

Translating Humanities and Social Sciences texts: translators' perceptions of difficulties and competences

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Abstract

The translation of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) texts promotes the circulation of knowledge and theories across languages and borders. Given disciplinary uniqueness and the divergence between the source and target discourses and contexts, translating HSS works is challenging. Although the difficulties in and competences for translating HSS texts are mentioned in the literature, they have not been empirically validated so far. This study aims to explore translators' perceptions of the difficulties in translating HSS texts and their ratings of the importance of relevant competences. A questionnaire was completed by a convenience sample of academic translators of HSS texts. The results indicate that the difficulties proposed in the literature occur to a greater or lesser extent and that the low quality of source texts, which is ignored in the literature, also poses problems for translators. As for competences, the results indicate that the proposed competences (extra-linguistic knowledge, communicative and textual competence, and strategic competence) are important and that linguist and field-expert translators hold similar views in this regard. Instrumental competence, though not mentioned in the literature, is also essential. This study also generated results that may inform the choice of translators between generic translators and subject experts with different levels of subject knowledge and translation skills. The findings are relevant to and provide insights for stakeholders in HSS translation, for example, HSS scholars publishing in English through translation, academic translators, editors and reviewers, translation commissioners, translator trainers, and HSS programme leaders.

Keywords: Humanities and Social Sciences Texts, academic translation, perceptions, difficulties, competences.

Resumen

La traducción de textos de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales: percepciones de los traductores sobre las dificultades y competencias

La traducción de textos de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales (HCS) promueve la circulación del conocimiento y teorías a través de idiomas y fronteras. Dada la singularidad disciplinaria y las divergencias entre los discursos y los contextos de origen y de destino, traducir obras de HCS supone un desafío. Aunque en la bibliografía se mencionan las dificultades para traducir textos de HCS y las competencias necesarias para ello, hasta ahora no han sido objeto de una validación empírica. Este estudio tiene como objetivo explorar las percepciones de los traductores sobre las dificultades al traducir textos HCS y sus calificaciones sobre la importancia de las competencias relevantes. Para ello, se suministró un cuestionario a una muestra de conveniencia de traductores académicos de textos de HCS. Los resultados indican que las dificultades señaladas en la bibliografía se producen en mayor o menor medida y que también plantea problemas a los traductores la baja calidad de algunos textos fuente, cuestión que no se menciona en la bibliografía. Por otro lado, los resultados indican que las competencias propuestas (conocimiento extralingüístico, competencia comunicativa y textual y competencia estratégica) son importantes y que tanto los traductores lingüistas como los traductores especialistas en otras disciplinas mantienen criterios similares al respecto. La competencia instrumental, aunque no se menciona en la bibliografía, también es esencial. Asimismo, este estudio generó resultados que pueden ayudar a la elección entre traductores generalistas y expertos con diferentes niveles de conocimiento en la materia y habilidades de traducción. Los resultados ofrecen perspectivas valiosas para los agentes implicados en la traducción en el ámbito de las HCS, como los investigadores en HCS que publican en inglés mediante traducción, traductores académicos, editores y revisores, encargados de la contratación de traducciones, formadores de traductores y gestores de programas de HCS.

Palabras clave: Textos de Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales, traducción académica, percepciones, dificultades, competencias.

1. Introduction

Given the superiority of English and the Anglophone way of knowledge construction over other languages and alternative ways of knowledge construction (Bennett 2023; Bielsa, 2011), publishing in English benefits academics in terms of recognition of scholarly contribution and performance evaluations (Bielsa, 2011; Cussel et al., 2023b). Therefore,

Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS) scholars tend to disseminate research outputs in English (Bielsa, 2023; Kulczycki et al., 2018). To publish in international (mostly English) journals, non-Anglophone scholars with limited English proficiency resort to editing or translation services (Bennett, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023b). Therefore, translation of HSS articles is prevalent in the academic community (Montgomery, 2009; Penttilä et al., 2021).

Academic translation plays an important role in the global circulation of knowledge and theory in HSS (Gibb, 2023; Keim, 2016; Sapiro et al., 2020; Sapiro, 2012; Tietze et al., 2017). According to Bielsa (2011, 2022), translation plays a vital role in the production, reconstruction, and dissemination of sociological knowledge: 1) sociologists are assisted by translators or interpreters in their field research (knowledge production); 2) sociologists' research outputs are rendered by translators (or themselves) into other languages (knowledge dissemination), during which process original concepts and ideas are reinterpreted and introduced into new academic territories, challenging established traditions and stimulating innovations (knowledge reconstruction).

