

Translation competence and the translation job market in Saudi Arabia: investigating recruitment practices and job-market readiness

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Abstract

Purpose – The current study set out to examine the recruitment practices and job-market readiness of translators in Saudi Arabia in light of the Process in the Acquisition of Translation Competence and Evaluation (PACTE) model of translation competence (TC). The main purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which the outcomes of translator training programs are aligned with job-market requirements.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study was conducted adopting a mixed-methods research design to collect qualitative and quantitative data using interviews and a questionnaire. Data were also collected from the analysis of 28 translation job advertisements. The questionnaire targeted employers, while the interviews were conducted with employers and professional translators.

Findings – The findings indicate that there is a gap between the outcomes of translator training programs and the needs of the job market with a particular emphasis on the importance of developing trainee translators' job-market skills as well as their awareness of the professional practice of translation.

Research limitations/implications – The findings of the current study are limited to the sample from which data were collected.

Practical implications – The study has significant implications for translators and translator training in Saudi Arabia. Although the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission and the Saudi Translators' Association were established in 2020, additional measures are needed to support the translation profession in Saudi Arabia. Such support may take the form of specialised accreditation for translator training programs as well as licensing requirements for practitioners. Implementing these measures will play a significant role in establishing benchmarks for translator training programs and promoting the integration of job-market requirements into translator training.

Originality/value – Although TC has been examined in the Saudi context before, examining it in light of the PACTE framework sheds new light on the job-market readiness of translation program graduates and enriches the literature on the training of translators in Saudi Arabia.

Keywords Translation competence, Job-market skills, PACTE group, Translation job market, Translation pedagogy, Translator training

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Research in translator training and TC development indicates that there is a gap between the translation job market and the outcomes of translator training programs (e.g. [Abu-ghararah 2017](#); [Alenezi, 2015](#); [Anderman and Rogers, 2000](#); [Ben Salamh, 2012](#); [Muñoz Martín, 2002](#)). This gap has been attributed to a number of institutional and pedagogical practices, such as the absence of clear program and course objectives as well as deficiencies in translator training curricula and teaching methods ([Colina, 2003](#); [Kiraly, 1995](#)), in addition to the lack of qualified faculty members to teach translation and train translators ([Al-Faifi, 2000](#);



Atari, 2012; Colina, 2003). Atari claims that “misconceptions about the true nature of translation [. . .], and mismatches between workplace expectations and translator training in academia” (2012: 104) are among the major factors contributing to this gap. The present study was motivated by the importance of aligning the outcomes of translator training programs with job-market requirements which involved addressing the following aims:

- (1) Identifying the recruitment practices adopted in the translation job market in Saudi Arabia.
- (2) Tapping into the perceptions of employers regarding:
 - The skills and knowledge anticipated in candidates for translation jobs.
 - The current skills and knowledge of the graduates of undergraduate translation programs in Saudi Arabia based on their recruiting experience.
- (3) Determining the perceptions of professional translators regarding their readiness for the translation job market as graduates of translation programs in Saudi Arabia.

To address these aims, the researcher adopted the PACTE TC model (PACTE Group, 2003) as a framework (See Section 2.1. for further details) since the acquisition and development of TC should—in principle—be the aim of any translator training program. Using the PACTE TC model as a framework, the study set out to answer the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent is the PACTE TC model reflected in the recruitment practices of translators in Saudi Arabia?
- (2) How do employers in the Saudi translation job market perceive TC in light of the PACTE TC model?
- (3) To what extent do professional translators believe their university training prepared them for the translation job market in light of the PACTE TC model?

2. Literature review

2.1 Translation competence

The notion of TC did not begin to appear in the literature on translation pedagogy and education until the 1980s (Hurtado Albir, 2017a; Kiraly, 2015). In fact, up until 2009, Göpferich (2009) claimed that developing models for TC was still in its early stages, and a bibliometric study examining research published in ten major translation and interpreting journals between 2000 and 2012 found that TC research accounted for only 8% of the studies in these journals (Yan *et al.*, 2018), which demonstrates the slow growth of research in this area.

Since the 1980s, several studies have dealt with the notion of TC, or translator competence (Kiraly, 1995), translation performance (Wilss, 1996), transfer competence (Chesterman, 1998; Nord, 2005) or translational competence (Neubert, 2000), as it was referred to by other scholars. Another trend emerging at the turn of the 21st century witnessed an interest in the development of TC models (e.g. EMT Expert Group, 2009; European Commission, 2017; Göpferich, 2009; PACTE Group, 2000, 2003). These models typically consisted of several different components, yet they seemed to agree on the significance of linguistic proficiency, cultural knowledge and the mechanics of the translation process.

From among these models the PACTE TC model was used as the current study's framework. The PACTE TC model was selected as the framework because it was developed and validated by the PACTE Group, a research group established in 1997 in the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Spain to investigate the development and acquisition of TC

(Hurtado Albir, 2017b). In addition, the PACTE TC model was more suited to the objectives of the current study compared to other models, such as the European Master’s in Translation (EMT) model (European Commission, 2017), which targets master’s programs of translating and interpreting, and Göpferich’s model (Göpferich, 2009), which is based on the PACTE TC model (2003).

The development of the PACTE TC model (2003) went through two phases. After proposing an initial model in 1998, the group modified the model in 2003 following a series of empirical experiments conducted on translation students and professional translators. The model comprises six components (See Figure 1).

2.2 TC development and the industry’s needs

The notion of competence development has long been a driving force in language-related disciplines. In translator training, competence development has motivated researchers and practitioners to design, develop and borrow teaching methods and pedagogical approaches to target the skills and knowledge required to achieve desired competence levels and meet market requirements and the needs of the industry. Nevertheless, the objective of training programs has always remained constant: developing the competence of trainee translators to enable them to carry out their work as professional translators. Unfortunately, studies in several contexts have shown that this endeavour has not always been successful.

