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DEVELOPING TRANSLATION RESEARCH COMPETENCES WITHIN THE ID-TS NETWORK

Keywords: doctoral programme, ID-TS, network, translation research competence

Abstract

In 2015, the European Society for Translation Studies proposed to establish a worldwide network of existing doctoral programmes in Translation Studies or doctoral programmes that included a Translation Studies component. The new network was named "The International Doctorate in Translation Studies" (ID-TS) http://www.idts-est.org. The first round of applicants submitted their documents for consideration in 2016, and the launch of the new network took place in Vienna the next year. The main goal of this study is to demonstrate how research competences may be acquired by students in doctoral programmes in Translation Studies within ID-TS by providing information about its chief aims and initiatives, admission criteria, application procedures and various activities and functions. ID-TS is recognized by the international community of translation scholars as a network that serves the purpose of enhancing international cooperation and building higher standards of programme content and delivery, curriculum assessment, research design, publication of research, and student mobility and placement at the third-cycle (PhD level) translator education.

1. The scope and the purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is not to deliver a report on conducted empirical research but to present an idea, which in Chesterman's terms (Chesterman 1997/2016) can be called "a meme". This idea, to promote and spread translation research at PhD level, has been embodied by the International Doctorate in Translation Studies (ID-TS) for several years now. The ID-TS is neither a new PhD programme, nor a joint

doctorate although cooperation within it may lead to such. It is a worldwide network with seventeen participating doctoral programmes[1] from twelve countries[2] each of which is either a PhD programme directly in Translation Studies (TS) or a programme that includes a TS component within a larger academic field or discipline, such as communication studies, philological studies or others. Such network capacity allows for accommodating curricular and programme diversity across various cultural and institutional backgrounds, the primary research orientation being translation.

In order to analyze the relevance and validity of the recently launched ID-TS in developing research competences by students in doctoral programmes in TS, let us first consider the very notion of networking in educational settings.

2. The relevance of networking to academic research in Translation Studies

More than ever before, the idea of networking, so common in social media platforms, has also become popular in today's world of science (cf. Muscanell and Utz 2017). Modern academic research, rather than promoting scholarly individualism, inspires numerous and different forms of cooperation, large international projects and big teams' collaborative initiatives, which is, for example, evidenced through multiple authorship of scholarly papers. The phenomenon has been enhanced recently by opportunities offered by virtual environments, digitalization processes and global mobility. Evaluation standards and education quality assurance procedures at many universities in the world are also conducive to enabling academic contact and joint research work with participating scholars not only from various universities and research centres in a given area, but also across disciplines in inter- and multidisciplinary studies (Protolea 2013; Risku et al. 2016). Hence, bodies such as networks and consortia have become active and successful in academic contexts over the past decades, and recently, owing to the spread of digitalization, electronic media and distance learning, their role has even increased, their impact on scholarly work and education at tertiary level more visible.

In academic research nowadays, what poses problems is not so much accessing knowledge, which is freely available online; although in some environments the luxury of free access to knowledge and information is still not commonplace; but selecting information that is relevant for a given research purpose, and its critical evaluation. Networking may be helpful during the research workflow processes thanks to extended possibilities of exchanging and filtering information within a larger framework than one person's cognitive judgement and critical thinking.

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[1] The number of participants in the present round of 2022–2025, as compared to fourteen programmes from eleven countries originally constituting the Network for the 2017–2019 round [available online at: https://idts.pro/home/history-of-id-ts/, accessed: 10 January 2025].

[2] Contemporary members are universities in Austria, Belgium, The Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Israel, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom (ibid.).

Contemporary networking inspires its participants to implement various communication tools as it entails creating spaces for it to take place. Platforms, portals and fora, such as www.academia.edu, www.researchgate.net, www.linkedin.com or www.proz.com as communities of professionals in the translation area serve the pure purpose of exchanging information, and help to maintain contact across barriers, cultural divides and time constraints. Sharing knowledge, brainstorming, critical thinking, reaching out and benefitting from a bigger pool of expertise, going beyond the local to acquire new perspectives – these are all channels enacted by virtual networking. Their universal appeal pertains to TS, as well. Thanks to the available electronic tools, international organizations, associations and networks such as ID-TS may function globally connecting interested individuals, groups or communities, and have done so, during the times when direct contact has been costly, difficult or even impossible.

