


Translator Competence Requirements Perceived by Translation Clients in the Ever-Changing World

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ABSTRACT

Although the roles of clients have been stressed by TS scholars for decades, the client-translator relationship is a relatively less explored topic. Asian clients' voices have been under-researched. This paper examines the competence requirements that Asian clients look for when hiring translators. It discovers whether there are changes in translator competences expected by clients over time. To achieve the objectives, the Optimale survey was replicated. Analyses are made based on 64 Asian clients participating in the present study and the data from the Optimale survey. It was found that both groups attach greater importance to quality than to speed and put more emphasis on experience than on qualifications. Translators' awareness of professional ethics and standards is stressed. Technological competences are emphasized. When it comes to translation competence, both groups have similar expectations: translators' ability to produce good-quality work followed by their ability to render materials in one or more highly specialized domains and use of translation memory systems.

KEYWORDS

Client-Translator Relationship, Sociology of Translation, Translation Clients, Translation Profession, Translator Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

In Translation Studies (TS), although the past two decades have witnessed a huge revival of interest in discussing translator competences, a fuller picture will not be obtained if the perspectives of clients, who are important stakeholders initiating and commissioning a translation task, are not taken into consideration. Unfortunately, the voices of translation clients have been relatively under-researched empirically in spite of the fact that their roles have been emphasized by TS scholars for decades (Nord, 2018; Orlando, 2016; Prunč, 2007; Risku, Pein-Weber & Milošević, 2016). In Europe, some empirical studies were conducted to examine clients' viewpoints. For example, the Optimale Survey (2012) identified the competence that clients (translation services providers) expect when seeking to hire

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translators. Lafeber (2012) explored the decisive elements, including the combination of skills and knowledge that inter-governmental organizations (IGOs) look for in candidates during the recruitment process. Risku et al. pointed out that the “client–translator relationship is seldom researched in TS and cannot be easily distinguished from its specific real-life context” (2016, p. 995). They thus conducted a case study to compare the views and expectations of a translator and a client regarding an actual translation process. Comparatively speaking, in Asia, clients’ voices have received limited attention. Little knowledge about how clients perceive translators, such as their professionalism and competences, has been gained.

In TS, analyzing clients’ opinions is quite a challenging task. One of the reasons is that “client” is a “rather dangerous blanket term” as noted by Chesterman and Wagner (2014, p. 49). Because “the relation between the reader, the client and the author can vary” (ibid), they identified three types of clients: (1) those who are authors. For example, these clients may have written a text in their first language or in a foreign language and are having the text translated; (2) those who are middlemen between readers and authors. They may work in translation agencies or are responsible for hiring translators in a company; and (3) those who are readers who need the translation because they do not understand the source language. In recent years, due to globalization, clients’ demand for translation service has continued to increase. The Common Sense Advisory (CSA) predicted that the language services industry keeps growing and the market will increase to US\$56.18 billion by 2021 (Globalization and Localization Association, 2019). The global translation service markets are predicted to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6.7% during 2021–27 (Market Watch, 2022). In particular, the pandemic boosted the need to communicate across languages and cultures for information exchange and therefore has led to a rise in the number of both translators and translation service providers (TSP). However, there are very few published results about the opinions of TSPs or those who work in translation agencies responsible for hiring translators in a company (the second type of clients according to the classification of Chesterman and Wager). In the literature, Optimale Survey (2012) is one of the most seminal empirical studies investigating the way TSPs perceive translator competences in the workplace. The survey, in which over 680 people took part, identified the competences requirements within the European translation industry. However, the focus of the survey was mainly on Europe, and it was conducted in 2011. The findings may not be able to reflect the current situation because translators are now expected to be highly competent multitasking agents possessing excellent language skills, advanced information literacy, and great technological and instrumental competences (Enríquez Raído 2016, p. 970). As a result, it is worthwhile to replicate the Optimale survey so as to understand the current competences that the second type of clients in Asia look for when they seek to hire translators and to discover whether there are changes in translator competences expected by clients over time. The information will not only be useful for academics involved in offering translator training but also for translators to enhance their professionalism.

