Work placements in doctoral research training in the humanities: Eight cases from Translation Studies

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Abstract: Research cooperation between academic and nonacademic institutions tends not to concern the humanities, where mutual financial rewards are mostly not in evidence. The study of eight nonacademic placements of doctoral researchers working on interlingual translation nevertheless indicates some degree of success. It is found that the placements lead to ongoing cooperation when the following conditions are met: 1) the nature of the placement is understood and relations of trust are established; 2) mutual benefits are envisaged; and 3) there are prior arrangements for receiving visiting researchers. A placement can nevertheless be successful when one of the last two factors is missing. Further, the measure of success for placements in the humanities should concern social and symbolic benefits, in addition to financial profits.

Key words: Industry-university collaboration; PhD research; Translation Studies; non-academic partnership

Introduction

The 2000 Lisbon Strategy aimed to make the European Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world" by 2010 (European Council 2000). The general failure of the strategy is now widely recognized, and one of the reasons for the failure is attributed to relations between universities and industry. In order to ensure innovation in a knowledge-based economy, it is considered essential that academic and nonacademic partners cooperate in research projects at various levels. Doctoral research is obviously a key component of most such projections.

Recent studies of university-industry collaboration (e.g. Borrell-Damian 2009, Pertuzé et al. 2010, Todd et al. 2011, Technopolis 2011, Science Business Innovation Board 2012, Lind et al. 2013) nevertheless paint a dappled picture, with the headlined success stories being written against a background of inconclusive attempts:

> Universities and other higher education institutions (HEIs) can and do make a significant contribution to regional economic and social development, a role growing in importance in a globalised economy. Too often, however, the potential for synergy is thwarted by failures of communication between regional stakeholders and HEIs, weak or unclear policy signals, and conflicting agendas in institutions. (Technopolis 2011: 12)

The available studies are moreover written with an eye to economic sectors where the impact of research is clear: computer science, engineering, chemistry, or medicine. These are areas where companies see advantages in setting up joint research projects or financing specific PhD candidates with a view to patents, which are among the arrangements most likely to lead to mutual benefits in a financial sense.

Here we report on eight attempts at cooperation in a slightly different sector. Although university research on translation between languages (here limited to written and audiovisual translation) does have a relation with the language industry, translation is obviously of interest to several other sectors as well, particularly intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The potential for cooperation is not only with "industry" in the sense of private, profit-oriented companies, but also with a range of institutions that are best described as "nonacademic". Here we will be talking about "academic-nonacademic cooperation", despite an extensive literature that prefers the pair "industry-university".

Research on translation is of interest because it has largely been developed in relation with the university *training* of translators; it does not have a developed history of impacting on that industry in any more direct way. The main innovations in recent years (translation memories, statistical machine translation, collaborative translation software, accessible subtitling software) have mostly come from industry, rarely from a university setting. Particularly in situations where, as in our case studies here, translation research is housed in humanities departments (rather than engineering or computer science, for example), the only substantial exchange with nonacademic partners had been through work placements for trainee translators.

The TIME project set out to change this pattern. Initiated in 2011, it was a Marie Curie Initial Training Network whose full name is *Translation Research Training: An integrated and intersectoral model for Europe* (TIME- ITN 2010- 263954). The initial goals included:

- To increase the involvement of private/public institutions in research training in Translation Studies by kick-starting joint research training, which will lead to sustainable cooperation;
- To raise awareness of the industry of the scope and relevance of translation research and, in turn, raise awareness within academia of the needs of private and public institutions;
- To establish the foundations for academic/private sector joint PhD training and a joint doctoral degree. (TIME 2011)

The kind of cooperation sought here was at the level of components in the researchers' training, rather than a concrete project or a particular PhD dissertation.[1] Four

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[1] Lind et al. (2013) identify four broad forms of collaboration: distanced, translational, specified and developed. The experiences reported on here seem not to find a comfortable place in any of these categories. If the TIME project's aims fit in anywhere, it would be in the "translational" category, at least in its goals, since this is where industry and academia share the same topic, even though they have two different *modi operandi*. The academic partners do research in order to publish and develop knowledge. The non-academic partners aim to improve their products or their firm. The research processes try to suit both needs. However, the project's aims, as expressed above, are at best vague about what benefits the nonacademic partners are expected to gain.

doctoral students and one postdoctoral researcher were each required to spend about six months in one or two work places, which included private companies, non-profit research organizations, and NGOs (all of which will here be called "host organizations"). All the organizations that initially signed up as partners in the project were significantly engaged in translation in some way, as either producers or consumers of translations. In addition to developing the communication avenues and models listed in the aims, the placements ("internships" in the United States, "secondments" in EU parlance) were supposed to enhance the researchers' training in applied research design, communication, transfer skills and general employability, and in some cases to help in the data-gathering for the researcher's doctoral dissertation. In exchange for this, the host organizations could have their costs reimbursed for up to 600 euros per month per researcher, and in some cases they received additional services such as translations, proofreading, data processing, and some initial research findings.