TS, undoubtedly, is one of the fields that have strongly been affected by modern digital technologies, which have had a great impact on both the translation industry, the Language Service Provision (LSP) economic sector, and on the profile and type of scholarly research performed within this area (cf. Ehrensberger-Dow 2014; Massey 2017; 2022). It is also a very challenging scholarly domain for conducting consistent research, owing to its multidimensionality and transdisciplinary linkages to various fields, such as psycholinguistics, sociology, IT and language engineering, communication studies, cultural studies, literary studies and many other branches of knowledge (Risku 2014; Rovira-Esteva et al. 2015). TS shaped by many variables as a discipline is also strongly affected by local translation traditions, theoretical paradigms and research methodologies. In such a dispersed and complex translation scholarly environment, it appears justifiable to highlight the status and role of networks, such as the European Master's in Translation Studies (EMT),[3] and consortia, such as the Consortium for Translation Education Research (CTER),[4] which may serve as examples of long standing cooperation in both on site and online modes. ID-TS, an original initiative of the European Society for Translation Studies (EST), is a network created for academic purposes with the mission to enhance and promote doctoral research specifically in the TS area.

3. The origins and admission criteria of the ID-TS Network

Starting already in the 1990s, EST had organized various discussions and meetings related to doctoral research that led to creating a network focused solely on the tertiary education of translation researchers. The enclosed chronology presents

[3] The European Master's in Translation is a network of translation programmes chaired by the Directorate General of Translation at the European Commission. [available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/european-masters-translation-emt_en, accessed: 15 February 2025].

[4] Consortium for Translation Education Research is an international organization of individual and institutional members. The main focus of CTER is translation pedagogy and translator education. [available online at: http://cter.edu.pl/en, accessed: 15 February 2025].

several pivotal events that preceded the actual foundation act of ID-TS and marked the progress of its initiative:

- 1992. An early proposal that EST should compile a list of potential co-supervisors for doctoral research was created (*EST Newsletter* 1, November 1992);
- 2003. The first *EST Round Table on Doctoral Studies* was held in Misano Adriatico, Italy;
- 2009. The TS-Doc international survey of doctoral programmes was conducted;
- 2013. The "International Doctorate in Translation Studies" was first presented as a proposal for creating a network at the 7th EST Congress in Germersheim on August 31st;
- 2013. Yves Gambier compiled the paper "Doctoral Studies in Translation Studies" on behalf of the TS-Doc Working Group, which was published in the *EST Newsletter* 42 (May);
- 2014. A meeting of international representatives of doctoral programmes took place in Leuven, Belgium, on August 27th. It was chaired by Reine Meylaerts and the EST Doctoral Studies Committee;
- 2015. EST formally proposed to establish a worldwide network of existing doctoral programmes in TS or doctoral programmes that included a TS component;
- 2016. The first round of applications was organised;
- 2017. The launch of the new ID-TS Network took place in Vienna.

Membership in the Network is conditioned by fulfilling the set admission criteria and completing application procedures, which are all specified on the website. The application process is assisted by the systematically updated "Guide for Applicants", where the explanations on the required applicant programme information are provided for reference. Important data that each applicant needs to give concern, among others, the curriculum, programme characteristics, statistics (such as the number of programme graduates), infrastructure and resources. Formally, two declarations are required: of the programme eligibility and conformity. All applications are considered during the process of rigid and thorough evaluation by the Evaluation Committee.[5]

4. Aims and goals of the Network

The chief aim of the ID-TS Network, as specified in the "ID-TS Foundation Document", is "to achieve international cooperation in the field of doctoral education in order to promote higher quality in student recruitment, programme content and delivery, research design, publication of research and mobility and placement" (http://www.idts-est.org). This analysis reveals how ID-TS attempts to achieve this goal through its activities.

[5] For more detailed information about the Network, see its website: http://www.idts-est.org [accessed: 7 December 2024].

Other goals set by the Network include establishing a framework of minimum admission objectives for a doctoral programme to be an approved ID-TS participant, and building a database of online course materials to be of assistance in developing research competences by PhD students (cf. Pym 2012). Training opportunities that the Network organizes and disseminates concern both – the researcher level and research supervisor level. What is of particular significance for the present overview when considering ID-TS aims and objectives is to propose and structure a set of competences to be acquired by doctoral students in TS programmes that could universally serve as a reference framework. Before discussing such competences, let us first present various activities that have been conducted by the Network so far.

