Chapter 6
Preparing Trainee Translators for the Job Market: Social Network Analysis of Teams at Work

Bryan J. Robinson 
University of Granada, Spain

M. Dolores Olvera-Lobo 
University of Granada, Spain

ABSTRACT

Competence-based learning contrasts radically with content-focused education. Today’s undergraduate programmes take a multidisciplinary approach that imbues learning with input from the professional workplace. This chapter describes possibly the first social network analysis of trainee translators participating in an intensive, randomised teamwork experience centred on project-based, cooperative learning. An online survey gathered data and perceptions of the teamwork experience and of interpersonal relations. Participants describe friendship relations, the quality of their peers’ performance in professional roles, and their preferences with regard to the roles, and these are contrasted within the teams. These indicators of intra-team cohesion are compared with course-final achievement. Results indicate that the strengthening of friendship ties accompanies greater cohesion in teams and may be associated with higher achievement. This suggests that a multidisciplinary focus on teamwork competences enhances learners’ professional prospects.

INTRODUCTION

In the post-Bologna world of European tertiary education, the potential employability of learners is high on the agenda. Academics deliver undergraduate study guides that include competences which directly and indirectly relate to the workplace and therefore favour a multidisciplinary approach to learner training with a specific focus on graduate employment prospects. As a direct consequence of the pedagogical approach to these competences, in Translation studies—and probably in other disciplines—learners are highly conscious of the importance of teamwork and, by implication, of the intra-team relationships that are an intrinsic part of their day-to-day learning experience and can be heavily weighted in continuous assessment. However, given the discipline-bound nature of much undergraduate teaching, a wholly

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-4154-7.ch006
multidisciplinary approach is rarely found and this can limit the learners’ appreciation of the relevance of workplace-oriented competences beyond the classroom.

Undergraduate programmes in Translation and Interpreting are well-suited to this re-orientation of tertiary education since translators and interpreters are employed in a workplace subject to constant technological change. Based on professional translation experience and exploiting the ever-changing information and communication technologies to the full, translator trainers have incorporated developments in e-learning into pedagogical models that demand learners apply teamwork skills (e.g. Kiraly, 2005; Olvera-Lobo et al., 2007; Kiraly, Rüth, & Wiedmann, 2016).

In this context, our objective is to report a social network analysis of learners’ perceptions of the teamwork experience on a course that focuses on workplace-oriented competences.

BACKGROUND

In this section, we will (a) contextualise the present study within the literature on the need to teach teamwork competences in Translation Studies and define the competences on which we focus; (b) outline our underlying pedagogical approach grounded in social constructivism; (c) describe the didactic tools we have employed to put this into practice; (d) outline the key elements of the Professional Approach to Translator Training that we present to our learners and indicate how we expect them to put this into practice; (e) describe the concept of friendship relations in the workplace and the potential benefits organizations see in the existence of strong friendship ties among workers; (f) describe the teamwork-related contents that we have drawn from management training and use to raise our learners’ awareness of the issues; (g) detail the weighting of assessment components; and (h) present our overall aims for the study.

Teamwork-Related Competences

National surveys of translation service providers identify the social difficulties experienced by newly trained graduates as one of their deficiencies (in Portugal [Ferreira-Alves, 2008], Canada and Italy [Canadian Translation Industry Sectoral Commission, 1999; Mauriello, 1999, apud D. C. Kiraly, 2005]). These difficulties involve both interaction in work teams and the ability to work independently. Translation competence theory, whether multicomponential or minimalist recognizes teamwork as one of the pertinent social competences translators need to develop and apply (e.g. D. Kiraly, Hansen Schirra, & Maksymski, 2013; Pym, 2003). Pedagogically, Kiraly has filled this competence gap by integrating both pairwork and teamwork, within a large group of learners, into his teaching. His conclusion is that a “potentially viable approach for investigating the genesis of Translator competence would be to focus on the observation of interaction and learning in situated translation projects within educational settings” (D. C. Kiraly, 2005), which is precisely what we intend to do in the present study. Similarly, Olvera-Lobo et al. (2007) wholeheartedly embrace structured teamwork interaction as a cornerstone of the Professional Approach to Translator Training (PATT). Nonetheless, in practical terms guidelines on the application of teamwork practices remain pragmatic (e.g. Kelly, 2005) and we have been unable to locate quantitative or qualitative research of small group learning processes in the field. Consequently, in the present study, we seek to take up this research challenge by applying social network analysis to determine the consequences of teamwork practices.

Given the aforementioned competence gap, from the study guide for the course under analysis (Facultad de Traducción e Interpretación, undated) we have identified a set of competences that are directly