Translating is a service and service business, too – building up “business know how” in translating studies

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to profile translating as a professional service, and to bring a business and marketing approach to translating. Because translator students will be a part of the language business in their real work life, this article aims to create an understanding of how translation services are produced, marketed and bought as a service business. Services are mostly invisible, heterogeneous and process-based, and these, besides other characteristics of services, cause a number of problems, both for the service provider and the customer. Therefore, translating students who will provide translation services need to gain business knowledge on their expert industry. The focus of this paper is not linguistic, but instead it considers translating as business, with the main theory being grounded in marketing of services. This paper is based on qualitative interview research among translation agencies and their customers. It also gives some practical suggestions for enhancing the business aspect and know-how in translation teaching.
1 Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing understanding of the fact that students need multidisciplinary skills, such as teamwork skills, self-employment skills and project management skills, in order to succeed in real work life (for example Calvo Encinas & Morón Martin 2006, p. 113). In other words, students need other skills and competencies alongside the substance competence of their own profession and industry. Understanding business is one of the competences that are required: translating graduates need practical translating skills to succeed in the translation industry (Garant 2006, p. 81), but they also need business skills too. This article relates translating and other language studies to the current topics of “business know-how” and “business competence” which have recently been under discussion in public. Translation graduates will be a part of language business and they will produce language services for customers. Therefore this article aims to articulate that an understanding of the service business builds students’ “business know-how” and improves their success in real work life. The article profiles translation services as a professional service, and introduces some concepts from business sciences into the translation/linguistics discipline, in order to increase our understanding of translating as business.

The focus of this paper is not linguistic, but instead the paper considers translating as business with the main theory being grounded in the marketing of services. The paper aims to build a bridge between business studies (especially service marketing) and translation studies. It introduces issues concerning characteristics of the services and professional service business that translators should be aware of, and discusses what translators should know about
producing and marketing professional services. The paper also presents the customer's viewpoint on buying translation services.

It would be advantageous to increase translator students' understanding of service marketing issues and business know-how for several reasons. Translation services can be considered as a challenging type of service to produce and buy. In general, the marketing of services is argued to be more complicated than marketing of products, since the services are mostly invisible, heterogeneous, and process-based. Professional services are challenging because of their knowledge-intensive characteristics (Clemes et al. 2000 pp. 575–578). The characteristics of the services challenge both the service provider and the customer during a business transaction: for the customer it might be difficult to understand and evaluate the service; for the service provider, such as a translation agency, it might be difficult to present the service offering in advance, and to manage the service process in order to achieve the best service outcome. Knowledge-intensive service businesses with complex features are increasing in EU countries (Eurostat 2004).

There are also diverse players in the translation industry and the translation service providers vary from individual freelancers to business-oriented global translation agencies. Therefore it is important to identify the features of translation business, understand business angle of translating and learn to market the substance translating skills.

The article describes the basic concepts and models of service marketing, selling and buying in order to increase explicit know-how of the service business. Secondly, it provides a description of translating as service type, on the basis of qualitative interview research among translation agencies and their customers. Thirdly, it concludes with the challenges that translators and project managers
and other experts in translation industry face when they execute their profession in real work life. The features and challenges of translating business are stressed, in order to make translating students and educators aware of the business aspects of their profession. These aspects should be learned in order to succeed in the translation industry in real life. Therefore the pedagogical aim of the article is to highlight the business viewpoint of translating and bring ideas on how to teach business know-how to students, so they are enabled to market and manage translation services in a more successful way from a business point of view.

The article describes translating as a part of service business and therefore special features of the service in general are discussed. These characteristics distinguish services from visible products and challenge service providers as well as buyers. In the next section, general service and professional service features are discussed theoretically and the main concepts are introduced to build foundation on which to evaluate translating as both a service and as a professional service.

Services have two dimensions: product and process. The product-dimension concerns the outcome and result of service, and can be considered as ‘what’ is produced and bought during the exchange. The process-dimension conceptualizes ‘how’ the service is produced (Grönroos 2000, pp. 63–64). In translation services, the actual translated document is an outcome of the process consisting of various activities from the very first contact to delivering the result of the translation project. Process- and outcome- dimensions are also reflected in the customer’s evaluation, since the customer evaluates the outcome-related ‘what’-dimension called technical quality and the process-related ‘how’-dimension called functional quality (Grönroos, 2000, pp. 51, 63). The customer can be satisfied with translation, but
be disappointed with how s/he was treated as a customer or how the project was co-ordinated during the process.