To achieve these purposes, this paper presents the findings derived from a large-scale empirical study, which employed a two-phase mixed-methods approach collecting both quantitative and qualitative data for investigating the way translators and clients in Asia perceive translator professionalism, viewed as a multifaceted term in recent decades (Cragie, Higgins, Hervey & Gambarotta, 2016; Kiraly, 2014; Kościółkowska-Okońska, 2012; Robinson, 1997). The quantitative phase involved two questionnaire-based investigations: one for translators and another for clients. The analyses of the translators’ perspectives can be found in another publication (Liu, 2021). The survey for clients contains items examining the way clients perceive translator professionalism and the competences that they look for when hiring practitioners. A detailed analysis of clients’ perception of translator professionalism is reported on in another publication (Liu, 2019). The present paper precisely delves into the way clients view translator competence. The second phase of the large-scale empirical study involved follow-up interviews to shed light on the findings and reasons behind the participants’ responses to the questionnaire. The results will be published.

2. PREVIOUS EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON CLIENTS' EXPECTATIONS OF COMPETENCES

In TS, the notion of “competence” has been widely discussed since the 1970s. At first, the term denoted linguistics as the key element and emphasized the bilingual proficiency of translators (Koller, 1979; Wilss, 1976). After several decades, “competence” has been developed into a multicomponent idea involving skills and knowledge that are not limited to linguistics, translation, cultures and technologies. Concepts or models proposed by scholars such as Neubert (1994), Presas (2000), PACTE (Hurtado Albir, 2017) and EMT competence framework (2017) are examples. Pym (2003, 2021) observes that “competence” has become a multicomponent term, and it “grows and grows and there is no reason why it can’t stop growing” (2021). He explains that students make mistakes or are unable to do things when learning. Scholars then convert the elements into components going into the competence model. “So, what interests me particularly is that the way these models developed was based on deficits, deficit pedagogy, observing what people can’t do, assuming they should do it and then you put it into the model” (ibid). Pym further points out one of the problems with these multi-componential competence models is that the components or categories are under-determined by evidence. In other words, there is a lack of empirical research supporting them. In addition, the models are mainly proposed by translation teachers and/or scholars. As emphasized, clients’ perspectives are important if one aims to have a better or even thorough understanding of “competence”. As a result, the author of the present study believes that it is worthwhile to obtain and analyze clients’ opinions when discussing translator competence, and this is the motivating factor for conducting the present study. In what follows, seminal empirical studies examining clients’ perception and expectations of translator competences or the work of translators will be reviewed before introducing the methodology of the present study.

Havumetsä’s PhD thesis (2012) examined clients’ views on the quality of non-literary translation and their expectations of translators via a survey conducted among companies of the Finnish-Russian Chamber of Commerce that were likely to place orders for translations in the Finnish-Russian language pair. The survey, conducted in 2006, analysed responses from 104 companies. The findings suggested that translators are expected to be experienced, can master the terminology of special fields and have language and translation skills though formal qualifications were not regarded as important. The author urges the importance of increasing clients’ knowledge of what competence means in translation and the general visibility of the translation profession because this would be beneficial for both translators and clients.

Lafeber’s PhD thesis (2012) carried out a survey to identify and rank the skills and knowledge that intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) translators need. The survey, done in 2009, was participated by over 320 translators and revisers working at 24 IGOs. It was found that IGO translators need far more than language skills, as they also need research, computer, analytical and interpersonal skills, as well as extensive general knowledge and specialized subject knowledge.

