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## **Transition to the Translation Market as a Challenge for Translators-to-Be**

### **Abstract**

Early adulthood is a time of very dynamic developmental changes. The transition to labour market is one of the key developmental tasks at this time, whose course often has an impact on the entire professional life of an individual. In the context of academic education, it is important to highlight the first transition of students from education to labour. This perspective imposes specific targets and challenges on academic education. Therefore, in this article, the author has presented the results of research on some aspects of the pre-transition situation of the students of translation specialization of the Applied Linguistics department at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University. The research results are discussed within the context of the nature of the translation profession.<sup>1</sup>

*Keywords:* academic education, labour market, developmental changes, translation, translation market.

In the period of early adulthood, people learn to function in new life dimensions, including the professional one. Also, they need to modify their functioning in the dimensions they already know, since their position and roles in this dimension change. This is the case of family life, where young adults create their own nuclear families. They set out on a journey to seek balance between private and professional life. Both these dimensions raise people's expectations concerning happiness, success and the sense of fulfilment. All these personal and social facts take place in the context of a substantial developmental change: young

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1 Irrespective of the obvious differences between translation and interpreting, the topics covered in this article are equally valid for interpreter education as professional education. This is firstly because the transition and developmental phenomena discussed in this article concern the majority of language specialists planning their career in the field. Secondly, the students researched by the author often took part in both types of training, which is owing to how such courses are structured in Poland. Yet, in the text, reference is only made to translation and translators, mostly for the sake of simplicity.

adults become autonomous, self-determined subjects, who face the necessity to make fundamental life decisions and who bear full responsibility for their consequences. Young adults also function in the domain of academic studies, which are an important developmental factor, and which constitute a key component in building their career capital. This latter concept is understood as “subjectively perceived value of one’s personal resources (competences) needed to build and sustain employee potential” (Bańka 2006: 81).<sup>2</sup> Career capital also means professional success capital, especially in view of the instability of the demand of contemporary labour markets.

Researchers agree that the period of early adulthood is a time of dynamic developmental changes. It is a time when people face a wide range of choices (of life style, education, profession, *etc.*), challenges and crucial life decisions. All these events take place in the narrative perspective of “having the whole life ahead”, which means a vast field of options to use” (Oleś 2011: 39).

Analysing the dynamics and the specificity of the developmental changes in the period of early adulthood, Arnett (2000) points out that the debut in the world of adults considerably differs from the style of functioning in the years to follow. This author employs the concept of *emerging adulthood* to characterise people at the age of 18–29, who have not yet taken up the social roles typical of adulthood. In his view, it is unjustified to refer to people in the age bracket 18–29 as young adults, as the majority of these people are single, with no children. Neither do they have a stable professional status, as they have not yet been professionally involved on a full-time basis. On the other hand, the people in question can hardly be named adolescents, since their period of puberty is long over. They are no longer school students in terms of mandatory education, and the majority of them no longer live in their family homes. Hence, Arnett defines *emerging adulthood* as: 1) *the age of identity explorations*; 2) *the age of instability*; 3) *the self-focused age*; 4) *the age of feeling in-between*; 5) *the age of possibilities* (Tanner *et al.* 2008: 34).

The transition to the labour market is a key developmental objective in the time of early adulthood. This concept relates simultaneously to one of the parameters of the continuum of life-span development and to career development. Transition from education to the labour market is one of the stages in career development. In most cases, this stage is of fundamental meaning to one’s life (Bańka 2006). A successful transition from education to work depends on numerous factors: economic, social, cultural and educational (Roźnowski 2009).

Even though transition is often understood as a one-time passage from the sphere of education to the world of occupation, the concept of transition transcends the border area between education and work. Transition concerns the totality of one’s functioning and development in adulthood and it becomes an inseparable component of adult life. Bańka explains that

contemporary transitions from education to the labour market are reiterated sequences of the processes of accumulation of life competences (career capital), enabling individuals to effectively perform at the particular stages of life, with the sense of safety and with the acceptance of the fact of transition: from job to job, from profession to profession, from unemployment to employment, from lack of ability to ability, from adolescence to adulthood or from one social role to another. (2006: 64)

One can therefore conclude that transition is a developmental necessity.