Service offerings can be seen as consisting of three different kinds of layers. A core service is the reason for the company being on the market. Additional services called facilitating services are needed to consume the core service. The third type of services is supporting services, and they are used to differentiate the service from the service of competitors. The distinction between facilitating services and supporting services is not always clear (Grönroos 2000, p. 166). In translation services, the core service is to enable the customer’s multilingual communication by producing the translation, but usually there are various additional services like office services and supporting services such as localization services.

The service marketing approach separates services from products on the basis of four features: intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability (Zeithaml 1981, p. 186), but their existence and appearance have also been criticised (see Lovelock & Gummesson 2004). Services are relatively intangible. There might be a tangible outcome or the process might have tangible parts, but there are always intangible elements compared to products. In translation services, the outcome – the actual translation – is tangible. Inseparability means that services are partially produced together with the buyer and the seller, and the customer is involved in production by briefing the translation assignment, by stating the special requirements and by delivering material. Because of heterogeneity, every service process is unique, and two processes are never exactly the same. In translation services, for example, the quality may vary, because translators possess various skills and competencies and interact with the customer differently, and also peak times can affect the process. Perishability means that services can not usually be produced beforehand and they cannot be stored.
afterwards. This causes considerable problems for service marketers, since supply and demand are difficult to synchronise. In translation services there might occasionally be peak times, and respectively, sometimes there is a lack of assignments.

Both the buyer and seller parties encounter problems because of the features of services discussed above (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Marketing problems and challenges</th>
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<tr>
<td>Intangibility</td>
<td>Services are difficult to display or communicate. This causes difficulties for the customer to evaluate competing services. The customer perceives high levels of risk and tries to reduce risk using especially personal information resources, and using the price as an indicator of quality. Firm may need to stress tangible cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Heterogeneity</td>
<td>Standardization and quality control of services are difficult to achieve and maintain: the service performance depends on the personnel and the level of demand to some extent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>&amp; Variability</td>
<td>Customer is involved in production</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inseparability</td>
<td>Services cannot be inventoried, stored or produced in advance. Waste and peak times should be avoided.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perishability</td>
<td></td>
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Table 1. The classical specific characteristics of services and marketing challenges originating from them.

2 Translation services and characteristics of knowledge intensive professional services

As translation services can be considered professional services, this distinguishable service type is discussed next. Silvestro et al. (1992, pp. 67–73) have identified three types of services: professional services (doctor, consultant), service shops (hotels, banks), and mass services (telecommunication, bus services). The professional (knowledge-intensive) services have distinctive features: they are complex, intangible, and highly customized. Professional services are delivered by qualified personnel and they are usually difficult for clients to evaluate even after the purchase. In professional services, organizations have relatively few transactions, but the process has a long contact time. The service and the process are produced mainly by the professional personnel, who use considerable judgment to offer the service that best meets the customer’s needs. (Silvestro et al. 1992, p. 73; Thakor & Kumar 2000, p. 71). The typical features of professional services are presented in Table 2.

The most typical and the most studied professional service industries are the following: law firms, accounting firms, management consultants, technology and engineering consultants, financial consulting, advertising agencies, architects, personnel and recruitment services, information systems consultants, designers, and medical services. (Lowendahl 2005; Clemes et al. 2000; Thakor & Kumar 2000).
Knowledge-intensive and professionalism requires education and formal training linked to scientific knowledge development.

Ethical codes, setting clients needs above profits, respecting the limits of professional expertise.

Customized solution for customers’ problem.

High degree of customization.

The result and outcome are critical.

Problem-solving nature.

Complexity of the process and the result.

Information asymmetry.

Knowledge gap between the service provider and the client.

Lack of clarity regarding the service needed.

High degree of risk because pre-purchase evaluation is difficult.

Degree of tangibility: intangible.

Information seeking is personalized, personal sources are used.

Pre-purchase evaluation is difficult because of credence qualities and information asymmetry, price sensitivity is insignificant.

The interaction and relationship.

Relatively few transactions.

Contact time relatively long.

Personal judgment is relevant, most-value added in the front office, where judgment is applied in meeting customer needs.