As mentioned, the Optimale Survey (2012) investigated how clients (TSPs) determine the current and emerging competence requirements of translators within the European translation industry in 2011. One of the premises was that the survey covered a range of competences required within the industry. Therefore, the survey contained 34 competence-related items grouped into five aspects: qualifications and experience (6 items), translation competence (12 items), technological competence (8 items), project management (5 items) and marketing competence (3 items). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 4-point Likert scale. Over 680 respondents participated. As not all respondents gave answers to all sections in the questionnaire (some answered certain parts but not all), analyses of data were done based on 530 to 580 respondents. According to the findings, the top ten competences ranked by the TSPs are the abilities of translators to: (1) produce 100% quality work, (2) identify client requirements, (3) define and/or apply quality control procedures, (4) translate materials in one or more highly specialized domains, (5) have experience in the field of professional translation, (6) be aware of professional ethics and standards, (7) define resources required, (8) produce estimates,

(9) have a university degree in translation or related fields and (10) consolidate client relationships. Because the present study replicates the Optimale survey to understand the voices of translation clients in Asia, analysis will be done to compare the findings of the present study and that of the Optimale survey, which mainly targeted European translation markets.

Risku et al. (2016) note that TS show little interest in client expectations of the tasks of translators and point out that only a few empirical research projects related to the field of technical communications have been done. They quoted the surveys conducted by Görs (2012) and Straub (2012) and explained: “the results of Görs’ study indicate that clients in the technical sector expect translators to have proven knowledge of the subject matter and prefer translators to be native speaker of the target language” (ibid, p. 994–95). According to Straub’s study (2012), clients in the technical communication field “strongly demand and expect translations to be accurate and free of errors [...]. They also expect translations to be produced and delivered quickly” (ibid, 995). In order to investigate the expectations clients and translators have of each other, Risku et al. (2016) interviewed a British freelance translator of German to English and the translator’s German-speaking client, both resident in Austria. The authors went into the way differing views shape the cooperation and communication process and, thus, influence the translation process and the translation as a whole. The results identified six differences between the translator’s and the client’s preconceptions and expectations regarding the translation process: (1) their assessment of the level of specialization and use of specialist terminology in the source text; (2) their expectations regarding the responsibilities for terminology research; (3) their assessment of the type of file to be translated; (4) their assumptions regarding time frame, working hours and deadlines; (5) their expectations regarding responsibility for layout and (6) their expectations regarding responsibility for quality management. The authors concluded that “many of the discrepancies and asymmetries of expectations did not reduce the mutual trust, but instead contributed to the fact that the mutual expectations were exceeded” (ibid, 1002).

In sum, a better understanding of clients’ expectations and their perception of translator competences can foster client-translator relationships. In addition, relevant findings will have pedagogical implications because translation teachers will be informed of the requirements of translation clients to develop curricula that accommodate market needs and trends. Translation students should be given opportunities to acquire up-to-date information that will enable them to be better prepared to enter the field and develop a lifelong career in the translation industry.

3. OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, it examines the competence requirements that Asian clients who are middlemen between authors and readers (hereafter referred to as “clients”) look for when hiring translators. Second, it discovers whether there are changes in translator competences expected by clients over time (about five years). For example, do clients attach more importance to translators’ technological competence because of new advances in technology nowadays?

Guided by the objectives, this research addresses the following questions:

1. What are the competences that clients in Asia look for when they seek to hire translators?
2. Are there any changes in the competence requirements over several years?

The research questions are worth investigating for several reasons. First of all, clients’ perceptions of translator competences are important to the development of the translation field, as illustrated. Also, depicting the way clients perceive translator competences over an extended time would allow people to better analyze the previous or current situation or even predict emerging competence requirements from translation clients. This can only be studied by repeated observations of the same variables over time. In TS, most empirical studies rely on a cross-sectional methodology, which takes a snapshot of

a population at one specific time. However, follow-up studies are of great value because this approach allows researchers to explain the changes over time.

As mentioned, a questionnaire for clients, which consists of three parts, was used for data collection and analysis related to translator competences and translator professionalism. The first part collects clients' background information and the translator competences that clients look for when hiring translators (explanation will be given in the following paragraphs about how the Optimale Survey was replicated). The present study only analyzes the data collected from the first part of the questionnaire. The second part gathers clients' perceptions of the various translator professionalism-related items. The third part is an open-ended question inviting clients to express their opinions on translator professionalism. The findings derived from the second and third parts can be found in other publications (Liu, 2019, 2022).