Together, these two aspects (research within the humanities, and a focus on training) made this project both highly innovative and extremely difficult. The aim was indeed to "kick-start" a process where previously there had been almost none. The type of cooperation being sought was essentially without a well-established model; it seems not to have been studied to any extent in previous research (although Borrell-Damian 2009 usefully stresses the doctoral candidate as a "link between university and industry"). In short, it was an adventure into relatively unchartered terrain.

Here we present each of the eight cases. The accounts are written from the perspective of the researchers themselves (the doctoral candidates and the post-doctoral researcher), with revisions and notes from a research supervisor and several representatives of the host institutions.

Since the overall project was divided into four subprojects, we retain that division here. Each subproject had one researcher (doctoral candidate) and one or two placements. Subproject 2 had a post-doctoral fellow as a second researcher.

Case studies

Subproject 1: Translation technologies: for a humanization of efficiencies and usability

This subproject required contacts with the localization industry. The researcher, a Brazilian who was based in Tarragona, Spain, had extensive experience working as a translator for major companies in several countries and was a competent user of the current translation technologies. His education background was in both Electrical Engineering and Linguistics, with a research Masters in Translation and Intercultural Studies. He was fluent in Portuguese, English, Spanish, French, and Catalan. His project was on how translators process metadata (information on translation suggestions) when using translation memories and machine translation, and his experiment involved eye-tracking the on-screen performances of ten professional translators. The results of the research are potentially important for enhancing translator productivity, improving the design of translation technology, and ensuring job satisfaction among translators.

Given the researcher's experience and the industry implications of the project, it was initially assumed that the placements would be easy to organize. Further encouragement came when a long-standing contact at one of the world's largest

multinational translation companies indicated that there was no shortage of issues they would like to see more research on, and he himself was pleased to be an industry consultant for the TIME project. Other initial contacts with a medium-sized translation company in Barcelona were also promising at first, especially since a senior project manager at the company was completing her doctoral dissertation within the same group as the researcher. The Barcelona company also signed up to be a partner in the project. In short, these looked like marriages made in heaven.

In practice, the placements were extremely difficult to organize. The initial contact person within the multinational was based in the Netherlands; he referred us to their Madrid branch, which worked with the researcher's languages. Those negotiations then fell through entirely, ostensibly because of issues of confidentiality but also because there was no prior relationship with the people there, and thus no basis for trust. The Human Resources Manager in Madrid was familiar with placements for young translators but she appeared to have no model for a visiting researcher. Would he be there to translate? If so, the company's documents belong to their clients and could not be used in public research (confidentiality is indeed a key issue in the industry). And if not, what would be the benefit for the company? Emails were sent, then resent, then not replied to; the conversations returned to previous points of departure; negotiations led nowhere.

Something similar happened with the Barcelona company. The idea of a translator coming onsite to conduct research was never clearly understood. This led to strangely circular conversations of the kind:

> Company: "What do you want to do?"
> Researcher: "That depends on what you want me to do."
> Company: "That depends on what you can do."
> Researcher: "But that depends on what I am able to do at your company."

And so on, in a context where clarity of purpose is a premium asset. Although there was another doctoral researcher already within the company, the manager had a background in business rather than languages and could not see how they could benefit from such a partnership. His main concern was that the hours spent tutoring the visiting researcher would not be covered by the official allocation of 600 euros a month. At the same time, though, the company was in the throes of a merger, and their main concerns were logically with other issues.

Two further companies eventually were located, with happier stories to tell.

Case Study A: MSS, Barcelona, Spain

MSS is a small translation company with one office and is also located in Barcelona. It has 15 in-house employees plus a network of freelancers. Its major client is IBM, for whom the researcher had worked in the past. The researcher had actually known two key staff in the company for more than ten years. The company's main prior experience was with work placements for translation students: they have a permanent work-placement arrangement with one of the universities in Barcelona, and all their translators in recent years have come from that arrangement. They were nevertheless happy to have the researcher come on-site and run experiments with their translators. Given the small size

of the company, the researcher was able to interact with staff at all levels, from the owner to the translators.