Relations can be project-based or relationship-oriented, typically projects in relationship.


Table 2. The synthesis of the features of professional services.
It is noteworthy that translation and interpreting services are not mentioned in professional service studies in the business literature, even if they meet all the demands of the definition of professional services. ‘Professional’ professions typically require a higher, usually academic, education. Translators have translation qualifications but also qualifications and training for specific markets such as technical engineering or medicine (Holland et al. 2004, p. 255).

The professional service is produced by an educated expert with special knowledge and experience. The customer lacks this special knowledge, and this is called information asymmetry: information asymmetry makes the client dependent on the service provider to define the problem, and the expert usually knows better what the customer needs better than the customer does (Thakor & Kumar 2000, p. 65). The professional solves the customer’s problems with education and specialist know-how, makes the diagnosis, formulates the problem and the way of operating, and produces the solution (Edvardsson 1989, p. 6). This problem-solving can be based on innovating new solutions or presenting old solutions (Løwendahl 2005, pp.121–141).

The relationship and interaction between the service provider and the client are also relevant in professional services. The average size of the projects can vary and the delivery of the service can require some cooperation of a professional team over a long time or only one expert for a day (Løwendahl 2005, pp.121–141).

Assignments in professional services are typically performed in long-term relations because of their high level of risk perceived by the customer (Lapierre 1997, p. 378), but short-term one-project-based assignments also exist. Usually there can be sporadic assignments and projects during the relationship, since after a project the client estimates whether to assign new projects to the service provider, or find a new service provider (Szmigin 1992, p. 17).
3 Translating service business from viewpoints of the service provider and the customer

When translating is considered as a service type, it is produced and marketed by the service provider (which can be an agency or a freelance entrepreneur) and it is provided for the customer. In the next section, professional service business is discussed as a dyadic business exchange, where the service provider as the seller party promotes and delivers the service, and respectively, the customer evaluates and buys the service.

Marketing discipline distinguishes business-to-business and business-to-customer contexts, and there are established differences between organizational and personal customers (see Coviello & Brodie 2001). In business markets, there are fewer but larger buyers, who create supplier-customer relationships, and purchasing is usually executed by trained purchasing agents, who buy for the organization. In consumer markets, the buyer is an individual person who lacks specific experience in buying. The translating business can be produced for the business or for the consumer markets, but here the focus is especially on the business-to-business-markets, because a business customer is the most typical client of professional services.

4 Marketing, selling and managing translation services: the viewpoint of the service provider

The service provider’s task is to produce and market the service. In professional service agencies, marketing is usually managed by professionals themselves because it is seldom that there is a person specifically trained in marketing (Szmig 1992, p. 6). This is conceptualized by the term ‘part-time-marketer’ (Grönroos 2000); the professionals within the agency usually have tasks related to
marketing (such as managing customer relationships and day-to-day-marketing) embedded in their work.

Another challenge is the sensitivity surrounding professionalism that affects marketing opportunities, practices and attitudes. The advertising and active marketing of professionals have formerly been considered unprofessional, and in some industries active marketing has even been prohibited. Times have slowly changed, and nowadays professional service firms have more opportunities to communicate about their offerings and performance (Feldman Barr & McNeilly 2003, p. 715; Thakor & Kumar 2000, pp. 72–73).

The sale and customer acquisition can be considered as a process that has several steps. The first step in the sale process is to find potential customers. When potential customers are identified, the seller approaches them, presents the firm and the service, counters and overcomes objections. The final step is to maintain the customer for the long term. (Moncrief & Marshall 2004, pp. 13–16)

Advertising is only one of the promotion activities in business-to-business marketing communication. The most often used practices to obtain customers in professional services are the following: direct contacts, such as direct mail and sales calls; social networking and utilizing events, such as continual contact building, speaking at functions, hosting seminars; informing potential customers through various media: Internet home page, websites, trade advertising, brochures, yellow pages, trade shows, newsletters, or utilizing previous contacts and works: positive recommendations of satisfied clients, recent successful work and winning industry awards (see Waller et al. 2001; Feldmann Barr & McNeilly 2003). Also, information technology based communication, such as email, web-pages and electronic newsletters facilitate promotion and enable the collection of new information about the customer, to remain in contact with them and to present the capabilities and offerings of the
firm (Moncrief & Marshall 2004, pp. 14, 16). The sales activities of the agency can be based on more distant bidding proposals or more active selling and networking (Løwendahl 2005, pp. 121–141).