The Optimale Survey (2012), written in English and distributed from April 2011 to October 2011, was replicated for the present study. It was chosen because the focus aligns with that of the present study: to examine the competence requirements from clients who are middlemen between authors and readers. Also, the Optimale Survey is a large-scale research project of over 680 respondents. The sample size is respectable and the data are worthwhile for comparison. Although the specific set of clients studied in the two surveys differs, changes of clients' opinions on competence requirements over time can be analyzed (see Babbie, 2016 for more explanation about longitudinal studies). The findings are useful to give a better idea of the thoughts of translation clients.

In order to facilitate a valid comparison, the research method used by the Optimale survey was adopted. First of all, a 4-point Likert scale was devised. Second, the same items were asked. Minor revisions were made to two questions after a pilot study, which was conducted on July 1, 2016, by inviting three clients—one from Hong Kong, one from China and one from Taiwan—to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback on it. The pilot study tested the wording of the questionnaire and examined the completion time. The respondents from China and Taiwan found no problem filling in the questionnaire. However, the respondent from Hong Kong suggested minor linguistic changes to two questions which are related to qualifications and experience: the “experience or knowledge in other professional fields than translation” in the Optimale survey was simplified to “experience or knowledge in non-translation fields”. Also, “a good knowledge of the language industry and professions” was revised to “a good knowledge of the translation and language industry” as the client pointed out that the translation industry should be made explicit in the question because the study is about the field of translation. The author thought that the client's suggestions were valuable. The wording of these two items has been changed, so comparing the two items between the present study and Optimale survey will not be made. After the pilot study, the finalized questionnaire was sent out. A non-probability convenience sampling technique was used to collect data from Asian clients who were mainly located from the following Internet websites: *etogether.net*; *LinkedIn*; *ProZ*; *TranslatorCafé*; *Translator Pub* and *Taipei Translators & Interpreters Union*. A private message was sent to the recipient through the site's system in order to invite the person to fill out the questionnaire. The recipients were informed of the research objectives and methodology. After receiving the recipient's reply and confirmation, the questionnaire and a cover letter was sent to the person via email. A reminder was sent to those who did not return the questionnaire after one month. The questionnaire was distributed from July 1, 2016 to July 31, 2018. A total of 64 clients who were middlemen between readers and authors returned completed questionnaires.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Of the 64 clients, 19 (29.7%) were female and 45 (70.3%) were male. Table 1 shows the geographical distribution of the participants. Most were from East Asia. To a great extent, the client respondents are well educated. Twenty-five (39.1%) reported undergraduate education, and 37 (57.8%) reported some postgraduate education, of whom 6 completed a doctorate. Two clients did not answer. A total of 9 clients (14%) had degrees in translation and/or interpreting.

Table 1.
Geographical distribution of the respondents

Country/ City	No. of respondents	Frequency (%)
China	16	25.0
Japan	13	20.3
Hong Kong	12	18.8
Thailand	6	9.4
Korea	5	7.8
Singapore	4	6.2
Taiwan	4	6.2
Vietnam	2	3.1
Indonesia	1	1.6
Macau	1	1.6
Total	64	100.0

It is observed that Asian clients tend to hold a relatively positive attitude towards communicating with translators. On a scale of 1 (dislike very much) to 5 (like very much), 26 clients (40.6%) said that they like communicating with practitioners, and 14 (21.9%) like communicating with translators very much. Twenty-three (35.9%) are indifferent, and only 1 client (1.6%) disliked communicating with translators. In this study, the clients are quite visible to translators. In the questionnaire, they were asked how often they communicate with their translators. The responses were on a 5-point scale from 1 = never to 5 = very often. Half of them (50%) often get in touch with translators, and 16 (25%) very often communicate with practitioners at work. Fifteen clients (23.4%) sometimes communicate with translators, and only one (1.6%) seldom does so. These findings align with those in the existing TS literature which points out that, in the past decade, direct communication between translators and clients has become more common (Pym et al., 2013). This phenomenon can be attributed to the advanced development of translator-client online platforms which enhance the visibility between clients and translators. One example is the online translator-client social networking sites (SNSs) such as Proz.com, which provides translators with an opportunity to advertise themselves for marketing and networking (Garcia, 2015). Clients and translators are given more chance to communicate and cooperate directly in this digital era (see Pym, Orrego-Carmona & Torres-Simón, 2016 for more discussion about translator-client contacts in SNSs).

The following sections seek to answer the two research questions. Participants were asked to give their answers to the competence-related items on a 4-point Likert scale scored as follows: 1=not required; 2=not so important; 3=important; 4=essential. Although the Optimale survey also employed a 4-point Likert scale, the mean values for the items asked in the questionnaire were not provided. Instead, bar charts presenting the results were given. For example, when the respondents were told to rate the importance of translators' ability to render materials in one or more highly specialised domains, a bar chart shows that 2% of the respondents indicated "not required", 9% said "not so important", 56% chose "important", and 33% "essential". Based on these categorial data, the author of the present study then calculated the mean value (=3.2) for this competence requirement. By doing so, comparing the mean values between the Optimale survey, conducted in 2011, and the present study, done between 2016 and 2018, becomes possible. However, notice has to be taken that *t*-tests cannot be performed to determine if there is a significant difference between the means, because of the lack of the key data values of the Optimale Survey.

4.1 Experience Over Qualifications

Asian clients attach more importance to experience (mean=3.56) than to qualifications (2.48) when seeking to hire translators. They also place heavy emphasis on translators' awareness of professional ethics and standards (3.52). In addition, Asian clients tend to think that a good knowledge of the translation and language industry is important (3.11). These perspectives are shared by the Optimale survey respondents who also put industrial work experience and adhering to professional ethics and standards as the top two priorities, as displayed in Table 2. These findings suggest that time does not change clients' preferences for professional and industrial experience over a university degree in translation or language-related fields. An issue worthy of translation educators to consider is how to equip translation students with some work experience, so that students, both undergraduates and postgraduates, can be better equipped before graduation. When reviewing the current trends in professional translator training in MA in translation programmes run by world-leading universities, Fabrychna (2021) found that those distinguished programmes tend to emphasize providing students with practical translation because they offer a combination of practice classes, workshops, translation project management practices and translation internship. In the translation industry, internship is always seen as the first step in a translator's career. It is also considered by educators and scholars as a strategy for translation programmes to provide enculturation into professionalization (Massey, 2016), to help students acquire prior translation experience and competence (Li, 2007) as well as to serve as a bridge between classroom knowledge and real-world practice (Liu, 2017). The findings of the present study further reinforce the importance of incorporating internship/placement as part of the curriculum of a translation programme. By doing so, fresh graduates will thus be in an advantageous position when entering the field, as they have acquired some work experience which is valued by translation clients.

4.2 Translation Competence

As illustrated, the term “competence” has evolved into a multidimensional notion in the recent decade. To understand how clients view competences, the Optimale survey concentrates on “translation as a process designed to produce a document in a given language for a client within a specific deadline (Valero-Garcés & Toudic, 2015, p. 190). The mean values in Table 3 show that the top four competences ranked by both Asian clients and the Optimale survey clients are the same: translators' ability to produce good-quality translation work, followed by their ability to render materials in one or more highly specialized domains, use of translation memory systems and extraction and management of terminology.

When it comes to translation competence, speed and quality seem to fall at opposite poles. As Lacruz points out:

[...] there is a trade-off between speed and quality. Working faster may cause the translation product to be of lower quality, whereas a focus on increased quality may slow the translator down. To make matters worse, it is more effortful, and so more tiring, for a translator to work faster or to pay more

Table 2.
Qualifications and experience related competences

Qualifications and experience	The Optimale survey (Mean)	Present Study (Mean)	Differences (%) between the two surveys
Experience in the field of translation	3.32	3.56	7.23
Awareness of professional ethics and standards	3.21	3.52	9.66
*A good knowledge of the translation and language industry	Nil	3.11	Nil
A university degree in translation or language-related field	3.11	2.48	-20.26
*Experience or knowledge in non-translation fields	Nil	2.43	Nil