What mismatches the contributions of HSS translation is the invisibility of HSS translators. Although HSS translation is widely practised (Montgomery, 2009; Penttilä et al., 2021), translators' work often goes unacknowledged (Bielsa, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023a; Kelso et al., 2023). This might be attributed to a misconception that translation equals mechanical transcoding between languages and is only technical or instrumental (Bielsa, 2022, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023a; Cussel et al., 2023b). To change this misconception, it is necessary to educate stakeholders (authors, journal editors, reviewers, and target readers) about the uniqueness, difficulties, and required competences of HSS translation. Although ideal HSS translators are academics with formal training in translation (ACLS, 2006; Wallerstein, 1981), they are not available (Lillis & Curry, 2010) as universities discourage academics from working as translators (Gibb, 2023). Thus, who should translate (academics or linguists) is also worth exploring.

So far, research on academic translation has been rare (Luo & Hyland, 2019; Schögler, 2019). Studies on HSS translation are even more scarce (Collet, 2016; Gambier, 2021; Károly, 2022). Existing studies have approached HSS translation either from a translation studies (TS) perspective (Bennett 2006, 2007, 2013a, 2013b, 2017, 2019, 2023; Schögler 2018) or from a sociological perspective (Bielsa 2011, 2022, 2023; Price 2008). Conceptual discussions

have recognised the contribution of HSS translation in producing and disseminating knowledge (Bielsa, 2011, 2022; Gibb, 2023), recontextualising knowledge within new intellectual environments (Schögler, 2018), and renewing, clarifying and elaborating on original concepts (Price, 2008). Empirical contributions have focused on discourse analysis (DA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) of HSS texts, strategies to cope with micro- or macro-structures and their impact, case analysis of translating concepts, and translation policies (Bennett, 2007, 2017; Collet, 2016; Cussel et al., 2023a; Fan, 2017; Howland, 2012; Jacquemond, 2015; Kelso et al., 2023; Li, 2020; Pawelski, 2019).

Against such a background, this study aims to answer two research questions:

1. How do academic translators perceive the difficulties in HSS translation?
2. How do they rate the importance of the proposed competences for HSS translation?

This quantitative survey aims to develop constructs of difficulties in and competences for HSS translation and verify them by collecting data from practising HSS translators. This article acknowledges textual diversity within the field of HSS and does not mean to create a dichotomy between scientific texts and HSS texts.

2. Why are HSS texts difficult to translate?

HSS texts possess distinctive features. Academic texts in medical or natural sciences feature the universality of research subjects and uniformity of terms (Károly, 2022; Kuteeva, 2014; McKenny & Bennett, 2011), as is evidenced by the creation of linguistic guidelines (EASE, 2018). By contrast, concepts in HSS texts are subjective and rooted in the social, cultural, historical, political, ideological, and geographical realities of specific contexts (ACLS, 2006; Collet, 2016; Leclerc-Olive, 2016; Poncharal, 2007; Sedová, 2022). The terms are author-, space-, or time-specific in their cultures of origin, have shared or conflicted conceptual reach with those from other cultures, and thus may not have cross-cultural equivalents (ACLS, 2006; Arppe, 2012; Gransow, 2001; Hempel, 2009; Sayhi, 2012; Wei, 2018). The

language is peculiar in style and used in an ambiguous, expressive, novel, and creative way, which can be author- or culture-specific (e.g., nominalisations and figures of speech) (Hempel, 2009; Poncharal, 2007; Sapiro, 2012; Sayhi, 2012; Talaván, 2016). The rhetorical conventions are based on narrations, argumentations, reasoning, and interpretations which are language- and culture-specific (Arppe, 2012; Milliaressi, 2021).

That said, HSS translation is supposed to be demanding. Translators of specialised texts may encounter a series of difficulties, for example, inadequate disciplinary knowledge, lack of equivalents between terms or concepts, creative interventions in the translation process, and untranslatability due to different rhetorical conventions (untranslatability here emphasises the difficulty of HSS translation) (ACLS, 2006; Ladmiral, 2021; Sapiro et al., 2020). Given the challenges, ideal HSS translators should be bilingually competent, familiar with field knowledge of the texts to be translated, and equipped with translation skills (ACLS, 2006; Arppe, 2012; Berrichi, 2012; Schögl, 2018).