In a 2017 study examining the needs of the translation industry in Saudi Arabia, Abu-gharaharah found a gap between the outcomes of Saudi translator training programs and the needs of the industry. This finding is echoed by other studies conducted in the Saudi context, such as Ben Salamh (2012), Alenezi (2015) and Al-Faifi (2000). On a larger scale, Al-Batineh and Bilali (2017) surveyed university translator training programs in the Arab world to examine the extent to which these programs meet job-market requirements. Based on their findings, the situation in the Arab world is a magnified image of the Saudi context; they found that what was emphasised in translator training programs was not necessarily prioritised by employers. For instance, knowledge of the professional aspects of translation was prioritised

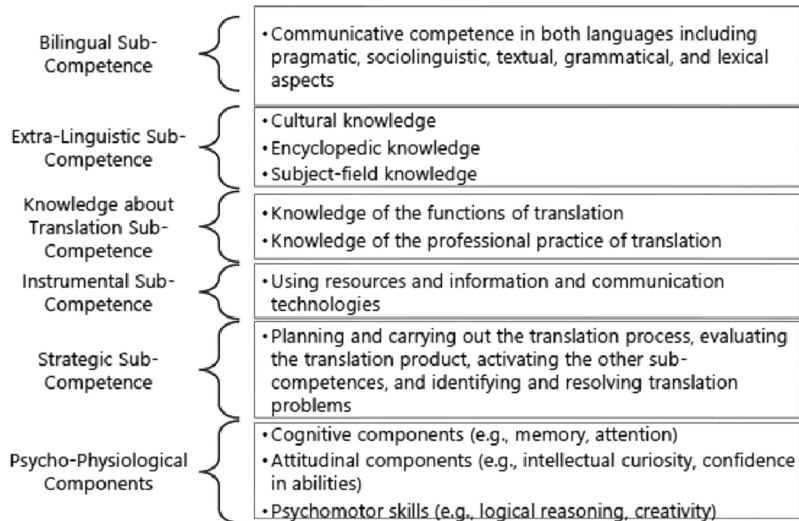


Figure 1.
Sub-competences of the PACTE TC model

Note(s): Source of figure: Salamah (2021)

by employers, while training programs did not award it a similar degree of importance (Al-Batineh and Bilali, 2017).

A similar gap was also detected between the graduates of translator training programs and job-market requirements in other countries. For instance, in Spain, a study found that translation graduates were generally unsuccessful in entering the job market or enrolling in graduate programs due to their lack of competence (Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva, 2008). Meanwhile, professional translators working in the industry typically do not receive any formal training. This paradoxical situation encouraged Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva to discuss the need to incorporate market requirements into translation training programs at universities instead of “pretending that translation practice takes place in an academic vacuum” (2008, p. 197). Also in Spain, Muñoz-Miquel (2018) found that although university programs that train translators emphasise many of the aspects required by the professional practice of translation, there remain some divergences that are not to be ignored, such as differences between the type and nature of tasks performed by professional translators and student translators, and the lack of emphasis on developing cultural knowledge and job-market skills.

The translation industry in Lithuania suffers from a similar divergence between the training of translators in higher education institutions and the requirements of the translation industry (Horbačasuskienė *et al.*, 2017). Google-like translations have been cited as an issue among translators in addition to the lack of training on computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools and the overall weak language proficiency.

The same scenario is replicated in Australia and Vietnam as Do (2020) reported that the graduates of translator training programs in both countries lacked the competences needed to perform translation in professional settings. Do found that translation program graduates faced challenges in dealing with the pressures of time and workload as well as other business-related skills, such as handling translation briefs. Accordingly, Do (2020) proposed incorporating training on these and similar skills to develop the TC of trainee translators which enables them to effectively contribute to the job market.

Research in China also revealed that the preparation of Chinese translators fails to meet the requirements and expectations of employers. In a 2020 study, Tang (2020) found that the successful preparation of translation students relies on clear course objectives that are aligned with the expectations of employers and the requirements of an evolving translation industry. Failure to achieve alignment in these areas results in the production of translators who do not meet job-market expectations. Tang (2020) suggested reconsidering the assessment criteria in academic institutions to make them compatible with the conventions of the industry. This involves taking into consideration factors such as the purpose of the translation, agreed upon deadlines and desired levels of quality.

The gap between translator training and job-market expectations seems to be a dominant concern in the literature on translator training as shown by the research reviewed in this section. Another nagging concern is that the issue seems to persist even though it was detected decades ago. This may lead to the conclusion that translator training programs seem to be resistant to change which puts them at risk of becoming redundant if they continue to produce translators that fail to meet the expectations of employers and the requirements of the translation industry.

3. Methods

3.1 Design

A mixed-methods case study design was adopted to address the study’s research questions since case studies and mixed-methods are appropriate approaches when conducting context-oriented research (Duff, 2008). Accordingly, both qualitative and quantitative methods were

used to collect data for the study. More details about data collection, sampling and analysis are presented next.

3.2 Data collection and sampling

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using a questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire targeted employers, while the interviews targeted both employers and professional translators. In addition to these two instruments, the researcher analysed translation job advertisements.

3.2.1 Questionnaire. The researcher developed a questionnaire targeting employers (See [Appendix 1](#)). The questionnaire was based on a questionnaire developed by [Khoury \(2016\)](#). The original questionnaire was in English, but the researcher translated it into Arabic before piloting it.

The questionnaire consists of three sections: (1) the perceptions of employers regarding the components of the PACTE TC model, (2) the perceptions of employers regarding the skills of the graduates of undergraduate translation programs and (3) the recruitment practices adopted by employers. Sections 1 and 2, measuring degree of importance and degree of agreement, respectively, are in closed-item Likert scale format and consist of 15 items each, and section 3 contains several multiple-choice items.

To measure the reliability of the questionnaire, the value of Cronbach alpha was calculated for the Likert scale sections (i.e. sections 1 and 2). The two sections were found to have a high degree of internal consistency as the values of Cronbach alpha were 0.735 and 0.922 for sections 1 and 2, respectively.

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using a link generated by the SurveyMonkey online survey website (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>). The link was sent to potential participants using WhatsApp, LinkedIn and email.

3.2.2 Interviews. To gain a deeper understanding of the recruitment practices of translators in the Saudi job market, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with professional translators and employers of translators. The researcher created interview guides for both interviews (See [Appendix 2](#)).

During the interviews, both employers and professional translators were invited to describe recruitment practices and requirements in the Saudi translation job market. They were also asked about the skills needed for translators to practice their jobs professionally. In addition, professional translators were asked to reflect on the programs from which they graduated and the extent to which they believed these programs prepared them for the job market.

Both interviews were conducted virtually using the Zoom video communication application due to the precautionary measures enforced during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Using Zoom also facilitated recording the interviews. Interviews were scheduled after potential participants consented to the recorded interview, and on the day of the interview, the researcher sent the participants the Zoom meeting link.

The interviews were held over a three-week period to accommodate the schedules of the participants. Interviews were conducted in English or Arabic based on each participant's preference. The duration of employer interviews averaged 55 min, while the duration of professional translator interviews averaged 40 min.

3.2.3 Translation job advertisements. Since the study aimed to examine recruitment practices for translation jobs in the Saudi job market, as well as determining the extent to which the components of PACTE's TC model are reflected in such practices, the researcher analysed job advertisements for traces of the model. A total of 28 advertisements for the job of "translator" in Saudi Arabia were collected and analysed. The documents were collected from online sources (i.e. LinkedIn, Twitter, WhatsApp).

3.2.4 Sampling. The researcher employed a purposive non-probability sampling technique for the samples of the questionnaire and both interviews since these two instruments targeted

participants with particular characteristics who were willing to participate (Dörnyei 2007; Mellinger and Hanson, 2017).

A total of 13 participants completed the questionnaire. Table 1 below provides further details about the participants.

As for the employers' interview, the researcher interviewed four employers who were all males with 4–11 years of experience recruiting translators. Three of them worked in the private sector, and the fourth worked in the semi-government sector. The fourth interviewee also had previous recruiting experience in both private and government sectors.

Additionally, the researcher interviewed nine female professional translators who were also graduates of Saudi undergraduate translation programs. Their experience ranged between 1 and 10 years.

3.3 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics for quantitative questionnaire data were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 25.0). As for the data collected from section 3 of the questionnaire, the researcher quantified the responses to calculate percentages.

To analyse the interview data, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews and summarised the main points based on the interview guides and study questions. Data were entered into a MS Office Excel spreadsheet. After entering the data, the researcher identified recurrent themes. These themes were grouped under the different components of the PACTE TC model and quantified to calculate percentages. To report the results, codes composed of an abbreviation and the number of the interviewee were used to maintain the participants' anonymity. The abbreviation "E" was assigned to employers and the abbreviation "PT" was assigned to professional translators, so for instance, E3 and PT5 refer to employer 3 and professional translator 5, respectively.

As for the analysis of translation job advertisements, the researcher created a coding scheme corresponding to the components of the PACTE TC model. Each component was assigned a code from 1 to 6 as follows: Bilingual sub-competence "Code 1", Extra-linguistic sub-competence "Code 2", Knowledge about translation sub-competence "Code 3", Instrumental sub-competence "Code 4", Strategic sub-competence "Code 5" and Psycho-physiological components "Code 6". The following description was used to apply the coding scheme:

- (1) *Bilingual sub-competence*: Any reference to language proficiency or communication ability including standardised language proficiency requirements.
- (2) *Extra-linguistic sub-competence*: Any reference to cultural, specialised or general knowledge, such as knowledge of specialised fields of translation including specialised terminology.

	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Years of experience recruiting translators</i>		
1–5 years	6	46.1
6–10 years	5	38.5
More than 10 years	2	15.4
<i>Sector</i>		
Government	4	30.8
Private	6	46.2
Semi-government	3	23.0

Table 1.
Questionnaire sample

- (3) *Knowledge about translation sub-competence*: Any reference to solving translation-related issues, dealing with different types of texts or dealing with the professional aspects of the translation profession (e.g. meeting deadlines).
- (4) *Instrumental sub-competence*: Any reference to research skills or using information technology, references or translation technologies.
- (5) *Strategic sub-competence*: Any reference to translation tasks or the translation process.
- (6) *Psycho-physiological components*: Any reference to cognitive, attitudinal or psychomotor skills, such as motivation, teamwork or attention to detail.

After carefully reading the advertisements and coding the data using the coding scheme explained above, the researcher classified the data appropriately using a MS Office Excel spreadsheet. The classified qualitative data were then quantified to calculate percentages. Other relevant details were also entered into the spreadsheet, including applicant nationality, gender, qualifications and experience.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The researcher observed relevant ethical considerations to protect the rights and identities of participants by practising informed consent. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and that their participation was voluntary meaning they could withdraw from the study at any time. They were also informed that any collected or recorded information and data were to be used for research purposes only. In addition, they were assured that their identities would remain confidential.

4. Results

4.1 Questionnaire

Descriptive statistics of sections 1 and 2 of the questionnaire are presented in [Tables 2 and 3](#), respectively. The tables are followed by the results of section 3. Since the questionnaire was in Arabic, the researcher translated the items into English to present the results.

The third section of the questionnaire showed that, overall, there was no preference for a particular gender among employers as only 23.1% of them reported that they preferred female translators, and 76.9% had no preference. Furthermore, in terms of requirements, the data revealed that employers required a bachelor's degree in translation, a bachelor's degree in English language, a standardised English language proficiency test score and/or experience (See [Figure 2](#) for further details).

Only 15.4% of the employers who required a bachelor's degree in translation also required a GPA of at least "Excellent". Most of the employers who completed the questionnaire (i.e. 61.5%) accepted a GPA of at least "Very good", and only 23.1% of them did not have GPA requirements.

There was agreement among the participants on recruitment procedures. All of them required translation job applicants to sit for a translation test with the majority (i.e. 92.3%) indicating that the test was of limited time. Furthermore, most of the employers (i.e. 69.2%) allow applicants to use references during the test including paper and electronic dictionaries and the Internet.