5. The Network activities

Among early ID-TS initiatives there was a proposal to build a registry of doctoral programmes with their specifications on the website, and also to compile a registry of doctoral supervisors, with their positions and affiliations, areas of expertise and working languages, to be placed in the protected member area. The latter was meant to be of guidance and assistance in searching for potential supervisors and reviewers of doctoral dissertations, and a tracking inventory of formal supervision and external examination candidates. Both initiatives were implemented with a view of prospective content enlargement and verification of the registries.

Undoubtedly, what seemed an important consideration at an early organizational phase of the Network was preparing academic events that would attract the attention of translation researchers at doctoral level. Several graduate and doctoral events mark the conference landscape of the Network's first five years (2017–2022):

- *Publishing in Translation Studies Conference,* a joint CETRA and ID-TS event organized at KU Leuven's campus in Antwerp, in September 2018;
- *A Graduate Conference* organised by Tampere University with KÄTU symposium in collaboration with the national Finnish PhD training network Langnet in April 2019;
- (*Hi)stories of Translation and Translators: Past, Present and Future,* a conference organized by the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul in November 2020;
- *Studying the 'Dark' Side of Translation: Translation and (Counter)Intelligence*, a lecture and round table discussion focused on methodological issues in TS research at the Department of Translation Studies of the University of Ljubljana in November 2021;
- *Visual Research Methods in Research,* an online workshop organized jointly with the EUTOPIA learning community "Creative Research Methods" in December 2021.
- *Positionierungen | Positionings – Selbstreferentialität in translationswissenschaftlichen Dissertationsprojekten,* a conference held at the Department of Translation Studies at the University of Graz in June 2022.

- *Re-Thinking Research Ethics: Decolonizing Translation Studies?* a workshop organized at the 10th EST Congress in Oslo on June 21st, 2022 that focused on geo-political influences on knowledge dissemination and explorations into the ethics of translation- and interpreting-related research of postcolonialism.

The enclosed inventory demonstrates the versatile and diverse needs of the research community at PhD level, taking into consideration academic and cultural backgrounds that the programmes and universities organizing the events are rooted in. This is exactly an aspect that should be tackled in developing any network that functions cross-nationally and cross-culturally. Specific institutional expectations and formal requirements of given academic settings, as well as particular cultural environments and research styles and discourses of network participants, are factors to be considered in organizational activities, as well.

Active participation in international conferences by doctoral researchers helps them to get acquainted with other people's research and to establish contacts with peers. Presenting own research, as well as listening to prominent scholars and meeting in person authors whose publications feature in the bibliographical lists of PhD dissertations, are all essential motivation builders that contribute to reaching research goals and objectives (Protolea 2013; EST Round Table 2022).

Besides doctoral conferences, other functions of ID-TS relate to supporting cooperation among member institutions. One of the areas of such support are joint doctorates, for which the Network cooperative actions may be a great enhancement and trigger. The Network also facilitates student mobility by being a platform of reference for doctoral students enrolled in the member programmes to attend courses and participate in summer schools or seminars in other programmes of the Network. Another field of cooperation are links with non-academic institutions, such as NGOs, government or industry bodies, and other partners. In contemporary translator education, such cooperation is particularly valued as it encourages reflection on professionalization and promotes research projects based on incorporating non-academic components.

6. Research competences

Research at PhD level is assumed to be innovative and often interdisciplinary. It is expected to contribute substantially to the development of a given subject area, and the PhD graduates who have completed their dissertations are supposed to progress in their academic careers as independent, autonomous researchers in many university settings.

The research competences of a TS doctoral student as defined for the purposes of the Network (cf. Gambier 2013[6]) are grouped into three categories: basic skills

[6] ID-TS uses a slightly modified version of Annex 1 "Objectives and skills" compiled by Yves Gambier on behalf of the TS-Doc Working Group in *EST Newsletter* 42, 2013.

(such as time management or information mining); general research skills (such as critical thinking in developing theoretical concepts or choosing an appropriate methodology); and TS-specific research skills (such as using proper TS metalanguage or critical reading of TS authors). Each of the three competence domains is further sub-divided into more specific categories and illustrated with sample competences on the ID-TS website.

In the first group of generic and transferable basic skills, management, information mining, collaboration, intellectual, ethical and communication skills are deemed important. Implementation of these skills may serve various research purposes and they are not restricted to TS field. Pivotal aspects of ethical and mindful behaviour, self-reflection and awareness, creativity and critical thinking; are all found relevant in various academic fields and education levels, tertiary included.