The differences in research subjects, concepts, terminologies, and linguistic features not only prevail between scientific texts in medical or natural sciences and HSS texts, but also exist more or less between different HSS disciplines. HSS refers to disciplines along the continuum between hard sciences and literature (anthropology, art, communications, cultural studies, economics, gender studies, geography, history, international relations, law, linguistics, literary criticism, musicology, philosophy, political science, psychology, sociology, etc.) (ACLS, 2006; Sapiro, 2012). Among these disciplines, some exhibit a higher degree of internationalisation than others. For instance, economics and psychology are more likely to adopt Anglophone conventions in knowledge construction compared to anthropology and history. The former two disciplines are also more developed than the latter in terms of the use of standardised meta-languages for scholarly communication. For example, history is a typical discipline of low internationalisation. It focuses on national contexts as research subjects and lacks a standardised meta-language for academic discourse (Annales, 2020). Therefore, disciplinary variations also exist among HSS texts. Such disciplinary variations, together with working language pairs and genres, may pose different challenges for the translation of academic texts in different HSS disciplines. In other words, while some difficulties and competences are shared in HSS translation, others are specific to the discipline, language pair, and genre concerned.

Although discipline-, language-pair-, and genre-specific difficulties and competences do exist, the current study focuses on the shared difficulties in and competences for HSS translation through quantitative surveys of HSS translators. This is done through a deductive logic: 1) development of constructs of difficulties in and competences for HSS translation based on the literature; 2) collection of data from HSS translators as evidence to confirm, reject, or modify them. The advantage of this approach is that, since the surveyed translators represent a good convenience sample of the population of HSS translators (perfect representation of the population not feasible due to the unknown sampling frame), the confirmed or modified constructs of difficulties and competences can, to some extent, apply to general HSS texts. The difficulties and competences provide insights for stakeholders because translators deal with texts of different HSS disciplines and translate both books and journal articles (as suggested by the backgrounds of the participants). Their perceptions of difficulties and competences in HSS translation are not compartmentalised based on disciplines and genres. In this sense, knowledge of general constructs of difficulties and competence provides more insights for practice and training than genre- and discipline-specific difficulties and competences.

The limitation of this broader approach is that it lacks a discipline-, genre- or language-pair-specific perspective. Such a perspective is beyond the capability of the current quantitative survey design. Due to the lack of a sampling frame, recruiting sufficient HSS translators based on a given genre, language pair, and discipline is next to impossible. Analyses of discipline-, genre- or language-pair-specific difficulties and competences require a qualitative design, for example, case studies or focus groups. Even for such studies, sampling HSS translators according to a given discipline and language pair has been challenging, as in the case of Cussel et al. (2023a).

3. Constructs of difficulties in and competences for HSS translation

General translation difficulties are well-documented (see Giozza & Del Mar Gatti, 2015). Difficulty is defined here as factors that potentially pose challenges for translators. Considering space limitations and focus, difficulties in the translation of specialised texts (particularly HSS texts) are reviewed. They are as follows:

- (1) Lack of literacy in disciplinary knowledge (one system rooted in the source culture and the other in the target culture) (ACLS, 2006; Luo & Hyland, 2016; Muñoz-Miquel, 2018; Pisanski Peterlin, 2014).
- (2) Lack of literacy in rhetorical conventions of the target language (Luo & Hyland, 2016).
- (3) Lack of equivalents between terms or concepts due to conceptual void or different conceptual reach between contexts (ACLS, 2006; Arppe, 2012; Bouton-Kelly, 2019; Collet, 2016; Link, 2019; Martorell, 2008; Milliaressi & Berner, 2021; Muñoz-Miquel, 2018; Pawelski, 2019; Pisanski Peterlin, 2014; Poncharal, 2007, 2019; Sayhi, 2012; Tribe, 2012; Wallerstein, 1981; Wilmot & Tietze, 2023) (as witnessed by the publication of a dictionary devoted to conceptual terms that defy translation between languages: Cassin, 2004).
- (4) Untranslatability arising from bridging different rhetorical conventions (e.g., analytic and continental philosophy in argumentation) due to different epistemological norms (ACLS, 2006; Bennett, 2019; Gambier, 2021; Ladmiral, 2021; Luo & Hyland, 2016; Milliaressi & Berner, 2021; Noble, 2019; Poncharal, 2007, 2019; Takeuchi-Clément, 2021).
- (5) Lack of equivalents between words specific to local social, cultural, political, ideological, geographical, and historical realities (existence of false friends) (ACLS, 2006; Bartholomäus et al., 2015; Tietze et al., 2017).
- (6) Cultural divergence (Bouton-Kelly, 2019; Muñoz-Miquel, 2018).
- (7) Treatment of linguistic and stylistic peculiarities that are dependent on the source linguistic forms (figures of speech, cultural references, proverbs, etc.) (ACLS, 2006; Arppe, 2012; Bouton-Kelly, 2019; Dokhtourichvili, 2021; Sayhi, 2012).
- (8) Creative interventions (interpretations, filtering, explanations, etc.) to ensure better reception and avoid misunderstandings among target text readers since the translated texts circulate without their original contexts of production (Berrichi, 2012; Bourdieu, 2002; Sapiro et al., 2020).