4.2 Interviews

4.2.1 Employers' interview. The employers' interview revealed that translation job applicants were required to sit for a translation test and attend an interview as part of the recruitment

Item	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Level of importance
<i>Bilingual sub-competence</i>			
1 English language proficiency	4.00	0.00	Very important
2 Arabic language proficiency	3.85	0.38	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.93		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Transfer sub-competence</i>			
3 Ability to translate from English into Arabic	3.92	0.28	Very important
4 Ability to translate from Arabic into English	3.92	0.28	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.92		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Extra-linguistic sub-competence</i>			
5 General knowledge	3.38	0.51	Very important
6 Specialised knowledge (e.g. medical)	2.92	0.64	Somewhat important
7 Knowledge of target language culture (i.e. English)	3.62	0.51	Very important
8 Knowledge of source language culture (i.e. Arabic)	3.54	0.52	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.37		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Instrumental sub-competence</i>			
9 Using references and resources, such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc.	3.62	0.65	Very important
10 Using translation technologies, such as machine translation software, CAT tools, translation memories, etc.	2.92	1.12	Somewhat important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.27		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Strategic sub-competence</i>			
11 Ability to overcome obstacles during translation	3.77	0.44	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.77		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Knowledge about translation sub-competence</i>			
12 Ability to determine the client's needs and meet such needs (e.g. determining the purpose of the translation, meeting deadlines)	3.54	0.66	Very important
13 Dealing with work requirements, multitasking, stress, time management, etc.	3.62	0.51	Very important
14 Cooperation and teamwork	3.69	0.48	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.62		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Psycho-physiological components (motivation)</i>			
15 Motivation to work as a translator	3.54	0.52	Very important
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.54		<i>Very important</i>
<i>Overall mean of section 1</i>	3.59		<i>Very important</i>

Table 2.
Section 1: Employers' perceptions on the importance of the sub-competences of PACTE's TC model in translation job applicants

process. Furthermore, translation tests were typically timed, and applicants were allowed to access resources during tests. As for the nature of the translation tests, the interviewees reported that tests typically included material related to the organisation's scope of work. Tests were also typically in both directions unless the nature of translation work at the organisation is only in one direction. The interviewees explained that interviews with applicants usually focused on personality traits including aspects such as the applicants' attitudes, willingness to learn and ability to accept criticism.

Figure 3 shows the quantification of the responses to the employers' interview. When the interviewees were asked about the most important skills translators need by describing the qualities they look for in candidates, all four interviewees agreed on the importance of linguistic proficiency (i.e. bilingual sub-competence) and the ability to carry out the translation process including evaluating the product and addressing translation issues

Item	M	SD	Degree of agreement
<i>Bilingual sub-competence</i>			
1 English language proficiency	3.62	0.65	Very good
2 Arabic language proficiency	3.38	0.87	Good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.50		<i>Very good</i>
<i>Transfer sub-competence</i>			
3 Ability to translate from English into Arabic	3.62	0.77	Very good
4 Ability to translate from Arabic into English	3.00	1.00	Good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.31		<i>Good</i>
<i>Extra-linguistic sub-competence</i>			
5 General knowledge	3.08	0.76	Good
6 Specialised knowledge (e.g. medical)	2.92	0.64	Good
7 Knowledge of target language culture (i.e. English)	3.08	0.76	Good
8 Knowledge of source language culture (i.e. Arabic)	3.31	0.75	Good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.10		<i>Good</i>
<i>Instrumental sub-competence</i>			
9 Using references and resources, such as dictionaries, encyclopaedias, etc.	3.62	0.77	Very good
10 Using translation technologies, such as machine translation software, CAT tools, translation memories, etc.	2.85	1.07	Good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.24		<i>Good</i>
<i>Strategic sub-competence</i>			
11 Ability to overcome obstacles during translation	3.31	0.63	Good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.31		<i>Good</i>
<i>Knowledge about translation sub-competence</i>			
12 Ability to determine the client's needs and meet such needs (e.g. determining the purpose of the translation, meeting deadlines)	3.54	0.78	Very good
13 Dealing with work requirements, multitasking, stress, time management, etc.	3.62	0.87	Very good
14 Cooperation and teamwork	3.92	0.64	Very good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.70		<i>Very good</i>
<i>Psycho-physiological components (motivation)</i>			
15 Motivation to work as a translator	3.77	1.09	Very good
<i>Overall mean</i>	3.77		<i>Very good</i>
<i>Overall mean of section 2</i>	3.38		<i>Good</i>

Table 3.
Section 2: Employers' perceptions on the skills of graduates of undergraduate translation programs

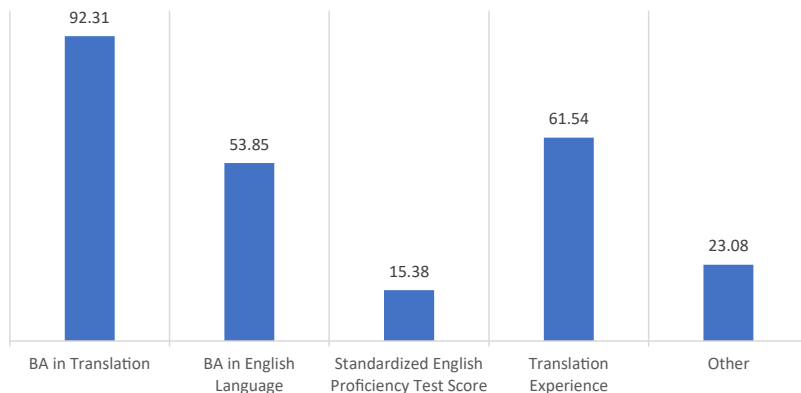


Figure 2.
Recruitment requirements based on the questionnaire

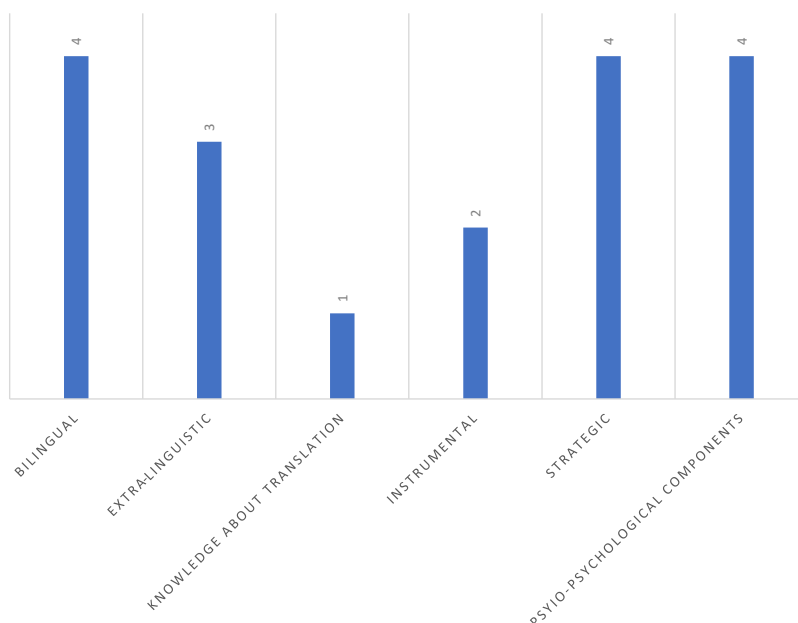


Figure 3.
Importance of the
components of
PACTE's TC model
based on employers'
interview

(i.e. strategic sub-competence). The four interviewees also unanimously agreed on the importance of attitude, personality traits and cognitive abilities (i.e. psycho-physiological components).