The placement lasted for four months in 2012. It enabled the researcher to gain access to professional translators who could participate as subjects in his experiment. Additionally, the researcher was able to learn about the company's internal workflow, particularly with respect to the use of translation tools and machine translation. The researcher had no need to engage in translating or other tasks that were outside the frame of his own research. The company was not carrying out any research of its own and was thus not in a position to offer any specific training in research techniques. Confidentiality was not an issue for this company, which came as something of a surprise after the previous unsuccessful negotiations.

The main costs of the placement were negligible in terms of office space and materials: the researcher brought a computer and an eye tracker to spaces assigned to people who worked from home most of the time or were on leave or vacation. There were nevertheless real costs in terms of time, since the researcher spent three to four hours with each of the ten participant translators, conducted interviews of 30 to 60 minutes with around 10 people and had two reviewers assess the translations for quality. Further, the Production and Vendor Manager and the Project Manager and Technical Support spent several hours providing him with information or direct support. These expenses might have been covered by the 600 euros per month paid to the company.

The researcher felt very well received. People in the company understood the project and the researcher was able to learn about the company through meetings and one-on-one contacts.

The main benefits to the researcher were not particularly in terms of any new knowledge about translation, since he had ample prior experience of the translation industry. However, there were insights into aspects such as how the company recruits and ranks freelance translators.

As for the company, it was aware it needed data on the increased productivity obtained with machine translation and post-editing processes. It is nevertheless doubtful that MSS actually solved any problems directly from the researcher's project, although some employees reportedly used the exchange to think about improvements to their workflows. On the other hand, the company gained prestige with its main client IBM, which saw that MSS was associated with the project and was thus interested in improving the tools and workflows related to the services they sell to IBM. This gain in status in the eyes of their major client was of considerable commercial value to MSS.

Not by chance, the placement allowed an exchange directly between the researcher and IBM, which actually occurred during the placement at MSS. IBM had been collecting data on the way its translators used translation memories and machine translation, so it was interested in what the researcher was discovering. At the same time, the researcher has remained in touch with MSS directly and will go back to them to give a seminar on his main research findings. The owner of MSS also contacted the researcher when he was looking for someone to help them with their machine-translation processes.

The researcher enjoyed carrying out the practical tasks of his research, in contradistinction to his more abstract concerns in the university setting. The staff at the company appear to have been happy to talk about what they were doing in their daily

jobs. They were curious about the eye tracker and they seemed to feel privileged for having been "chosen" to host a European research project.

Case Study B: Symantec, Dublin, Ireland

The second placement was quite different. Symantec is a large multinational software manufacturer and security services provider, with over 18 500 employees in more than 50 countries. The placement was arranged through the head of a research department in Symantec's Dublin office, although it had to be approved by the head office in California. Symantec Ireland was used to cooperating with Irish universities and hosting doctoral researchers, mainly through the Centre for Next Generation Localisation (since renamed the Centre for Global Intelligent Content), a university-industry research framework subsidized by the Irish government. Our initial contact person was actually met by the TIME supervisors at a seminar on relations between industry and the training of translators, organized by the Directorate General for Translation in Brussels. The placement thus came about as a result of at least two prior networks dealing with relations between academic and nonacademic institutions.

The placement was for two months in 2013 and was with Symantec's Language Solutions Group. This department had no direct connection with the researcher's specific project, and the main research carried out by Symantec—on developing machine translation engines and studying community collaboration—was done in a different department. It thus took some time to identify a project where the researcher could be of use, and he finished up working on a product-testing project that was not directly related to his own research interests. The main intellectual aim was nevertheless to learn about how a large software company handles terminology and carries out its own research. The researcher did not feel that the company's research was being concealed from him at all, although he never sought to ask for details that went beyond what was offered for general distribution. Confidentiality never became a real issue, since there was no conflict between what the researcher needed to know and what the company was willing to reveal, including information about some of their business practices and service providers.

The costs of the placement to the company were not significant in terms of workspace and contact hours. Indeed, the company was benefiting from free labor that it was being paid to use. The general reception in the company was very positive, and there was some interest in the researcher's project. There are plans to follow up the placement with a survey of post-editor satisfaction, which is a topic of interest to both the researcher and the company. The prestige accruing from the placement is considered of real value for future job searches.

Subproject 2: Multimedia and Multimodal translation: accessibility and reception

This subproject investigated the psycholinguistic mechanisms underlying the reading of subtitles in films. This subproject had two researchers. The doctoral fellow had a research Masters in Translation and Interpreting and a professional Masters in Audiovisual Translation; she was fluent in Spanish, English and Catalan. Her project was on how people watch films with subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing.