

# Chapter 10

## Translator Intercultural Competence: A Model, Learning Objectives, and Level Indicators

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter proposes possible answers to the questions of what translator intercultural competence is and how it can be developed. Namely, an eight-factor model of the competence is proposed, associated learning objectives and developmental level indicators are introduced, and a ten-session pedagogical sequence aimed at student translators' intercultural competence development is suggested. The solutions presented cannot be considered as definitive but are based on both theoretical and empirical data.*

### INTRODUCTION

Student translators eagerly laugh at machine-translated texts but rarely realize that a culturally-blind translation hardly communicates better. Students may also recognize that the translator's role is to help the reader "get access" to the originally foreign reality and link it to his/her own cultural world. This does not mean, however, that students are aware of the need to develop their intercultural competence (IC hereon) or know how to do this.

This is why *Translation (and Interpreting)* curricula must cater for translator intercultural competence (TrIC hereon) development in a systematic way. To help instructors do this, the present chapter proposes a TrICmodel based on

both theoretical and empirical research. Associated learning objectives with developmental level indicators, as well as corresponding awareness raising statements, are introduced next. Finally, a 10-session intercultural training sequence is presented.<sup>1</sup>

### TRANSLATOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE: THE CONCEPT AND A MODEL

While recognizing that student translators need IC simply to live together with culturally-different others (e.g. Commission of the European Communities, 2005, p. 13; Council of Europe, 2008;

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6615-3.ch010

or UNESCO, 2009), this chapter discusses IC-configuration student translators should develop as future professionals whose task is to enable intercultural communication. The first question here is what elements form TrIC.

### **Translation Studies Scholars on Intercultural Competence**

Although many Translation Studies (TS hereon) authors advocate the importance of IC, few specify what this competence comprises. Two scholars who do are Arjona (1978) and Kelly (2005).

Arjona (1978) defined translation as “a specialised discipline within the field of intercultural communication” (p. 35). Therefore, students had to develop awareness of the communication process, focusing on “the basic problems of intercultural and interpersonal communication”, along with an awareness of the translator’s role in this complex intercultural communication. These had to be complemented by knowledge about both cognitive and affective differences and similarities between the cultures students were likely to work with and by capacity to identify problems. Furthermore, students had to practise research skills and become familiar with strategies they could use to solve the problems identified (Arjona, 1978, pp. 36-37).

Thus, Arjona’s understanding of TrIC reflects the translator’s functions in an act of intercultural communication. And perhaps even more significant is that the scholar purports to account for all the elements that students should develop to be considered interculturally competent.

Kelly’s (2005, pp. 32-33 and 74) conceptualisation is very different in this sense. While the *cultural and intercultural competence* is distinguished from other competences student translators must develop, it does not account for all the “(inter)cultural” elements of translator training. Thus, knowledge of culturally-specific textual and discourse conventions is regarded as part of *communicative and textual competence in at least two languages and cultures*; research

skills belong to the *professional and instrumental competence*, while problem identification and solving form part of the *strategic competence*.

The *cultural and intercultural competence* consists of the intercultural communication process awareness, factual knowledge of relevant cultures and familiarity with how respective values, beliefs, stereotypes, etc. usually get represented in texts. Kelly also highlights the importance of studying students’ own culture (and not the foreign culture(s) only) and learning to manage information. Whether the *cultural and intercultural competence* has any observable behavioural constituent is not clear. Besides, the very inter-cultural mediating component is never mentioned when Kelly speaks of the *cultural and intercultural competence*.

The third TS author we will mention does not offer any detailed description of TrIC but voices an opinion about its nature that is worth discussing. Thus, Robinson (2007, p. 195) claims that in modelling IC and intercultural training translation scholars should start where intercultural communication training “leaves off”. For him, the difference between TrIC and other possible configurations of IC is both qualitative and quantitative - TrIC is a higher stage of IC development than those non-translators (non-mediators) reach. Such position does not appear objective. A student does not need to develop all the other IC elements to the up-most level before starting to learn how to mediate. TrIC is a distinct configuration of IC, but this does not mean that it is somehow more advanced.

These three approaches to describing TrIC can be considered representative of the body of thought within TS. Arjona’s approach, bringing together all the relevant elements, seems more instrumental for organising translator intercultural training. More elements should, however, be included and the ones mentioned by Arjona require further specification. Kelly’s model, in turn, demonstrates how difficult it is to separate TrIC from other competences a professional translator needs. As for Robinson’s position, it makes clear that the task of mediating

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