Only three of the interviewees referred to the importance of specialised or cultural knowledge (i.e. extralinguistic sub-competence), while only two of them referred to research and information technology (IT) skills (i.e. instrumental sub-competence). Only one interviewee referred to aspects that fall under knowledge-about-translation sub-competence (i.e. meeting deadlines).

When asked to describe the graduates of undergraduate translation programs in Saudi Arabia based on their experience recruiting translators, E2, E3 and E4 reported that translation graduates need more training on job-market skills because they believed that there is a gap between the training students receive at undergraduate university programs and the job market. E2 also explained that there may be a problem with the way translation is taught and assessed in university courses due to the lack of basic translation skills among applicants. This was confirmed by E3 who also believes that graduates seem to be more concerned with translation quality at sentence level, while they lacked the ability to produce a cohesive text. E3 believes that this might be due to the way translation is evaluated at universities. Finally, E4 proposed that authentic texts should be used to train undergraduate translation students to help simulate job-market conditions.

4.2.2 Professional translators' interview. The professional translators' interview revealed that translation tests and interviews were a requirement in the recruitment process for translation jobs. Applicants are allowed to access resources during translation tests. Interestingly, the professional translators interviewed explained that employers' expectations differed depending on the type of organisation and the nature and amount of translation work required. Some employers, for instance, focused on communication skills

and other aspects such as commitment, meeting deadlines and the ability to work under pressure.

The interviewees revealed that they generally felt prepared and ready for the translation job market as a result of the training they received at their undergraduate translation programs. However, their sense of readiness only involved translation skills. Four of the nine professional translators interviewed by the researcher reported a lack of training in the professional practice of translation. PT5 and PT8 wished that they had received more training on translation technology use, and PT2 and PT6, who were both freelance translators, felt they lacked skills relevant to setting up a freelance translation business (e.g. marketing skills, drawing up translation agreements, determining fees and project management skills).

As for the strengths and weaknesses of undergraduate translation programs, the interviewees cited intensive practical field-specific translation training as a major strength. However, they discussed several weaknesses. For instance, PT5 and PT8 mentioned the lack of practical training in translation technology use, and PT1 and PT3 mentioned that some courses overlapped or could have been merged and replaced with other courses. Some interviewees graduated from programs which did not offer a field training component, and they cited this as a weakness. PT2, PT5, PT6 and PT7 discussed the lack of job-market skill training, such as the use of non-authentic texts in translation courses.

The interviewees also tapped into the nature of translation work in the Saudi job market. The interviewees reported performing a variety of different tasks other than translation and language-related activities. Translators employed in the government sector mostly performed administrative work with little or no translation work. On the other hand, translators in the private or semi-government sectors performed translation work alone or a combination of translation work and other language-related activities, such as proofreading, reviewing, editing, summarising, creating content, enhancing written or translated material and copywriting. They also typically performed administrative tasks.

Finally, the interviewees listed several issues when asked about the challenges facing them in the Saudi job market. The biggest challenge they reported was the lack of support and appreciation for translators and their work. PT1 explained that some employers fail to provide translators with the support and tools they need to perform their jobs. This includes things as simple as a quiet place to work. Another challenge that was mentioned was the false expectations of a translator's role. For example, interviewees explained that some employers expect translators to possess other skills in the areas of marketing and graphic designing. Consequently, when a translator fails to meet such expectations, employers believe the translator is underqualified. Another major issue that was brought up during the professional translators' interview was the lack of job progression for the profession of translation. PT1 and PT7 explained that there are no career development opportunities for translators which discourages many translators from continuing to work as translators and pushes them to seek other career options with more opportunities for growth.

4.3 Job advertisements

Analysis of the corpus of translation job advertisements revealed that only 50% of the advertisements required applicants of Saudi nationality [1]. Furthermore, 71.43% of the advertisements targeted applicants of both genders. The analysis also showed that 60.71% of the advertisements included "translation" among the required degrees in combination with other degrees, such as English language, linguistics or literature, and in some cases the phrases "or its equivalent" or "or relevant field" were used in conjunction with "translation". Interestingly, only 7.14% of the job advertisements restricted applicants to those who have a degree in translation, while 17.86% did not mention a specific degree and used expressions such as "any discipline" or "relevant qualification". Some advertisements (14.29%) required

language-related degrees other than translation, such as English language or literature, with no mention of a degree in a translation whatsoever.

It is worth noting that translation jobs at government agencies (e.g. ministries) typically adhere to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development’s job classification guide, and according to this guide, graduates of several language-related disciplines can apply for the job of “translator”.

As far as experience is concerned, 33.33% of the advertisements did not require experience. However, some of them were posted by government agencies which means they adhere to the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development’s job classification guide. The guide determines an applicant’s appropriate grade based on his/her qualifications and years of experience. In the current study, 23.33% of the advertisements were for “entry level” or “fresh graduate” positions. Experience was listed as a requirement in 43.34% of the advertisements. The required period of experience in the advertisements ranged from 1 to 10 years.

Figure 4 reflects the frequency of the components of PACTE’s TC model in the advertisements. The advertisements referred to skills, characteristics and types of knowledge that corresponded to the components of the model. Only two of the 28 advertisements were found to include elements that correspond to all six of the components of the PACTE TC model.

