions, but also between different years within the same institution. This suggests that it is worth asking for questions from each new student group.

We have then asked how those questions can be addressed. Our general propositions here, mostly drawn from our personal teaching experience and experiments, are as follows:

1. Questions cannot be answered by research alone: those concerning business practices and career development, especially, are better dealt with by professional discourses, with reference to actual experience of particular working environments.

2. If understood as the production of a certain knowledge, Translation Studies can be taught in the classroom by having students carry out experiments on their own practices, particularly in relation to cognitive processes and new technologies.

3. Although established translation theories are rarely mentioned in the questions and are even more rarely able to provide answers to those questions, specific theoretical terms and concept can be introduced into class discussion, ideally at the point where they are most needed for the clarification of ideas and the focusing of exchanges.

4. Above all, the aim of the Translation Studies course should be to spark discussion and discovery.

Finally, to reiterate a point on which we still risk being misunderstood: we are *not* suggesting that a course designer should work exclusively to answer students' initial questions. The teaching situation should be able to actively engage in the production of knowledge and stimulate *new* interests among students, at the same time as the use of the teaching space as a testing ground should help theories speak at a level that is not purely for professional scholars.

That said, student researchers in search of topics might pay heed to the many areas in which Translation Studies currently has little to say to the students' questions. If you want to do research that someone might want to read and apply, if you would like to address a few perceived social problems, then you could do worse than consider what beginners would most like to know.

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**Appendix: The courses actually given**

So as not to hide anything, here are the titles of the seminars given in each of the courses we have been looking at:

*Vienna BA 2015*
1. What is Translation Studies?
2. How to solve language problems in translation and interpreting
3. How much can you change a text?
4. How not to work too hard (including cognitive studies comparing novices and experts)
5. How to work with technology (not against it)
6. Where to find work and what skills you can be paid for
7. How to solve ethical problems (using examples from the previous seminars, plus Eurovision, which had happened in Vienna the week before)

*Vienna MA 2015*
1. What is Translation Studies?
2. Indeterminacy and the history of Western translation theories (questioning *Skopos*, which they all knew)
3. Risk management as a key to translation processes
4. What is quality in translation?
5. Literacy as an ethical aim for translation
6. A sociology of the translation profession
7. The impact of technology

*Monterey 2012*
1. Overview of Translation and Interpreting Studies
2. How to decide (between things and people) (presenting *Skopos*, which only some knew)
3. Risk analysis, cognition, and how not to work too hard
4. Problems in the ethics of translation and interpreting (testing the ATA code of ethics)
5. Translation and interpreting as localization?

6. Quality in translation and interpreting
7. Are translation and interpreting really different? (a debate between two teams of students)

*Monterey 2014*
1. Overview of Translation and Interpreting Studies
2. Translation solutions for many languages (testing a new typology)
3. How to decide (between things and people)
4. Professional status and the market for translation and interpreting services
5. Cognitive research on translation processes
6. The impact of technology on translators and interpreters
7. Quality in translation and interpreting

There was obviously considerable recycling of material from year to year (don't we all?), just as there had been considerable repetition and overlap in the questions asked by each group of students. Similarly clear should be the extent to which the course designer was also drawing on his own recent research, as might be seen in the work on 'status' (which followed Pym et al. 2012), the interest in 'literacy' as a criterion for quality in the *reception* of translations (an aspect that no student has *ever* asked about), as well as ongoing experimentation with indeterminism and risk. There was also some unabashed testing of research in progress, as in the 2014 seminar on 'translation solutions' (which tested work published in Pym 2016). So we are clearly not suggesting that a course designer should work *exclusively* to supply students' needs. As said, the teaching situation should be able to actively engage in the production of knowledge and stimulate *new* interests among students, at the same time as the use of the teaching space as a testing ground should also help research speak at a level that is not purely for researchers.

There were also considerable differences in the teaching methods. In all these courses, the first part of each seminar was a 50-minute lecture-style presentation of ideas, sometimes with minor interactions interspersed (but the class sizes were very large). In Monterey, the second 50-minute session of each seminar was always a practical activity where the students had to work in small groups and then, in some cases, present the results to the whole group. Each group then had to submit to Moodle a short written report on each activity at some time within the following week. Many of the group activities are described in Pym (2010/2014), so here we are more concerned with the selection of topics. In Vienna, the large group sizes and general student attitudes were far less conducive to these activities, which were less frequent.

Despite all these differences, each seminar in these courses began with a list of the students' questions that were going to be addressed. The instructor did at least try to respond to the doubts expressed at the beginning of the course.