*As mentioned, the wording of these two questionnaire items was revised after the pilot of the present study. As a result, comparison cannot be made.

attention to quality. As a consequence, there is an inherent incompatibility between increasing translation speed and improving translation quality—and achieving either goal can cause fatigue and eventually lead to lower productivity. (Lacruz, 2017, p. 386)

How do translators cope with such a problem? Data in Table 3 may give some ideas. It was found that both Asian and Optimale survey clients place greater emphasis on quality than on speed. An important consideration about producing quality translation is whether or not the translator fully understands the expectation of his or her clients, and a rigorous quality-assurance process is adopted. Also, translators’ ability to render materials in one or more highly specialized domains is important (ranked second, and the mean values for both surveys are higher than 3.00). This finding may explain why some universities offer double degree options for undergraduate translation programmes, so that students can major in translation and minor in another discipline. For example, the Chinese University of Hong Kong offers an LLB-BA (Translation) double degree (Bachelor of Laws and Bachelor of Arts in Translation). When Robinson, Shuttleworth, and Yu (2020) talk about “specialization”, they point out that the translators with a “huge advantage” first spent some years working in another field or fields prior to becoming translators, because these people know their subject matter inside out. The three authors further suggest students majoring in translation should give serious thought to *double-majoring* in translation and the subject that they hope to specialize in.

Also, both Asian clients and the Optimale survey clients place some importance on translators’ ability to use translation memory as well as the ability to extract and manage terminology. Comparatively speaking, translators’ ability to translate into and proofread in their third language is relatively not important to clients (the mean values are below 2.00).

4.3 Technological Competences

Translators’ technological competence is increasingly stressed by clients in this ever-changing digital world, as shown in Table 4. In addition to the very basic technical skills such as processing files and converting files to different formats (mean=2.79), Asian clients nowadays expect translators to have more advanced IT skills, including the ability to understand and use markup languages such as html and xml (2.52), to understand software/ video game localization processes (2.42), to localize

Table 3.
Translation competences

Translation competences	The Optimale survey (Mean)	Present study (Mean)	Differences (%) between the two surveys
Ability to produce good-quality translation work	3.61	3.85	6.65
Ability to translate materials in one or more highly specialized domains	3.20	3.11	-2.81
Ability to use translation memory systems	3.09	2.79	-9.71
Ability to extract and manage terminology	2.79	2.68	-3.94
Ability to translate into the translator’s second language	2.17	2.59	19.35
Ability to proofread in the translator’s second language	2.30	2.53	10.00
Ability to post-edit machine translation	1.96	2.28	16.33
Ability to pre-edit texts for machine translation	1.76	1.96	11.36
Ability to use speech recognition system	1.56	1.91	22.44
Ability to proofread in the translator’s third language	1.68	1.91	13.69
Ability to translate into the translator’s third language	1.56	1.85	18.59
Ability to translate quickly though quality is not very good	2.10	1.83	-12.86

Table 4.
Technological competences

Technological competences	The Optimale survey (Mean)	Present study (Mean)	Differences (%) between the two surveys
Ability to process files in and convert files to different formats	2.88	2.79	-3.13
Ability to understand and use markup languages (html, xml)	2.50	2.52	0.80
Ability to understand software/ video game localization processes	2.05	2.42	18.05
Ability to localize multimedia websites	2.26	2.33	3.10
Ability to understand mobile technologies	2.19	2.29	4.57
Ability to use desktop publishing tools	2.09	2.27	8.61
Ability to parameter machine translation systems	1.97	2.15	9.14
Ability to program and/or modify simple macro-commands	1.87	2.03	8.56

multimedia websites (2.33), to understand more mobile technologies (2.29), to use desktop publishing tools (2.27) and to parameter machine translation systems (2.15). Relatively speaking, Asian clients are not concerned too much about practitioners' ability to program and/or modify macro-commands.

An important observation is that, of the eight technological-related competences, the mean values of seven are higher than those reported by the Optimale survey clients. This result suggests technological competences now tip the scales. In fact, TS scholars point out that translators are increasingly expected to make good use of computer-aided translation (CAT) tools to increase productivity, meet tight deadlines and maintain their competitive edge (Bowker, 2002; Kenny & Doherty, 2014; Rodríguez-Castro, 2018). A translation memory tool (TM) is one example. According to Christensen and Schjoldager (2010), TM refers to "a database of segmented and paired source and target texts that translators can access in order to re-use previous translations while translating new texts" (ibid, p. 1). In other words, translators can utilize existing translation resources with TM systems and are spared from manually translating everything from scratch in order to save time and cost. In LeBlanc's (2013) study, he identified five advantages of TMs by interviewing and observing over 50 full-time translators who worked in translation firms. It was found that TMs help to increase productivity, improve consistency, eliminate uninteresting and repetitive work, are also used as a searchable database and have a pedagogical function. The importance of translation technologies to translators can also be observed in their emerging appearance in translator training (Dillon & Fraser, 2006; Killman, 2017; Rodríguez-Castro, 2018). Since translation teachers recognise the extensive usage of CAT tools in the industry, training has now been geared toward equipping students with more advanced technological competences that they may need after graduation. The skills of using translation technology would thus been seen as a way to help translators stay competitive in this technological-driven field.

4.4 Project Management Competences

Table 5 suggests that translators' ability to identify client requirements, to define and/or apply quality-control procedures are valued by both Asian and the Optimale survey clients.

It seems that Asian clients pay less attention to translators' project management competences than the Optimale survey clients do, as shown in Table 5. However, both groups tend to think that project management-related competences are important, as most of the mean values are above 3.00. Translation is a purposeful activity (Nord, 2018). Identifying translation clients' requirements is of paramount necessity because problems would arise if there are misunderstandings regarding expectations and perspectives between clients and translators. The study conducted by Risku et al. (2016) demonstrated project-management skills of translators are essential. If the translator was not an effective communicator, the person might fail to reach an agreement with the client on those

Table 5.
Project management competences

Project management competences	The Optimale survey (Mean)	Present study (Mean)	Differences (%) between the two surveys
Ability to identify client requirements	3.52	3.32	-5.68
Ability to define and/or apply quality control procedures	3.37	3.15	-6.53
Ability to produce estimates	3.00	3.00	0.00
Ability to define resources required	3.16	2.85	-9.81
Ability to lead complex projects	3.00	2.80	-6.67

topics, possibly leading to an unhappy ending to the project. Unfortunately, as pointed out by Plaza-Lara (2021), scant attention has been paid to the competences of translation project management. In Western countries, for example, Plaza-Lara (2018, 2021) found that “the competences promoted in translation project management in EMT courses seem to be aligned with those proposed by the professional sector”. However, in the East, particularly in Greater China, project management and interpersonal skills are often not present in translation curricula, which tend to focus on teaching translation skills. The pandemic era has had a huge impact on the translation industry. Translators are expected to manage the entire project with clients properly, even when there are differences in perspectives. As a result, project management and interpersonal skills are worth considering when translation teachers develop or revamp existing translation curriculum.

4.5 Marketing Competences

From clients’ perspectives, translators’ marketing competences are relatively less important, as revealed in Table 6, although the mean values reported by the Optimale survey participants are higher than those of the Asian clients from the present study. One of the reasons for this result is that translation programmes in Asia tend to overlook teaching entrepreneurial and marketing skills in translator training.

Both surveys were done before the outbreak of COVID-19. However, the pandemic has affected the translation and language industry in different ways. The traditional model of working has been changed, and translators have to consider how to market themselves so that they can stay competitive in the field. In addition, globalization and digitalization have greatly transformed the translation market. The outsourcing of translation jobs, prevalent number of freelance translators (Kuznik, 2010), and extensive use of machines in translation all imply a need to increase competitiveness and entrepreneurship among translation graduates (Klimkowska & Klimkowski, 2020). Entrepreneurial competence, which is often described as “one of the contemporary civilization needs” (ibid, p. 13), is becoming increasingly important in European higher education (European Commission, 2013) and the translation industry. Translators need to communicate professionally with clients and/or translation agencies to fully understand the skopos, negotiate price rate and explain their translation work to clients.