As illustrated in Figure 4, 72.41% of the advertisements referred to elements that corresponded to strategic sub-competence. This included any descriptions of translation-related tasks, such as translating different types of texts, editing or proofreading, as well as reference to the translation process itself, for example, reading the source text and revising the translation.

Bilingual and extra-linguistic sub-competences were also described by more than 50% of the advertisements. Some of them only stated “fluency in English and Arabic”, while others

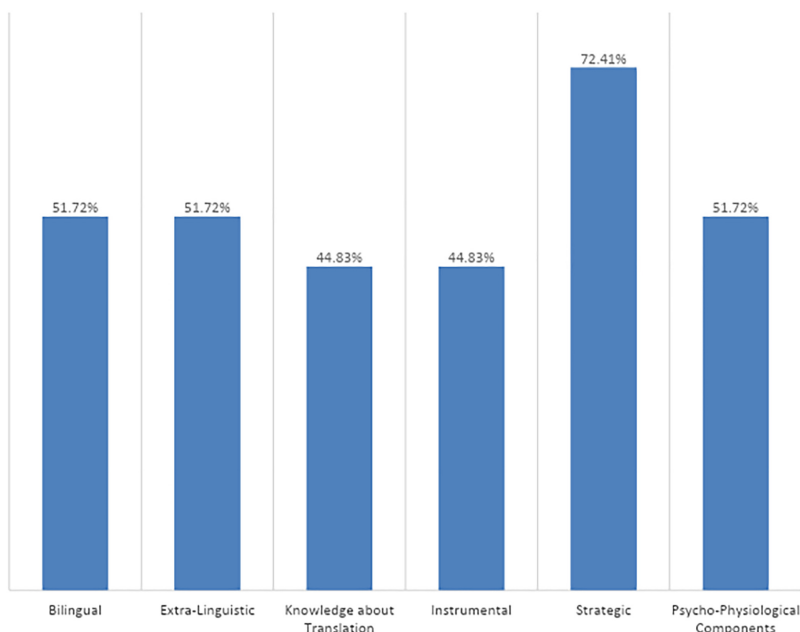


Figure 4.
Components of
PACTE’s TC model in
job advertisements

detailed specific aspects of language competence (e.g. competence in English and Arabic grammar, spelling, etc.). The same applies to extra-linguistic sub-competence. Some advertisements just mentioned the need to have knowledge in specialised fields of translation, while others were more specific and identified the required field, such as the medical field, energy sector or defence industry.

Knowledge about translation and instrumental sub-competences received equal attention (44.83%). Some advertisements detailed elements related to knowledge about translation sub-competence, such as communicating with researchers or relevant entities to verify the translation, while others just mentioned characteristics like meeting deadlines and time-management skills. Instrumental sub-competence was described differently in the advertisements. Most of the advertisements required knowledge of basic computer applications (e.g. MS Office, computer skills and IT skills). Very few advertisements referred to dictionaries or other reference materials, or any form of translation technologies (e.g. translation memories, translation software and translation tools).

Finally, almost 52% of the advertisements mentioned characteristics related to psycho-physiological components, such as attention to detail, the ability to work without supervision, responsibility, motivation and interpersonal skills.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of the study indicated that the PACTE TC model is reflected in the recruitment practices of translators in Saudi Arabia. The analysis of advertisements for the job of “translator” showed that, overall, the components of the PACTE TC model are reflected in the recruitment of translators. The analysis also revealed that strategic sub-competence was emphasised over the other components as more than 70% of the advertisements contained elements corresponding to it. Strategic sub-competence was followed by bilingual and extralinguistic sub-competences and psycho-physiological components. Knowledge about translation and instrumental sub-competences were also described in the advertisements. This finding is supported by the data obtained from the employers and professional translators as the two groups unanimously reported that translation tests were a main component of the recruitment process. Translation tests are essential and they are an indicator of applicants’ TC through the evaluation of the quality of their performance.

However, the current study’s findings do not fully correspond to the findings of the survey conducted by [Al-Batineh and Bilali \(2017\)](#). Their study found that competences corresponding to PACTE’s knowledge about translation and instrumental sub-competences were emphasised in translation job advertisements and descriptions. Their study also found that language proficiency ranked second, which supports the current study’s findings. The lack of importance placed on instrumental sub-competence in the documents analysed in the current study may be because translation technologies may not be widely used in the Saudi translation job market, in addition to the fact that Saudi undergraduate programs do not provide sufficient practical training in this area. Thus, since employers are aware of the lack of training, they do not expect fresh graduates to have experience with translation technologies, as one of the employers interviewed in the current study reported.

Even though the findings indicated that the PACTE TC model was reflected in the recruitment practices of translators in Saudi Arabia, the findings also revealed the disregard of the significance of academic specialisation for translation job applicants. Employee data along with the data obtained from the analysis of translation job advertisements showed that the majority of employment opportunities are available to graduates of any relevant or language-related degree with less than 10% of the opportunities restricted to translation-degree holders. This corresponds to the findings of [Ben Salamh \(2012\)](#) and [Khoury \(2016\)](#). It also indicates a

lack of appreciation for translation and translators, which is a common issue among professional translators (Ben Salamh, 2012; Gouadec 2007). This view was supported by the data obtained from professional translators in the current study as some of them reported on the lack of support they received at their workplaces. This disregard may be due to stakeholders' perceptions of the low competence of translation graduates (Khoury, 2016), or it may be due to the common misconception that "anybody who knows two languages can translate".

In terms of employers' perceptions of TC, the researcher found that employers placed very high importance on the components of the PACTE TC model. In particular, the questionnaire indicated that employers value bilingual, strategic and knowledge about translation sub-competences. These findings closely correspond to Khoury (2016) since the employers in her study also rated these three sub-competences highly. It was interesting to note that employers in the current study believed that, within extralinguistic sub-competence, cultural knowledge and general world knowledge were "Very important", while specialised knowledge was only "Somewhat important". The same was observed in instrumental sub-competence since employers were more interested in job applicants' ability to use reference materials (e.g. dictionaries and encyclopaedias), then their ability to use translation technologies. The two observations may be related since specialised knowledge and translation technology use can both be developed through experience and training. Additionally, some employers may not use translation tools, or they may provide new employees with relevant training on the particular tools they use.

The employers' interview partially supported the findings above. The interviewees unanimously agreed on the importance of bilingual and strategic sub-competences followed by extra-linguistic sub-competence, instrumental sub-competence and, finally, knowledge about translation sub-competence. Unlike the findings of the questionnaire, only one of the employers referred to the importance of meeting deadlines, which is a skill that falls under knowledge about translation sub-competence. As for the other sub-competences, employers referred to language proficiency, solving translation problems and research skills. Furthermore, all four interviewees agreed on the importance of psycho-physiological components such as motivation, willingness to learn, attitude, interpersonal skills, critical thinking and accepting criticism, which supports the findings of the questionnaire.

The final aspect addressed in the current study was the perceptions of professional translators towards their readiness or preparedness for the job market as a result of the training they received at their undergraduate university programs. The study's findings revealed that professional translators reported feeling prepared to join the job market after graduating from undergraduate translation programs. They appreciated the intensive and specialised practical translation practice and training they received as university students. However, their sense of preparedness was related to translation skills. Some of the interviewees felt a lack of preparation in terms of professional skills including translation technology use and other business-related aspects of the translation profession. They also required further training on job-market skills. This includes aspects as simple as the use of authentic texts, as it was reported in the professional translators' interview that the use of non-authentic texts created a gap between university training and the job market.

In sum, the current study found that the PACTE TC model is reflected in the recruitment requirements and practices of translators in the Saudi job market. The model's components are also recognised by the employers of translators in Saudi Arabia. However, there still seems to be a gap in the training of translators at undergraduate translation programs as reported by practitioners. Although this gap may not be detected in basic translation skills, training that simulates job-market conditions is still needed, which supports similar findings in the literature (Casas-Tost and Rovira-Esteva, 2008; Do, 2020; Horbačauskienė *et al.*, 2017; Muñoz-Miquel, 2018; Tang, 2020). Translators need to be trained in ways that feed into their

awareness of the professional context and environment in which translation occurs, rather than the way it occurs in academic settings. This conclusion is supported by a recent study which found that two-thirds of the graduates of translation programs do not find employment as translators or interpreters, which calls for the reconceptualisation of the design of translation programs at higher education institutions (Hao and Pym, 2022).

6. Implications and limitations

The current study has significant implications for translator training in the Saudi context. The translation sector in Saudi Arabia is in need of the implementation of further regulatory measures. Although 2020 witnessed the launching of two monumental projects: the Literature, Publishing and Translation Commission and the Saudi Translators' Association, more initiatives are needed to provide translators with the support they require. These initiatives include discipline-specific accreditation for translator training programs similar to the EMT framework adopted in Europe. The licensing of professional translators should also be enforced to support the profession and its professionals. Licensing contributes to improving the status of translators in the professional community as well as improving the quality of translation services. Specialised accreditation and licensing, once implemented, will help establish benchmarks for translator training programs and promote the integration of job-market requirements into translator training.

In conclusion, the researcher does not attempt to make any general claims based on the findings of the current study as no study is without limitations. The findings of the current study are limited to the sample from which the data were collected.

Note

1. It is worth noting that at the time of preparing this manuscript, the job of “translator” in Saudi Arabia became restricted to Saudi nationals pursuant to a decision issued by the Saudi Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development (Ministry of Human Resources and Social Development, 2022).

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استبانة أصحاب العمل

عزيزي صاحب العمل

أشكرك على الموافقة على المشاركة في هذه الاستبانة التي تهدف الباحثة من خلالها إلى دراسة كفاية الترجمة في الإعداد الأكاديمي للمترجمين في الجامعات السعودية وذلك من خلال استطلاع آراء أصحاب العمل فيما يلي:

أولاً: مدى أهمية توفر مهارات معينة فيمن يتم توظيفهم من المترجمين

ثانياً: مدى امتلاك خريجي برامج الترجمة فعلياً لتلك المهارات

يرجى ملاحظة أن الباحثة ستعامل مع الإجابات بسرية تامة، ولن تستخدمها في أغراض غير تلك المتعلقة بالبحث.

ولكم جزيل الشكر والتقدير..

1. هل أنت موافق على المشاركة في هذه الاستبانة؟

نعم

لا

أولاً: البيانات الشخصية

2. ما عدد سنوات خبرتك في توظيف المترجمين؟

1-5 سنوات

6-10 سنوات

أكثر من 10 سنوات

3. إلى أي قطاع تنتمي جبتكم؟

القطاع الخاص

القطاع الحكومي

أخرى، أمل ذكرها هنا:

4. ما طبيعة مجالات الترجمة في جيتكم؟

مجالات متنوعة

مجالات محددة، أمل ذكرها هنا:

5. ما اتجاه أعمال الترجمة في جيتكم؟

من اللغة العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية

من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية

كلا الاتجاهين

ثالثاً: الاستمارة

6. من وجهة نظرك، ما مدى أهمية توفّر الخواص والكفايات التالية عند توظيف المترجمين؟

	مهم جداً	مهم إلى حد ما	قليل الأهمية	غير مهم
1				
إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية				
2				
إجادة اللغة العربية				
3				
إجادة الترجمة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية				
4				
إجادة الترجمة من اللغة العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية				
5				
الثقافة العامة				
6				
المعرفة في مجالات متخصصة مثل المجال الطبي وخلافه				
7				
معرفة ثقافة اللغة الإنجليزية				
8				
معرفة ثقافة اللغة العربية				
9				
استخدام المراجع والمصادر المختلفة بمهارة، مثل القواميس بأنواعها والموسوعات وغيرها				
10				
استخدام تقنيات الترجمة والأدوات المساعدة على الترجمة، مثل برامج الترجمة الآلية والترجمة بمساعدة الجاسوب وذاكرات الترجمة وغيرها				
11				
القدرة على التغلب على الصعوبات التي قد تواجه المترجم أثناء عملية الترجمة				
12				
القدرة على تحديد احتياجات العميل وتلبية تلك الاحتياجات (مثل: معرفة الغرض من الترجمة، والالتزام بمواعيد التسليم)				
13				
التعامل مع متطلبات العمل، مثل تعدد المهام والضغط وإدارة الوقت وغيرها				
14				
التعاون والعمل ضمن فريق				
15				
إظهار الحماس تجاه العمل في مهنة الترجمة				