General and transferable research skills also pertain to fulfilling all tasks related to a given research project: understanding and critically evaluating existing theories, formulating research problems and hypotheses, implementing appropriate methods to investigate the phenomena in question. The critical mind is a universal asset for research purposes, when the student is to compile, compare and analyze data, evaluate findings, make observations and draw conclusions.

Particular TS-specific research skills narrow down the target research field, which in itself is versatile, dynamic, broad and ever-changing. The area of TS imposes high demands when it comes to gathering data and research profiles. TS metalanguage is not fully consistent as the discipline is rooted in several divergent epistemologies, such as hermeneutic, literary, functionalist or cognitivist, which may create a certain level of dispersion of ideas and eclecticism in research (cf. Kiraly et al. 2016; Muñoz and Rojo López 2022). New developments in translation research in the fields so different thematically as media accessibility (e.g. audiodescription) and sworn translation, or transcreation and translation in health services create research opportunities but also conceptual, methodological and terminological obstacles. On the one hand, the inter- and multidisciplinarity of TS respond to the needs of modern applied sciences; but on the other, they present challenges in conducting empirical research.

TS, as a doctoral field of study, calls for specific research competences, quite distinct from translation competences in professional contexts that have been analyzed through decades-long theoretical discussions leading to modelling constructs, such as PACTE Group Competence Model (Hurtado 2017), or EMT Competence Framework 2017/2022.

7. The ID-TS potential in developing translation research competences

The Network addresses an important issue of research expertise in a context that is emerging and very dynamic. The ever-evolving and expanding areas of TS offer a great potential for putting forward and tackling interesting and socially relevant research questions and hypotheses. The human factor in networking enhances

reflexivity thanks to exchanging ideas and views, sharing experience and reaching respondents to questionnaires and surveys through the Network.

The outcomes of the learning experience of PhD students are formulated with reference to both two groups of generic and transferable skills, and translation research-specific ones. The first category covers, for example, the capability of comprehending and critically evaluating a new idea or study, the ability to conceptualize, structure and implement a research project, the competence to communicate research in a clear and efficient manner. Openness, constructive and critical mind, creativity and problem-solving skills are mentioned in the framework as important attributes of a TS scholar.

PhD students should be able to have a good understanding of TS field and should be familiar with epistemological and methodological approaches to studying given translation phenomena. Their metalinguistic expression should be up to the expected standard with terminological clarity and communicative value. Networking is expected to bring a better awareness of good research skills and practices among its participants, whereas doctoral conferences and other organized events and contacts provide opportunities for a more systematic and better understanding of research types, design, methodological and technological tools, as well as theoretical paradigms. Thus, by comparing translation research environments, (re-)conceptualizing and implementing research models and methodologies within ID-TS community may enhance its growth and serve the purpose of building research competences adequate to the PhD level.

8. Conclusion

The presented overview of fundamental assumptions and characteristics of the ID-TS Network, its aims and initiatives; as well as the discussion of research competences being developed within it, provides insight into how the Network seems to nurture thoughtful behaviour among doctoral students and helps them to grow as researchers, specifically in the area of TS. Even though the networking in general, has become an established means of promoting scholarly work and education at tertiary level, including the area of TS, no other comparable translation research networks at PhD level were found operational at the time this study was completed, which highlights the unique functions and outreach of the ID-TS.

In consideration of the short history of ID-TS and the fact that the Network's maturity is still a matter for the future, this descriptive study results may only be perceived as preliminary. First observations could be further investigated in more extended empirical and quantitative studies on the relationship between translator competence modelling and translation research competences, as fostered by ID-TS. Prospective analyses of the processes of integration of research skills that are generic and those that are translation-specific could also produce valuable insight into research on competence development and reveal interesting mechanisms lying behind international cooperation in that respect, and the promotion of good research

practices at PhD level in TS. Thus the study is meant as an opening towards scholarly enquiries into possible implementations and outcomes of trends and forms of international cooperation towards constructing translation research competences.

Participation in the ID-TS Network comes with exposing young researchers to high-level expertise in its members' community and new and stimulating research initiatives, projects and experiences shared within the Network. That is why raising awareness of the Network's mission and goals is viewed as relevant and beneficial for translation doctoral students.

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