Table 6.
Marketing competences

Marketing competences	The Optimale survey (Mean)	Present study (Mean)	Differences (%) between the two surveys
Ability to consolidate client relationships	2.99	2.45	-18.06
Ability to negotiate contracts with clients	2.57	2.14	-16.73
Ability to find new clients	2.48	1.92	-22.58

Previously, marketing-related skills were viewed as more essential for freelance and self-employed translators, who not only need to consolidate relationships with existing clients but also have to explore opportunities to work for new clients. The pandemic has dealt a severe blow to the translation industry and affects translation professionals, both full-timers and freelancers. Chaillou and van der Kallen (2021) use the statistics from the French Professional Association and the CSA Research Institute to emphasize that practitioners were afraid of job loss and anticipated the need to take on side jobs to make a living during the pandemic. In the midst of the unprecedented situation, some online translator-client social network sites developed new features and services so that their members can better promote and market themselves for job opportunities. For example, Proz.com introduced new services to profiles, including specific audio-visual services, language instruction, native speaker conversation and new marketing features for members to showcase their achievements and to make job matching easier and more effective. In undergraduate programmes, marketing competence is less emphasized and taught. In order to keep students abreast of the latest developments in the industry, it may be time for translation teachers and scholars to reconsider the importance of equipping students with marketing competence, which in fact has long been hinted at by some TS scholars. For example, when Pym (1993) discussed the way to train translators two decades ago, he said that teachers should teach translation as a general set of communication skills, so that students can apply and adapt them to the changing demands of markets and professions. He explained: “These skills should include obvious things like the use of personal computers, basic research procedures, a few ideas about public relations and marketing, and more than a bit of accountancy” (ibid).

5. CONCLUSION

The motivation to carry out this research was based on the author’s strong belief that clients are important stakeholders in the translation process. Having a better understanding of their expectations and opinions will be particularly beneficial to translation practitioners. This paper analysed the competence requirements that Asian clients who were middlemen between authors and readers looked for when hiring translators. It also examined whether there were changes in translator competences expected by clients over time. Speed and quality are always regarded as the top goals that a translator aspires to achieve. However, in reality, it is hard for practitioners, especially novice translators, to deliver good-quality translation work at high speed. Comparatively speaking, Asian and Optimale survey clients attach greater importance to quality than to speed. In addition, both groups put more emphasis on experience than on qualifications. This perspective is also shared by some TS scholars. For example, Hubscher-Davidson (2018) notes that practical translating experience can take place without possessing a translation qualification. She said that a great number of highly acclaimed translators who have professional experience and/or degrees in other areas do not hold a translation qualification. One of the reasons explaining this is that translation as an academic discipline is comparatively very new; many academic disciplines are hundreds of years old (Gentzier, 2014). In the past, TS was not seen as an independent discipline, as it was often affiliated with contrastive linguistics or comparative literature. For example, according to Tan (2017), “it was indeed during the 1980s that translation studies in China eventually emerged as an independent academic discipline, which status was consolidated further in the years that followed” (608). As a result, clients and the general public may have a perception that experience is more important than qualifications to translators. However, rigorous translator training is worthwhile in this ever-changing and dynamic era.

One important finding is that translators’ technological competences are increasingly stressed by today’s clients. This is also a view echoed by many TS scholars. For example, Pietrzak and Kornacki (2021) point out that the ability to interact with technology and face technical difficulties is a component of translator competence acknowledged among the skills listed and analysed in models of translator competence (ibid, p. 39).

Although this paper has generated some new insights, a number of limitations must be noted. First, the clients who participated in the two surveys are different. However, as explained, changes of clients' viewpoints over time can still be analysed. Second, the present study only targets clients who are middlemen between readers and authors. Clients who are authors looking for translators to render their texts (the first type) and those who are readers who need the translation because they do not understand the source language (the third type) are not included in the present study. Therefore, future studies examining the opinions of the first and third types of clients are worthwhile for creating a fuller picture.

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