7. ما تقييمك للمهارات والجوانب التالية في خريجي برامج الترجمة عند توظيفهم أو إخضاعهم للاختبارات أو المقابلات الشخصية؟

ضعيف جداً	ضعيف	جيد	جيد جداً	ممتاز	
					1 إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية
					2 إتقان اللغة العربية
					3 إجادة الترجمة من اللغة الإنجليزية إلى اللغة العربية
					4 إجادة الترجمة من اللغة العربية إلى اللغة الإنجليزية
					5 الثقافة العامة
					6 المعرفة في مجالات متخصصة، مثل المجال الطبي وخلافه
					7 معرفة ثقافة اللغة الإنجليزية
					8 معرفة ثقافة اللغة العربية
					9 القدرة على استخدام المراجع والمصادر المختلفة بمهارة، مثل القواميس بأنواعها والموسوعات وغيرها
					10 القدرة على استخدام تقنيات الترجمة والأدوات المساعدة على الترجمة، مثل برامج الترجمة الآلية والترجمة بمساعدة الحاسوب وذاكرات الترجمة وغيرها
					11 القدرة على التغلب على الصعوبات التي قد تواجه المترجم أثناء عملية الترجمة
					12 القدرة على تحديد احتياجات العميل وتلبية تلك الاحتياجات (مثل: معرفة الغرض من الترجمة، والالتزام بمواعيد التسليم)
					13 القدرة على التعامل مع متطلبات العمل، مثل تعدد المهام والضغط وإدارة الوقت وغيرها
					14 القدرة على التعاون والعمل ضمن فريق
					15 الحماس تجاه العمل في مهنة الترجمة

ثالثاً: إجراءات توظيف المترجمين

8. هل تفضّل توظيف المترجمين أم المترجمات في جبهتكم؟

- المترجمين
- المترجمات
- ليس هناك تفضيل معين

9. ما شروط توظيف المترجمين في جبتكم؟ أمل اختيار جميع ما ينطبق
- أن يكون المتقدم من حملة البكالوريوس في تخصص الترجمة
 - أن يكون المتقدم من حملة البكالوريوس في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية
 - أن يكون المترجم حاصلًا على درجة معينة في أحد اختبارات اللغة الإنجليزية المعيارية، مثل أيلتس أو توفل
 - أن يكون لدى المتقدم مقدار معين من الخبرة في ممارسة الترجمة
 - أخرى، أمل ذكرها هنا: _____
10. إذا كانت درجة البكالوريوس في تخصص الترجمة أحد الشروط الرئيسة لتوظيف المترجمين في جبتكم، فهل يُشترط معدّل تراكمي محدد؟
- نعم، يجب أن يكون المعدّل التراكمي "ممتاز" على الأقل.
 - نعم، يجب أن يكون المعدّل التراكمي "جيد جدًا" على الأقل.
 - نعم، يجب أن يكون المعدّل التراكمي "جيد" على الأقل.
 - لا يُشترط معدّل تراكمي محدد.
11. هل تتضمن إجراءات التوظيف لديكم إخضاع المتقدم إلى اختبار ترجمة؟
- نعم
 - لا
12. إذا كانت إجابة السؤال رقم 11 "نعم"، فهل الاختبار محدود الزمن؟
- نعم
 - لا
13. إذا كانت إجابة السؤال رقم 11 "نعم"، فهل يُسمح للمتقدم باستخدام أي مراجع أو وسائل مساعدة أثناء الاختبار (مثل: القواميس بأنواعها أو الاتصال بشبكة الإنترنت أو غيرها)؟
- نعم
 - لا
14. إذا كانت إجابة السؤال رقم 13 "نعم"، فما هي الوسائل أو المراجع التي يُسمح باستخدامها؟ أمل اختيار جميع ما ينطبق
- القواميس الورقية
 - القواميس الإلكترونية
 - البحث على الإنترنت
 - أخرى، أمل ذكرها هنا: _____

15. أمل ترك أي ملاحظات أو تعليقات ترون إضافتها هنا.

.....
.....
.....

16. بيانات الاتصال:

..... الاسم:
..... اسم الجهة:
..... معلومات الاتصال:

Page 5 of 5

Appendix 2 Interview guides

Interview guide (Employers' Interview)

Interview questions:

Part I

How much experience do you have hiring/recruiting translators?

Part II

Walk me through a typical hiring process (advertising, exam, and interview).

From your experience hiring/recruiting translators, what are the qualities you look for in candidates?

From your experience hiring/recruiting translators, how would you characterize or describe graduates of Saudi undergraduate translation programs?

Part III

What is the biggest challenge you face when looking for qualified translators?

Is there anything you would like to add or share?

Probes:
SILENCE
Can you give me an example of what you mean?
Please tell me more about that.

Interview guide (Professional Translators' Interview)

Interview questions:

Part I

How long have you been working as a translator? Are you employed/a freelancer?

Did your university studies prepare you for the job of translator?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the program from which you graduated?

Employed: Part II (**EMPLOYED**)

Freelancer: Part II (**FREELANCERS**)

Part II (EMPLOYED)

Walk me through a typical hiring process (advertising, exam, and interview).

From your experience, what qualities do recruiters look for in translators?

Were you given a job description? If so, what are your tasks and responsibilities? Does your actual work match the description?

Part II (FREELANCERS)

Have you ever been employed as a translator? If so, go to Part II (**EMPLOYED**) then come back to Part II (**FREELANCERS**).

How long have you been freelancing?

How do you get translation work? What do your clients expect?

Part III

What is the biggest challenge you face when looking for a job/freelancing work?

Is there anything you would like to add or share?

Probes:

SILENCE

Can you give me an example of what you mean?

Please tell me more about that.

About the author

Dania Salamah is an Assistant Professor at the Department of English Language and Translation at the College of Languages and Translation, King Saud University where she has been teaching since 2004. She holds a BA in Translation and an MA and PhD in Applied Linguistics. Her current research interests revolve around translation pedagogy and its alignment with job-market requirements with a focus on translation competence and its development. She is also interested in investigating translation teaching strategies and the design and development of translation curricula and programs in higher education institutions. Dania Salamah can be contacted at: dsalamah@ksu.edu.sa

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