There are obviously differences in marketing between large firms and smaller local firms. Large firms have large financial resources to invest in large-scale marketing material and hire marketing professionals, whereas smaller firms invest in creating client relationships, build the firm’s image and utilize referrals (Feldmann Barr & McNeilly 2003, p. 719). Most of the service providers act locally and are small or medium-sized enterprises, and this also concerns most translation agencies (see Holland et al. 2004, p. 254).

5 Buying and evaluating the professional: the viewpoint of the customer

In the eyes of the customer, the service business is viewed from a different angle. The customer is motivated to buy the professional service since they lack the skills or resources to execute the service itself. Nieminen (2005 pp. 25, 33, 35) studied the main reasons for buying translation services, and found that the reasons for buying are related to costs, lack of resources and skills, and the internationalization of business, which follows the general tendency of outsourcing where some services are bought to support companies’ core business. However, even if the customer has a clear motivation to buy the service, executing the buying task is a complex activity, since the features of professional services make the need-formulation and decision making difficult (Mitchell 1998, p. 461).

This complexity stems from information asymmetry, intangibility, and the process nature of services, since because of them, professional services have mostly credence qualities, which increase the risk perceived by the customer. Medical and legal services can be difficult
to evaluate even after the purchase, because the buyer can not usually himself evaluate the diagnosis of the doctor or the actions of the lawyer. Goods usually have a high level in search qualities, because they can be examined before purchase (Zeithaml 1981, p. 187). The complexity of the buying process can also originate from the unfamiliarity of the buying task. According to the widely used classification by Robinson, Faris, and Wind (1967), different kinds of buying situations are distinguished. These are: a new task, a modified rebuy, and a straight rebuy situation. The buying situation has a direct influence on the information level of buyers, their perceived risk and their search behavior (Möller 1985, p. 4). The more unfamiliar and newer the buying situation is, the more difficult the situation is for the buyer.

The act of buying is usually represented as a process. The buying process starts when the need or the problem is recognized. The next stage is the formulation of the problem; the recognized need is transformed into objectives for a solution. Then the buyer evaluates the potential service providers with some evaluation criteria. The buyer identifies the alternatives, the initial consideration set, and the customer might also evaluate using an external consultant or its own personnel.

The ‘short list’ is formed because the buyer evaluates and selects only some alternatives for further investigation. The buyer evaluates the final alternatives and the consequences of the alternatives (time, price, quality, etc.) and selects the service provider. After the assignment is realized, the buyer evaluates the quality of service and perceives satisfaction or dissatisfaction. There are several propositions to describe the process and the stages of buying professional services (cf. Edvardsson 1989, p. 10; Day & Barksdale 1994, p. 46). However, Nieminen (2005, p. 35) found that buying does not necessarily follow the model in every single translation assignment, since companies
prefer long-term relationships with one or few service providers. The buyer party usually forms a formal or informal ‘buying center’ that executes the decision making, gathering and evaluating the relevant information (Johnston and Lewin 1996, p. 8). Persons within the buying center have variable roles: there are users, buyers (execute the buying), influencers, deciders, and gatekeepers (who control the flow of information into the buying center) (Webster and Wind 1972, p. 17). In buying translation services, Nieminen (2005, p. 28) found that there are small buying groups where roles are visible but overlapping.