From the perspective of academic education, the first transition – of the graduates to work – is the most vital. Analysing the objectives and the mission of contemporary higher education, Neckar-Ilnicka (2009) observes:

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2 Polish quotations translated by Konrad Klimkowski.

assuming that the prime educational objective of higher education is [...] developing skills of creative re-working of reality (also in the field of professional roles), it seems crucial that the organizers of the educational process engage in actions that enable students to advance their skills of internal development, provoking reflection and, in consequence, leading to reflexive practice in various areas of activity (including profession-related one) (2009: 47)

Thus, the academic studies must be regarded as time for strong stimulation of pro-transitional processes among students, reaching beyond the curricular, formal qualifications.

During the time of studies and simultaneously to the quest for specialist knowledge and skills, academic students accumulate knowledge and experience that are necessary for beginning autonomous life and reaching for economic independence. These attempts cover experiments with the labour market (temporary employment, part-time jobs, developing skills of simultaneous learning and working), participating in various forms of educational activity as well as engaging into actions that seemingly have no connection with professional life, like sports, leisure time activities or international travel. Even though these latter “forms of activity have no direct bearing on either work or learning, ultimately, they translate onto readiness to start one’s professional life” (Bańka 2006: 64; Bańka 2005). Moreover, as pointed out by Turner and Helms (1999), seeking job opportunities that are likely to bring more satisfaction are mostly typical of early adults (as quoted in Hankała 2002: 51).

The transition of the graduates to the labour market poses specific challenges for academic education, which stem from the new way of comprehending the concept of career – a *boundaryless career*. This concept was proposed by Arthur (Arthur & Rousseau 1996; Sullivan & Arthur 2006). Arthur claims that mobility is an inherent, constitutive feature of this kind of career. *Boundaryless career* is, therefore, a career with the imprinted transgressive approach towards the traditionally understood career making. Sullivan and Arthur (2006: 19–29) distinguish two dimensions of boundaryless career:

- physical mobility – which means individual’s transgression of the particular boundaries (such as changing jobs, employers, type of business or industry); and
- psychological mobility – relating to individual’s ability to initiate and go through changes in career, accompanied with openness and acceptance of the changes.

The translation profession and the specificity of the translation market demand it that a professional translator be mobile. Traditional organizational career infrequently happens to translators, since the very nature of translating as a professional activity presupposes a high degree of flux – *e.g.* as regard forms and types of business activity and of the translation process as such. Hence, both types of mobility are significant factors in translators’ professional success. Consequently, it becomes paramount that translator academic education should cater for the relevant student competences that can prepare them for effective and successful transition to the labour market and for empowering them for boundaryless careers.

In designing educational activities oriented towards the development of these competences, the first step to take is a diagnosis of how students or graduates perceive transition to the market. It is important to examine the broadly-understood functioning of the students, including their professional aspirations and plans, strategies for developing professional competences or methods of entering the market as attractive candidates for employment.

In view of the above, the author of this article decided to investigate how a selection of traits characterising the students (adults) in the pre-transition stage is represented in the opinions of

the students of the translation specialization in the course in Applied Linguistics at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University (UMCS).

The research on the topic concentrated around the following research problems:

- How concrete are the professional plans made by the students who are about to graduate from translator education courses?
- How do the students rate their chances of finding a job that lives up to their aspirations?
- How do the students assess their procedural knowledge about achieving success in their transition to the market?

The research was conducted with the method of diagnostic survey and the technique of questionnaire. The latter has been realized by means of the author's own questionnaire.

The research pool included 109 students of the 1st and 2nd year of MA courses in Applied Linguistics at UMCS (specializations: English-German, English-French, English-Russian and German-English). All the subjects declared their intention to work as translators. The majority of subjects were women – 88.99% – which is owing to the prevalent tendency noticeable for most academic courses in humanities. The subjects were 22–25 years old.

The first part of examination focused on the subjects' plans and aspirations as regards their future professional performance. The author wished to establish to what extent the subjects' plans were realistic and concrete and what these plans were about.

The students' plans and aspirations and their vision of professional achievements can be classified within the particular categories of success. The closer the actual outcomes of individual actions to the aspirations one had before engaging into these actions, and to the subjective indicators and designates of success in various fields, the higher the sense of being successful. This is why possessing precise expectations and aspirations for one's professional future – like these concerning the type of professional activity, the mode of translation preferred or other elements defining one's professional profile – is a determining factor in achieving career success.

Data presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the majority of the subjects possessed relatively well-defined plans as regards the main characteristic features of their future profession. The majority of the subjects planned to start their own translation business (26.61%) or to get employed with a translation agency (24.77%).

Table 1. The students' plans concerning form of employment and type of professional activity (source: own research)

<b>Plans as regards form of employment</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Starting one's own translation (single-person) business and working for many clients	29	26.61
Starting one's own translation (single-person) business and mostly working for one strategic client	3	2.75
Running one's own translation agency	5	4.59
Employment in a translation agency and accepting various types of translation	27	24.77
Running one's own business in a different industry, with translation as an additional source of income	10	9.17

<b>Plans as regards form of employment</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Employment in a different industry, with translation as an additional source of income	11	10.09
No clear professional plans or expectations	24	22.02
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Despite the fact that the majority of the researched students admitted having precise expectations as regards the form of their future professional activity, it cannot be ignored that a large group of the subjects – one out of five – admitted having no such expectations. Effective transition to the labour market is easier for those who relatively early realize and define what they want to do as a profession. This awareness gives students a chance of defining the desired path of competence development that will empower them to engage in the profession in the way they want, *e.g.* to start one's own business or get employed with an institution that requires candidates to possess a particular competence profile.

Another defining feature of the translation profession is that it can engage translators on individual basis, but it can also expect them to work as part of teams (*cf. e.g.* Gouadec 2007). Hence, successful transition to the translation market and the subsequent career successes depend on the future translator's recognition of the preferred mode of work (individual or collaborative), through recognizing one's own personality predispositions and abilities.

The research as regards the subjects' predilections for individual or collaborative style of work helped determine that in the majority of cases, the students expressed their preference for individual work (37.61%). Only one out of five students admitted being open to engage in individual and collaborative projects (see Table 2). It is worth noting that a relatively large group of subjects were unable to express their preferences on the matter under analysis (31.19%). The data collected can be suggestive of the fact that the variety and amounts of translation projects realized by the students in their courses largely contributed to the students' increased awareness of their professional preferences and choices and to their ability to modify their professional plans and expectations in accordance with these findings. It must be stressed, nevertheless, that even in the case of individual translation projects, translators need to rely on cooperation and teamwork, even though it may concern other partners in the project than co-translators, *e.g.* clients, terminology specialists, reviewers of proof-readers. Hence, an ability to effectively perform in collaborative translation projects concerns all translators, even if their favourite mode of rendering texts is individual work.

Table 2. The students' preferences as regards the mode of translator's work (source: own research)

<b>Preferences as regards the mode of work – individual or collaborative</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
individual work	41	37.61
pair/group or teamwork	12	11.01
individual and collaborative work	22	20.18
I do not know	34	31.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Successful transition to the labour market largely depends on the ability to plan actions. Skills of creating and executing plans by an adult are referred to as *planful competence* (Clausen 1991). This is a competence

that allows “assertive, deliberate and controlled process that underlies decisions as for institutional and interpersonal engagement” (Wojciechowska 2005: 480). It is important that students learn to plan their future reaching beyond the list of current tasks and objectives, like those relating to the academic curriculum. In other words, students need to formulate long-term plans, not only confining themselves to effective present performance (Pietrasiniński 1996). Keeping the above in mind, the author decided that the research questionnaire should also cover questions concerning the subjects’ concrete plans for professional development in the perspective of one and three years. The collected empirical material (see Table 3) allows an observation that the researched students quite infrequently constructed detailed plans for their professional growth; whether in a yearly perspective or with the transition threshold in mind, that is within the period after graduation and before starting (and continuing) a career. Only one out of three students admitted knowing what they want to achieve within a year in the field of job-related activities and objectives. The other researched students honestly stated that they had no profession-related plans for the coming year, or they found it impossible to determine if they had any. Thus, even if the students have some rudimentary, fragmentary plans for their professional development, they are not concrete enough to be a source of directions for the students’ educational and professional activities which they could undertake within a year. The data also demonstrated that the students perceived the three-year outlook as remote future. It turned out that only one out of three subjects was able to mention precisely his/her plans for professional development in the three years to come, that is in the period directly following graduation. The remaining group declared having no precise plans in this respect or stated that they were unable to answer if they had any.

Table 3. Precise plans for professional development among the subjects (source: own research)

	<b>Possessing a precise plan for professional development</b>			
	For one year		For 3 years	
	N	%	N	%
definitely not	8	7.34	11	10.09
rather not	28	25.69	29	26.61
hard to say	36	33.03	49	44.95
rather yes	23	21.10	11	10.09
definitely yes	14	12.84	9	8.26
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The reported research results can imply that a large number of students display certain ineffectiveness of their planning skills. These results also confirm the tendency for full-time students to perform as emerging adults, stretching somewhere between adolescence and early adulthood (Arnett 2000, 2011). People at this developmental stage tend to procrastinate their decision making and engaging into the social roles of adulthood. In the context of the demands of their future professional and life performance, it seems justifiable to expect MA graduates to possess a precise set of long and short-term plans for their career.

Another issue researched in the article is that of how the students rated their chances of finding a job that could live up to their aspirations. This issue was dealt with in the research since success expectation when planning one’s actions and objectives hugely boosts motivation for greater involvement

in the actions needed for the successful completion of plans. Łukaszewski and Doliński (2004: 447) emphasise that “the higher the expectations, the higher the results, irrespective of the initial evaluation of the chances of success.” The close bond between positive anticipation and factual achievements has been confirmed in numerous empirical works by Oettingen and collaborates (e.g. Oettingen & Mayer 2002). The authors proved that the students who exhibited positive expectations of their professional future were given more job offers and were paid more. The successful transition to the labour market of these students was closely related with their engagement in efforts to find a job. They sent a larger number of applications than those students who were less positive about their chances of finding a satisfactory job after graduation.

Table 4. Chances of finding a job that will live up to the students’ expectations (source: own research)

<b>Evaluating one’s chances to find a job that harmonizes with one’s aspirations</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
definitely big chance	12	11.01
rather big chance	44	40.37
hard to say	39	35.78
rather low chance	10	9.17
definitely low chance	4	3.67
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The research results in Table 4 show that more than a half of the researched students of Applied Linguistics (51.38%) positively anticipated their professional start. They rated highly their chances of finding a job that lives up to their aspirations. One out of eight subjects was afraid of a failed debut on the labour market, and one third of the subjects found it difficult to rate their chance of success at all. Taking into account that the subjects were at the threshold of transition to the market, the percentage of students unable to determine their chances of getting a satisfying job should be a cause for concern. In the case of this group of students as well as in the case of those who judge negatively their chances of success, one can anticipate that their transition can be a complicated process, marred with obstacles. The source of complications lies in the students’ self-esteem and self-perception in terms of being competitive and professional job candidates. However, this anticipated thesis needs confirmation through further research on factors influencing how the students of translation rate their vistas of professional success.<sup>3</sup>

The last problem discussed in the article concerned the procedural knowledge of the subjects. In other words, the students were asked about the methods they could employ to make their professional aspirations come true.

An indispensable tool for effective realization of precise plans is procedural knowledge (the knowledge of *know-how*), which complements declarative knowledge (of the *know-what* type) (Kwiatkowski 2007). The very vision of professional success helps direct an individual’s actions and constitutes a basis for evaluation of whether one’s partial objectives are attained. However needed, this vision is insufficient for realizing one’s plans unless it is complemented by the portfolio of methods and tools to be used in attaining objectives. For the purposes of the research reported in this article, it was assumed that the students who are at the very end of their translator education path should possess

3 These issues are discussed further in Klimkowska (2013).

the tools (qualifications and competences) necessary and sufficient for their engaging in the translation profession, as borne out by their academic achievements in languages and translation-related subjects. Hence, subject to analysis are the students' opinions on how they rate their procedural knowledge, instrumental in their attempts to implement their career-oriented projects.

Table 5. Students' procedural knowledge needed for successful transition to the labour market (source: own research)

<b>The <i>know-how</i> knowledge about entering the labour market</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
definitely in the know	13	11.93
rather in the know	18	16.51
hard to say	61	55.96
rather not in the know	12	11.01
definitely not in the know	5	4.59
<b>Total</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>100.00</b>

The research results presented in Table 5 above disclosed the fact that only one out of four researched translator-to-be declared knowing how to get a satisfactory job and realize one's career objectives. The remaining majority of students were either unsure of their knowledge, or they openly admitted not having it at all (71.56%). Putting the data above against the models of translation competence by PACTE (2008), EMT (2009) or González Davies (2004), one can conclude that the would-be translators questioned in the research under analysis failed to develop a satisfactory and sufficient level of competences other than the language-communicative or translation-process-related one that are vital for their effective transition to the labour market. The researched students could potentially possess the knowledge they were asked for, but it could as well be the case they did not realize having it. In consequence, the extent to which they could use the knowledge in practical professional application was significantly limited.

## Conclusions

The research results presented in this article demonstrate that a considerable group of subjects – students at the threshold of graduation from translation studies who declared that they intended to work as translators, and who were at the threshold of their transition to the labour market – exhibited considerable and well-observable difficulties in constructing precise plans for launching and developing their careers. Moreover, the students' strong indecisiveness (Rożnowski 2009) was noted, which makes it difficult for students to define or evaluate their chances of professional success. Indecisiveness can also be a barrier in determining if the students have sufficient procedural knowledge to achieve success.

The picture that emerges from the research elaborated on in this article justifies a call for a programme in translator education designed to cover the above-mentioned domains of declarative and procedural knowledge. It is a domain that reaches beyond the standard set of subcompetences often defined as "central" to translator education (language, communication, strategic subcompetences, *etc.* – see the models listed above for details). In the PACTE (2008) model, one can find an entity named



*psycho-physiological components*, which are placed graphically at the periphery of the “main” system of translator (sub)competences. This entity has been defined as follows:

As well as these subcompetences TC [translation competence – K. K.] comprises psycho-physiological components that may be defined as different types of cognitive and attitudinal components and psycho-motor mechanisms. They include cognitive components such as memory, perception, attention and emotion; attitudinal aspects such as intellectual curiosity, perseverance, rigour, critical spirit, knowledge and confidence in one’s own abilities, the ability to measure one’s own abilities, motivation, etc.; and abilities such as creativity, logical reasoning, analysis and synthesis, etc. (PACTE 2008: 107)

These are specific competences, relevant to the professional translating, but also those which can be desired in other professions. Students of translation or applied linguistics can successfully perform in number of other professional domains, where multi-language and intercultural communication-related skills are sought for. Analysing market demands posed in front of contemporary graduates, Szerląg points out that today

education is needed of the kind that encourages graduates to develop such competences as: professionalism, flexible performance, innovativeness and knowledge-management skills or international orientation in one’s professional functioning. Trying to face this challenge, academic education should proceed in two parallel and intertwined directions: one is the personal development of each student’s resources [...]. While the other should focus directly on the market and career-related competences; both in their cognitive and praxeological aspects. (2009: 37)

The significance of the successful transition to the job market for the whole reality of adult functioning and the strong emphasis put by the modern world (in its globalised, intercultural dimension) on individual and organizational effectiveness – intensified even more by individual ambitions to stand out and “be the best” (Bańka 2006) – also justify the claim about the need for helping students define clearly their professional plans and aspirations. This particularly holds good for the late stages of MA courses, where the moment when students are expected to start function professionally is not a matter of years but of months.

The research presented in this article does not exhaust the subject, and the results discussed here only give a hint of certain trends in the functioning of the students who are just about to enter the job market. Despite the fact that the subject pool for the reported research did not meet the criteria of representativeness, and that the research procedure was simplified, the research results can be inspirational for all those wishing to enhance the quality of academic education through the opening of translator training curricula to the realm of the psychological and social competences, which will undeniably help students build their career capital. The Domestic Framework for Qualifications [Krajowe Ramy Kwalifikacji] launched in Poland has created an advantageous environment for educational development, since it equips each academic institution with a high degree of autonomy as regards curriculum design. The adoption of the Framework in Poland shows that education of professionals who possess career capital empowering them to realize their plans and aspirations and hence to achieve professional success (Bańka 2006; Stochmiałek 2004) has become a priority of most higher education systems in Europe and in the world.

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