The customer faces increased risks because of the lack of pre-purchase evaluation possibilities. The customer can reduce the risk by seeking information or by remaining loyal to a certain service provider (see Clemes 2000, p. 586). The customer seeks information by using non-personal communication (e.g. mass or selective media) and personal communication (e.g. friends or experts) (Zeithaml 1981, p. 187), but personal information sources are said to be emphasized in professional services since they convey credible information about credence qualities (Thakor & Kumar 2000, p. 68). The risk-reducing strategies of the buyer in professional services can also be based on choosing the leading firm in the field, asking to see similar work done by the firm, or obtaining colleagues’ opinions of the firm (Mitchell 1998, 476). When choosing an appropriate service provider, the customer usually approaches several professional service agencies, but turns to a professional or an agency which has been employed before or is formerly known (Edvardsson 1989, p. 15, Mitchell 1998, p. 476). Additionally, the intangibility and the exiguity of concrete elements and information asymmetry drive customers to judge secondary tangible clues (such as appearance, behaviour, office, and the equipment and methods used) instead of the result of service (Edvardsson 1989, p. 8).
The customer chooses the seller on the basis of evaluation criteria. The most used evaluation criteria related to professional services are the following: the price, interaction with personnel, project knowledge, experience in the field, the result, previous work, knowledge and competence, reputation and image, social ties, proposal and presentation (Day & Barksdale 1992, p. 86; Edvardsson 1989, pp. 9–15; Dawes et al. 1992, pp. 187–193). Knowledge of the industry sector of the client is usually required (Edvardsson 1989, p. 15; Mitchell 1998, p. 476), and this also applies to translation services (Nieminen 2005, p. 12). In translation services, the important evaluation criteria seem to be: how well the company understands the customer and its specific problems, the turnaround capabilities on a given project, linguistics skills, technical competence, communication and accessibility of essential persons, the translation agency’s network – in order to handle big and complex assignments in many languages, speed and flexibility of the service, and respect of timetables (Potsus & Deschamps-Potter 2002, p. 7; Nieminen 2005, p. 30, 36). The price is not usually the main element in selecting the professional service provider, since the customer may consider the price as an indicator of quality, and because a low price implies a low quality, the customer does not normally choose the lowest-priced service provider (Zeithaml 1981, p. 187).

6 Marketing translating services: findings on translation service providers’ and their customers’ challenges

6.1 Research design and methodology

Qualitative interview research was conducted for studying translation services as service business. The empirical data comprised eight personal interviews conducted during the summer of 2005 and the
summer of 2008. Furthermore, written marketing material from translation agencies was utilized as secondary data: various company documents were collected and analysed, for example, brochures, leaflets, web pages, advertisements and presentation materials.

The translation service companies and their customer firms range from micro-sized entrepreneurial enterprises to large international firms. The cases and the informants were chosen by means of theoretical sampling (Flick 1998). The first contact was usually with the seller/the translation service provider, and after that the buyers mentioned were contacted.

We used focused episodic theme interviews (Flick 1998). Interview guide and research questions followed the theoretical issues discussed in the theoretical part of the article. The questions concerned translating businesses’ features and challenges, as well as efforts to meet these challenges. Each interview lasted about one and a half hours, and they were all tape-recorded and transcribed.

We used QSR N’Vivo software in our computer-aided analysis to manage the data. The data were coded into the following main categories: features of services, features of professional services, seller’s viewpoint, and customer’s viewpoint. Each main category contained more specific attributes. We started with open coding but changed to selective coding after further reading.

**6.2 Main Results: Empirical analysis on translation services as service business**

In the following section, translating services are examined in light of service marketing theory, in order to analyse how translations services reflect general service features and professional service features, and how they are marketed, managed and bought.
On the basis of the interview research, it became evident that the translating business field is fragmented and consists of various players of different sizes and professional levels. Some translating professionals compete with a low price, some with technique and project management skills, and others with professionalism and experience concretized in known professionals with a good reputation.

6.2.1 Translating services as services

Translation services are based on producing the actual translation (the core service), but this is usually enriched with facilitating services, such as localization, project management and office services. Also, make-up services and connections to photographers, editors and paint houses were mentioned. The following extract from the data shows various core, facilitating, support services related to the translation services.

To put it simply, the customer buys translation services or localization services. However, project management is usually embedded in that service. It might be really simple, if it is a case of translating and localizing only one language.

But if the project is large and there are many different language pairs, lots of term work and everything – then there is a need for plenty of project management. We can also edit the text in publishable form, check all the pictures and texts and show the customer what the final text will look like. And we also construct term lists and the customer can later use them for various purposes and harmonize their vocabulary. (The CEO of a translation agency)

Translation services are product-oriented services since the translation as a tangible outcome is emphasized. Customers often mentioned the flexibility and the speed of the service process as
important issues, but still the importance of a good quality translation service outcome was the most important element. The speed of the service process was mentioned as a relevant issue in both service providers' and their customers' interviews. A customer from a communication agency described the need for a speedy process in the following way:

Sometimes I have plenty of time to produce a publication and in that case it doesn’t matter whether the translating work takes a week or two days. But, if I write newsletters, I need to have them translated on the very next day, and you cannot use an agency that needs a week to do that work. The big organizations are usually not so flexible, but small agencies do the work, even if they have to work all day and night.

The intangibility, heterogeneity and perishability of services leads to difficulties for both parties in translation services. From the translation agency’s viewpoint, the data suggested that the quality and the outcome of translation services are difficult to communicate and the production of translations needs to be managed and scheduled well. For example, the quality of the service performance depends on the level of demand, the given time schedules and the skills of the personnel, and therefore agencies usually intentionally tried to control the number of assignments in order to maintain the quality level and avoid busy times and slack times. It is interesting to note that one of the interviewed CEOs suggested that translation memories “store” and standardize service to some extent. During peak times, the service capacity of the agency was extended by buying work time from freelance translators, but this requires that the agency takes extra care of the consistency of the quality. Problems originating from the heterogeneity of services have driven agencies to use various practices to avoid quality problems and to maintain good quality:
Even if we use freelancers, they are all educated and tested. Our processes are standardized, and when a new translator starts, the more experienced translator reads his/her texts.

Due to the intangibility, the customer faced difficulties in evaluating competing translating services, and thus the customer perceived high levels of risk especially when buying translation services for the first time. Despite this challenge, the service provider firms seldom stressed tangible cues and reduced service complexity by giving information about the process and potential outcomes or asked for additional information.

6.2.2 Translating services as professional services

Translation services are knowledge-intensive services which require high education. However, the data revealed an interesting point concerning the professionalism. Customers mostly appreciated the speed of the process and the price, while the highest quality was not so important; instead, a decent quality level was optimal and satisfactory for most of the customers. Also some translation agencies mentioned that the customer does not appreciate good quality and professionalism; instead, some customers have asked, whether a trainee translator could do the work cheaply.

Due to the information asymmetry, the experience and knowledge of the customer in buying translation services varied, as the representative of a translation agency states:

A large enterprise may have had in-house translators, but nowadays the translating is outsourced and these extra-translators as customers know what translating is, they are able to coordinate the process, and they are good at evaluating the service. But in some customer organizations, the secretary has translated the texts, and in these cases we need to start from basics and define what the translating really is.
In general, information seeking, evaluation and quality checking were difficult for the buyer party because of the information asymmetry and credence qualities of professional services. Customers found it very difficult to evaluate and compare translating service providers even after trial translations. Even experienced customers were not completely able to evaluate the translation outcome, as the following buyer’s citation shows:

Sometimes it is really difficult to evaluate how good a translation really is. We (within the customer organization) have usually discussed whether the translation is American English or U.K. English, and people who appreciate U.K. English have been dissatisfied and claimed that the translation is in awful American English style. In some special industries, for example, in biomedicine or biotechnology industries, it is really important that the translator know the right terms. But there are differences of opinion in these issues, for example, some people in our agency say that the translation is awful and some say that is totally ok.

In sum, translating services are difficult to evaluate even after the assignment. Nieminen (2005, p. 30) found that evaluating translations is not seen as easy unless it question of a common language such as English.

The data suggested that the most important evaluation criteria in translation services were price, project management, good attitude towards service, relevant specialization and capabilities, professionalism, speedy time schedules and good references. Prices of translation services are sometimes tricky to set (see Holland et al. 2004, p. 256). Translation agencies use various pricing systems and, therefore, customers may sometimes find it difficult to evaluate and compare the total costs.
Some customers of translation services are rather price-sensitive, and they do not even seek the best quality. For example some text has to be translated by law and, therefore, in some cases, the customer is more concerned about the price and delivery times than quality. In these cases, understanding and fulfilling the customer’s needs can be quite frustrating for language professionals and difficult to accept, since in these cases the customer is not interested in their professionalism and expertise.

Translation services are primarily people-based services produced by professional staff with supporting equipment, like databases and translation memory, as the following extract from the data describes:

Sometimes translation projects are extremely hasty and time schedules too strict. In these situations we are not able to follow the required time schedules or maintain our quality requirements: Even if we have enough translators and we are able to translate the text, the consistency of the text suffers, because one proofreader cannot read all the text so closely that text would be totally coherent, or we need two proofreaders to read it. We do have term lists but still each translator has his/her signature style of translating and it always comes through in the final text. People are people; they are not machines, and even if we use software and are technically advanced, it is people who are mostly involved in the work.

Even if the translation services are produced by educated professionals, technology has a facilitating role during the service process. For example, a CEO of a large translation agency mentioned that translation web-portals clearly facilitate the service process management, since the customer can enter the text, the information system evaluates the text and the use of the translation memory and even estimates the price and time schedule of the service process. Various shared information systems can add new possibilities to share
information about the translations with the customers during the service process, and the value of the translation service is obviously higher when the customer and the agency work together using advanced information systems in order to achieve a better service outcome (see Holland et al. 2004, pp. 258–259). For example, Holland et al. (2004, p. 255) argue that utilisation of the translation memory can be a tool to move away from one-off-transactions to longer-term relationships, since it can add a crucial value for the customer.

Translation services are always customized to some extent, and according to the data, judgment was usually applied by translators and project managers to meet individual customer needs. The customer participates in the production of translation and thus has a role in creating value during the translation service delivery process by presenting some requirements and by giving supporting information to the professionals in the translation agency. This co-operative interference should be seen as an opportunity to carry out the translation as the buyer company wishes, as the citation from the CEO of a large translation agency shows:

> If the customer is less experienced in buying translation services, we really need to define what translating and localization are and what the customer really needs and wants. We also need to figure out if the customer already possesses material or texts that we can put to use. Sometimes we discuss with the customer what kind of terminology and style they want to use. They need to tell us what they want, and we need to ask questions, for example, to whom their promotion texts or instructions will be directed and whether they have different kinds of standards or legislations in different countries.

Some professional services, e.g. technical consulting services, are more routinely produced and their service outcomes and processes are standardized (Edvardsson 1989, p. 7). Some translation agencies had
standardized their process whereas other agencies had not. Translation services were produced routinely by using the translation memory database technology and by standardizing the customer interaction processes and project management. The agency usually pursued a speedy process, a better quality and a certain kind of customer by using standardized processes, as the following citation describes:

I think it is mostly quality control, if we have standardized processes. But it is also about cost savings, because everything goes efficiently and speedily. Also automation of translations is easier when we have standardized the processes.

6.2.3 Promoting and creating new relationships

Translating agencies acted quite differently in terms of promoting their services. Some agencies were only reactive, while others were more active in finding new customers and in creating new needs for their existing customers. It was usually the CEO who was responsible for marketing but project managers, coordinators and occasionally even translators as 'part-time-marketers' participated in the actual marketing in various ways.

The most frequently used marketing practices were web-pages, direct marketing by email or telephone, word-of-mouth and social networking, and participation in competitive bidding. Some agencies were quite advanced in marketing their competences and proving their translation capabilities to potential clients. They used recognizable reference names of their customers and case studies that built a reputation and create a good quality image. If the translation agency mentions their customers from a certain industry, this indicates that the agency knows the terminology of this industry.

The interviews showed that customers of translation services tend to be loyal. This loyalty challenges the service providers, because they
have to ‘break’ the potential customer’s loyalty to their prevailing service provider by offering the customer more value; lower prices, speedier schedules, more services, better quality, better project management. Another finding related to the relationship issue was that even if the service provider’s aim is to gain long-term customers, the customer usually had several translation agencies in parallel: customers wanted to maintain the rivalry between the translation service providers, or they used different kinds of agencies in different kind of assignments. One of the customers described the situation:

I usually use both a small and a large translation agency. With a large one it is easier to handle big projects, while the small ones are more flexible and speedier in rushed situations.

7. Conclusions of needed business know how in translating industries and pedagogical implications

This study contributes to our knowledge of the field by exploring translation services as a professional service type, since translation services have seldom been studied as a professional service. The conceptual discussion and empirical analysis builds business know-how for translation service industry, and stresses business aspects that could be taught and discussed during translation studies.

Because of high-customization of professional services, the participation of the customer is crucial and affects the success of the translation service. Because of information asymmetry, the customers usually do not exactly recognize all their needs and the available possibilities, but the customer is at least partly responsible if the translation does not fulfil the customer’s wishes. Therefore the customer sometimes needs to be guided or taught to participate in service production in the right way.
This study showed that good interaction between the agency and the client facilitates defining the desired service outcome and process. Outcome-related elements, such as the quality of the translation and pricing, and process-related elements, such as schedules and interaction and understanding the customer’s needs should be communicated. The previous literature suggests that the outcome is the most important factor in professional services, and this research confirmed that also for the translation industry: the translation itself is the most crucial element. However, better outcomes and customer satisfaction can also be achieved if the service process is also managed well. Because there are few transactions but relations are usually long, each episode with the customer should be managed well. Customers want their translations fast and at a decent price, which increases the pressure on translating agencies to manage projects and quality effectively.

Because of service characteristics, the prices of translation services are difficult to set, and the standardization and quality control of translations are difficult to achieve. It is important to understand that these problems are common to all professional services, and service providers are able to manage these problems to some extent. For example, translation memory can be utilized to improve the quality and consistency of translation services, to reduce costs and to offer a faster service (see Holland et al. 2004, p. 255): it accelerates the service production, increases the efficiency and reduces the quality variation of the output.

Several marketing challenges were found within translation industries. From the service providers’ viewpoint, the challenge is that translation services are difficult to represent, the quality is difficult to communicate, and services are difficult to price in advance. Therefore the needs and expectations related to the assignment should be discussed openly and clearly in advance, and the translation
The service provider has the leading role in this discussion. The customers gained are important, not only because of profit, but also because of their promoting role through references and word-of-mouth activities. Recommendations originate from the satisfaction of existing customers and their positive word-of-mouth comments are important in gaining new customers. Professional service providers are not keen to promote their services (Feldman Barr & McNeilly 2003, Thakor & Kumar 2000), and in this situation, references, word-of-mouth and web-pages can be considered as neutral marketing conveying information about the offerings and capabilities. The professionalism and marketing attitude are not in conflict. Thirdly, the marketing role of the whole personnel as part-time marketers should be acknowledged; it is significant how translators answer the phone or email and how they present their agency to outsiders.

It is important for language professionals and translators to understand the viewpoint of customers as well. The existing literature acknowledges the increased risk perceived by the customer in professional services (Clemes et al. 2000, p. 576). Because intangible services with credence qualities are difficult to evaluate, translators should present their professionalism and especially their competence and experience more clearly and stress tangible cues, such as reference work and experience within various industries, their known and competent experts and facilities. One of the toughest points is that translator students are taught to make high-quality translations due to their professionalism, but in real business customers do not always appreciate the high-quality: instead they require fast “medium-quality” at a reasonable price, and this might be difficult to accept by a translator student (see, for example, Garant 2006, p. 85).

This study suggested that in translation business, understanding the customer’s viewpoint, needs and criteria and industry seems to be
crucial, in addition to the price and time schedules. Translators should understand the relevance of these elements. Because translation services seem to be more price-sensitive than professional services on average, translation service providers should clearly indicate the benefits of the service to the customer to make the customer understand that they are getting their money’s worth. This price sensitivity could be reduced by giving information about what the investment will bring to the client: speed, good quality etc.

Price sensitivity indicates that customers need to be taught to require good quality and to appreciate the professionalism of translating. This does not happen naturally and as a matter of course, and therefore it requires long-term work from the translation industry and training.

Finally, some pedagogical implications and suggestions are given on how to increase business know-how during translating studies. Some teaching methods, such as real translating projects for real customers during studies, teach students to interact with customers and to manage service projects. Authentic translation projects and assignments for customers (for example Garant, 2006, p. 81) are effective pedagogical tools, even though they are time consuming and require extra coordination from the teacher.

It is typical that some problems will emerge when students work with real customers: students will face time schedule problems, technical problems and customers’ unrealistic expectations (see Garant, 2006, pp. 84–85), but these challenges are typical and normal in translation industry and managing these situations builds business competence. Students could also acquire such project assignments in order to learn how to market and negotiate with customers.

New type of courses could also be offered. Some schools, such as the University of Turku and Turku School of Economics in Finland have implemented a study module called “Business Competence” that
consists of modules such as Entrepreneurship, Project Management and Services Marketing. The aim of the module is to teach business skills to university students studying languages, physics, pedagogics, medicine, etc. The business aspects could also be explicitly and openly discussed during the language substance courses.

If students are encouraged to discuss problems concerning project management, pricing, interaction with the customer, quality problems, the knowledge gained on these important topics will increase business know-how among translating graduates.
References


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