Two difficulties listed above are related to the lack of equivalents between HSS texts. In TS, equivalence serves as an instrument to measure the relationship between target and source texts (Leal, 2012). The lack of equivalents indicates that the source and target texts are linguistically, epistemologically, or culturally far from each other. This is related to the use of either target-oriented or source-oriented strategies, for example, dynamic or formal equivalence (Nida), communicative or semantic translation

(Newmark), instrumental or documentary translation (Nord), covert or overt translation (House), acceptability or adequacy (Toury), and domestication or foreignisation (Venuti) (see Munday, 2016, p. 311). A recent update was proposed by Cussel et al. (2023a) who distinguished between assimilatory translation (adaptation of the source HSS texts to the Anglophone conventions so that the target texts read as if they were originally written in English, thus eradicating the lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical features and ways of knowledge construction in the original texts) and reflexive translation (preservation of the original flavour of the original texts in terms of linguistic, cultural, and rhetorical heterogeneity, thus making translators' interventions visible).

Similar to difficulties, translation competence is also well-explored. It refers to the expert declarative and procedural knowledge required from translators (Hurtado Albir, 2010). Considering space limitations and research focus, general competences are not considered, and only those for HSS translation will be touched upon. Based on the translator competence models (Göpferich, 2009; Kelly, 2005; PACTE, 2003), competences fall into four categories (Table 1).

The above-mentioned difficulties and competences will be the theoretical basis against which this study examines to what extent those claims are true in the eyes of HSS translation practitioners. Besides, it will examine which sections and types of journal articles are the most challenging to translate. Since recruiting translators with all the required competences can be daunting, the possibility of being qualified translators for different types of translators and their availability are also explored.

Competence category	Competence component
Extra-linguistic knowledge	1) Pre-existing subject-specific knowledge (ACLS, 2006; Arppe, 2012; Bartholomäus et al., 2015; Berrichi, 2012; Canfora, 2017; Link, 2019; Lukes, 2019; Matoussowsky, 2019; Rochlitz, 2001; Schögler, 2018; Talaván, 2016; Ufnalska, 2007; Wallerstein, 1981).
	2) Capacity to understand and interpret research in the disciplines concerned (e.g., common methodological paradigms and terms, etc.) (Kučiš & Mavrič, 2021; Ufnalska, 2007).
	3) Familiarity with relevant literature in the fields of the texts concerned (Matoussowsky 2019; Ufnalska, 2007; Wallerstein, 1981).
	4) Familiarity with the source contexts in which knowledge in the original works is constructed (ACLS, 2006; Berrichi, 2012; Lukes, 2019; Rochlitz, 2001; Schögler, 2018).
	5) Familiarity with the target contexts to which the target texts are introduced and interpreted (ACLS, 2006; Berrichi, 2012; Lukes, 2019; Rochlitz, 2001; Schögler, 2018).
	6) Sufficient knowledge of the correct use of terminologies in the source and target culture (Canfora, 2017; Link, 2019; Talaván, 2016).
Communicative and textual competence	7) Literacy in the micro-level rhetorical norms of the source and target academic discourse / bilingual competence (tenses, voices, metaphorical expressions, hedges, boosters, discourse markers, etc.) (ACLS, 2006; Bartholomäus et al., 2015; Berrichi, 2012; Link, 2019).
	8) Literacy in the genre-specific macro-level rhetorical norms of the source and target culture (reasoning style, rhetorical moves, etc.) (Bennett, 2013b; Berrichi, 2012; Li, 2020; Matoussowsky, 2019; Talaván, 2016).
	9) Literacy in epistemological norms of the source and target culture (empirical approach vs. speculative approach, etc.) (Link, 2019).
Strategic competence	10) Creative use of strategies specific to the knowledge-making nature of HSS translation (inventing terms and concepts, developing interpretations, explaining concepts, justifying translation decisions in prefaces and notes, etc.) (Arppe, 2012; Berrichi, 2012).
Instrumental competence	11) Ability to document relevant literature and learn it quickly (this one is added here out of concern for its importance in translating HSS texts, though not mentioned in the literature).

Table 1. Proposed competences for academic translators of HSS texts.

4. Methodology

The current research is part of a project on HSS translation and translators. The methodology described here concerns the sections on HSS translators' perceptions of difficulties and competences. The instrument was an online English questionnaire (Table 2). To ensure construct validity, the items were based on the constructs of difficulties and competences mentioned previously. The questionnaire was checked by a colleague with HSS translation experience and refined in terms of wording and comprehensibility.

Sections	Items
Difficulties	1) Eight 7-point Likert-scale items (from “1 never” to “7 every time”; see Table 4).
	2) A checkbox question (which sections of a journal article are most challenging to translate?).
	3) A multiple-choice question (which type of article is more difficult to translate?).
Competences	4) Eleven 7-point Likert-scale items (from “1 not at all important” to “7 extremely important”; see Table 5).
	5) Four 7-point Likert-scale items (from “1 totally impossible” to “7 totally possible”) on the possibility of being good HSS translators for four types of translators (see Table 6).
	6) Four 7-point Likert-scale items (from “1 extremely easy” to “7 extremely difficult”) on the difficulty of recruiting the four types of translators in the market (see Table 7).
Optional question	7) An optional open-ended question to elicit difficulties or competences that are not covered in the above sections.

Table 2. Sections and items in the questionnaire.

A convenience sample of 346 HSS translators were invited to complete the questionnaire. They were from two sources: 1) academic platforms hosting bilingual HSS journals that acknowledge their translators on their websites or in their articles (only those with four or more translation records), and 2) translators’ associations or groups which display members specialising in HSS translation (only those with experience in HSS translation) (see the appendix). They were contacted through emails and/or LinkedIn messages, where they were directed to a link to the questionnaire (due to invalid email addresses or spam filtering, 26 emails failed to reach out). They were informed of the research purpose and the voluntary and confidential policy. The questionnaire was completed by 54 translators (17%), an acceptable response rate for online surveys (Kumar, 2014). The participants’ backgrounds are presented in Table 3. Since the ratio of linguist translators to field-expert translators is almost equal, there is no need to worry about biased perceptions.

Characteristics	Information
Gender	Male: 23, 43% Female: 31, 57%
Average years of HSS translation experience	17 years
Average number of translated books	11 books
Average number of translated articles	115 journal articles
Levels of education	Doctorate degree: 22 or 41% Master's degree: 20 or 37% Bachelor's degree: 8 or 15% Others: 4 or 7%
Types of employment	In-house translators: 4 or 8% Full-time freelancers: 37 or 68% Part-timers: 13 or 24%
Top five countries of origin	France, the UK, Spain, the USA, and Brazil
Top five mother tongues	English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Italian
Top five working foreign/second languages	French, English, Spanish, Italian, and German
Types of translators	Linguist translators (with educational backgrounds in linguistics or TS): 26, 48% Field-expert translators (with educational backgrounds in one or more HSS disciplines but no backgrounds in linguistics or TS): 27, 50% Others: 1, 2%)

Table 3. Profiles of the participants.

Due to the use of single-item scales, reliability is unknown and unknowable, which should not be considered a flaw (Schmidt, 2018; Wanous et al., 1997). Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the quantitative data. The limited qualitative data were analysed thematically and used supplementally.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Translators' perceptions of difficulties in HSS translation

Translators' perceptions of difficulties fall into three categories. As Table 4 shows, the most encountered difficulty is creative interventions (interpretations, filtering, explanations, etc.) to ensure better reception and avoid misunderstandings among target text readers, with a mean of 4.33, between "4 sometimes, in about 50% of the tasks" and "5 frequently, in about 70% of the tasks". The least frequently encountered difficulties are lack of literacy in rhetorical conventions of the target language (Mean=2.28) and untranslatability arising from bridging different rhetorical conventions

(Mean=2.83), between “2 rarely, in less than 10% of the tasks” and “3 occasionally, in about 30% of the tasks”. Both concern the rhetorical conventions of the source or target texts.

Rank	Difficulties	Min	Max	M	Median	SD
1	Creative interventions (interpretations, filtering, explanations, etc.) to ensure better reception and avoid misunderstandings among target text readers since the translated texts circulate without their original contexts of production.	2	7	4.33	4	1.53
2	Lack of equivalents between words specific to local social, cultural, political, ideological, geographical and historical realities (existence of false friends).	1	7	3.52	3	1.48
3	Lack of equivalents between terms or concepts due to a conceptual void or different conceptual reach between the source and target contexts.	2	6	3.48	3	1.36
4	Cultural divergence.	1	7	3.46	3	1.56
5	Untranslatability of linguistic and stylistic peculiarities that are inseparable from the source linguistic forms (figures of speech, cultural references, proverbs, etc.).	1	6	3.06	3	1.42
5	Lack of literacy in disciplinary knowledge.	1	6	3.06	3	1.05
7	Untranslatability arises from bridging different rhetorical conventions (e.g., analytic and continental philosophy in argumentation).	1	6	2.83	2	1.33
8	Lack of literacy in rhetorical conventions of the target language.	1	5	2.28	2	1.09

Table 4. Perceptions of difficulties in HSS translation.

The rating of five difficulties lies between “3 occasionally, in about 30% of the tasks” and “4 sometimes, in about 50% of the tasks” (ranked 2-5 in Table 4). One participant commented on why dealing with concepts can be difficult when relevant knowledge is required to comprehend the source texts and why it is not insurmountable:

Translating the humanities is challenging, but gratifying if you have the necessary contacts with the authors to be able to pin down their sources, as the sources behind various concepts are not always stated. (Participant 18)

One difficulty which was not covered in the questionnaire is the low quality of the source text, which was mentioned by two participants:

...you didn’t touch on bad writing and concomitant hazy thinking by academic authors, which are problems I frequently have to deal with as a translator. (Participant 35)

[The difficulty] ... usually depends on the quality of the source text, which is often poor. So the biggest difficulty I usually face is trying to unpick poorly written Portuguese which I translate into English. (Participant 23)

This study also attempted to explore the difficulties specific to the translation of academic articles. The most challenging sections of academic articles for translators are theoretical frameworks, article titles, and abstracts (Figure 1). Translating theoretical frameworks is difficult because of the presence of concepts, theories, terms, and other culture- and context-specific elements which require not only subject knowledge and ad hoc learning, but also creative interventions to reproduce them. Article titles are difficult because they are compact and condensed with information. The challenge of translating abstracts may be attributed to its standardised move steps and high information density. Both titles and abstracts are expected to be concise and simultaneously as informative as possible, which adds difficulty. Some believe that “it depends on the specific characteristics of the texts and authors” and that some articles they translated do not contain the listed sections. This is because, in some disciplines, such as history, art, anthropology, philosophy, geography, and sociology, articles are organised in a conceptual style relying on narrations, argumentations, and reasoning, instead of following standardised moves (Arppe, 2012; Milliaressi, 2021). This relates to the other question: which is more challenging to translate, conceptual or empirical articles?

The translators believe that conceptual articles are more difficult to translate than empirical ones (Figure 2). The former is less standardised in content and form compared with the latter, which features universal language use and structure (close to the IMRaD formula in sciences, though there are slight differences depending on disciplinary consensus). In HSS, articles in history, art, anthropology, philosophy, geography, and sociology are generally close to the conceptual pole along the conceptual-empirical continuum, while those in psychology, economics, and education are closer to the empirical side.

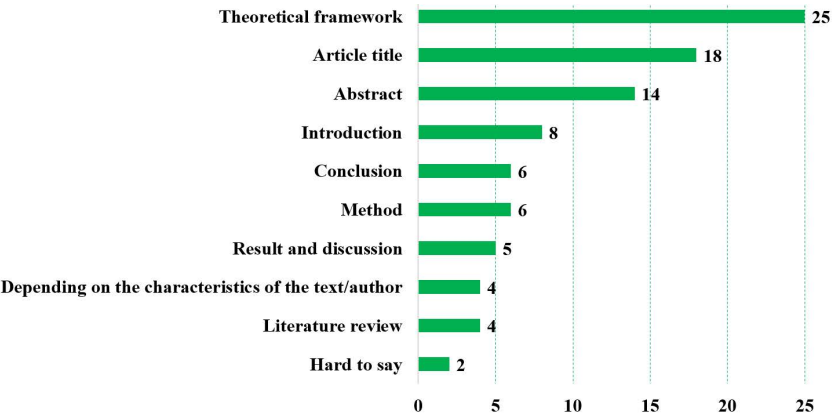


Figure 1. Which section(s) of journal articles are more challenging?

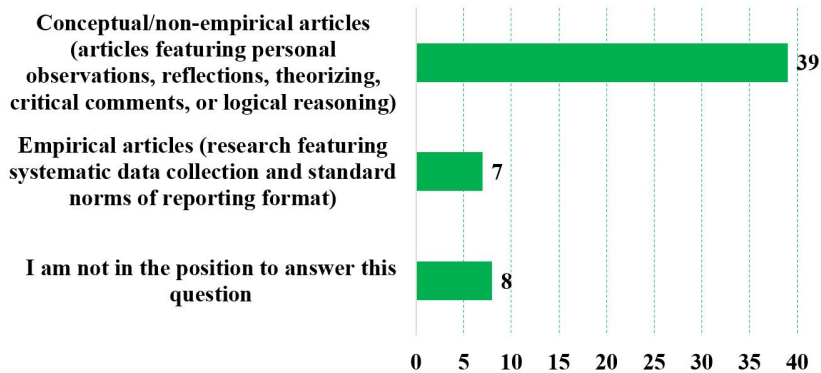


Figure 2. Which type of article is more challenging?

The results not only confirmed the difficulties in HSS translation proposed in the literature but also indicated a new one (low quality of source texts). Those difficulties provide evidence that, for both linguist and field-expert translators, HSS translation is a challenging task. The two groups have similar means in their rating of the difficulties (Figure 3). The results of independent samples t-tests indicate no significant differences in their perceptions.

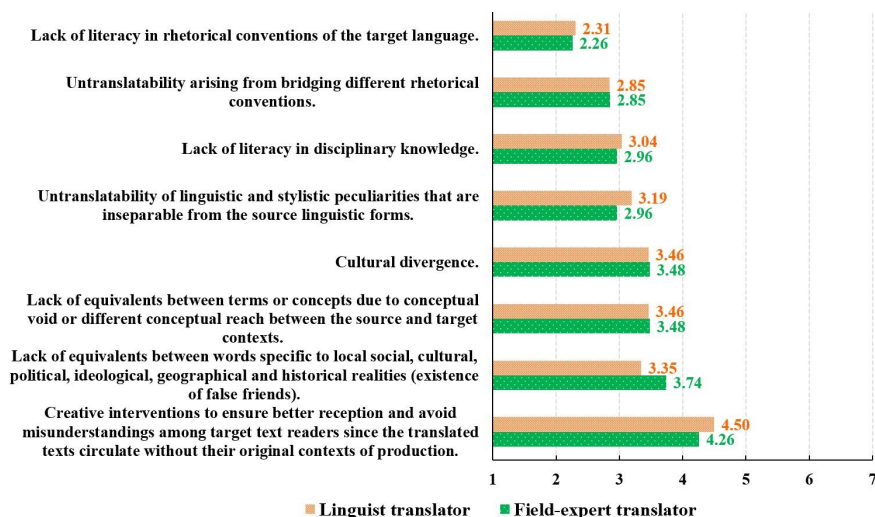


Figure 3. A comparison of the means in perceived difficulties between the two groups.

It is hoped that the findings can help clarify the misconception that translation equals mechanical transcoding between languages (Bielsa, 2022, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023a; Cussel et al., 2023b), inform other stakeholders of the difficulties in HSS translation, and change the unacknowledged status of HSS translators (Bielsa, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023a; Kelso et al., 2023).

5.2. Translators' perceptions of competences for HSS translation

As for the competences for HSS translation (Table 5), eight were rated between “5 considerably important” and “6 very important” (ranked 1-8). Three were rated between “4 moderately important” and “5 considerably important” (ranked 9-11).

Rank	Competences	Min	Max	M	Median	SD
1	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Sufficient knowledge of the correct use of terminologies in the source and target cultures.	2	7	5.91	6.5	1.43
1	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Capacity to understand and interpret research in the disciplines concerned (e.g., common methodological paradigms and terms, etc.).	2	7	5.91	6	1.23
3	Communicative and textual competence: Literacy in the micro-level rhetorical conventions of the source and target academic discourse (tenses, voices, metaphorical expressions, discourse markers, etc.).	2	7	5.76	6	1.49
4	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Pre-existing subject-specific knowledge (e.g., basic concepts, theories, etc.).	2	7	5.59	6	1.55
5	Instrumental competence: Ability to document relevant literature and learn it quickly.	1	7	5.67	6	1.59
6	Communicative and textual competence: Literacy in the genre-specific macro-level rhetorical conventions of the source and target culture (reasoning style, rhetorical moves, etc.).	1	7	5.56	6	1.48
7	Strategic competence: Creative use of strategies specific to the knowledge-making nature of HSS translation (inventing terms and concepts, developing interpretations, explaining concepts, justifying translation decisions in prefaces and notes, etc.).	2	7	5.28	5.5	1.61
8	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Familiarity with the target contexts to which the target texts are to be introduced and interpreted.	1	7	5.11	5	1.63
9	Communicative and textual competence: Literacy in epistemological conventions of the source and target culture (empirical approach vs. speculative approach, etc.).	1	7	4.85	5	1.76
10	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Familiarity with the source contexts in which the original texts (research) are constructed.	1	7	4.54	5	1.62
11	Extra-linguistic knowledge: Familiarity with relevant literature in the disciplines concerned.	1	7	4.30	4	1.64

Table 5. Perceptions of the competences for HSS translation.

All competences were rated as important, though to different degrees. “Sufficient knowledge of the correct use of terminologies in the source and target culture” is important because it involves the codification of professional terminologies, providing a shared means of communication in a given field and thus reshaping it (Chabada et al., 2012; Link, 2019). Other competences help translators comprehend the source texts and contexts, make interventions, and reproduce knowledge in the target texts and contexts. The instrumental competence to document relevant literature and learn it quickly is important because it complements inadequacies in extra-

linguistic knowledge. Why is it not mentioned in the literature? Extra-linguistic competence is emphasised in the literature (see Table 1), indicating that ideal HSS translators should be field experts (ACLS, 2006; Wallerstein, 1981). Since they have adequate extra-linguistic knowledge, instrumental competence, which serves to complement the deficiency in extra-linguistic knowledge, is not important. However, since university policies discourage academics from working as translators (Gibb, 2023), field-expert translators may not be available (Lillis & Curry, 2010). Linguist translators are thus an equally important labour force. Given their lack of background in HSS domains, they need to possess instrumental competence to obtain extra-linguistic knowledge.

Since the participants included both linguist translators (26) and field-expert translators (27), Welch's t-test (unequal sample sizes and variances between groups) was performed to check if significant differences exist between the two groups. Results indicate that, in one competence (familiarity with the target contexts to which the target texts are to be introduced and interpreted), the rating of linguist translators ($M=5.65$, $SD=1.20$) is significantly higher than field-expert translators ($M=4.56$, $SD=1.85$), $t(44.8)=2.58$, $p=.01$, $d=.699$ (medium effect size). This could be attributed to linguist translators' sensitivity to interlingual and intercultural communication resulting from their specialised educational backgrounds. No significant differences in others were detected between the two groups (Figure 4).

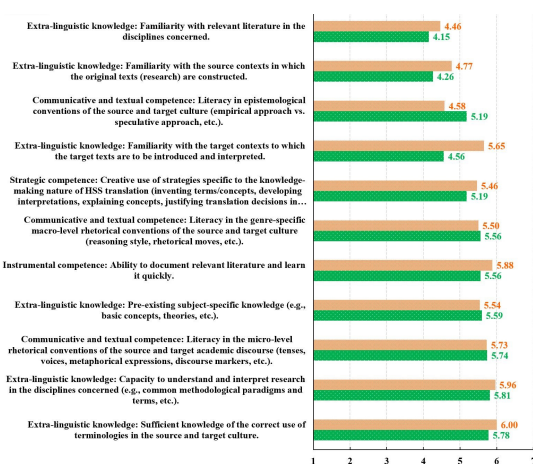


Figure 4. A comparison of the means in perceived competences between the two groups.

Some hold that subject-specific knowledge is not necessary if translators possess knowledge of the academic discourse conventions (micro- and macro-level rhetorical norms) (Bennett, 2009; DiGiacomo, 2010; Gile, 2009). Since knowledge constructed in the original texts is rooted in certain local historical, political, geographical, and cultural contexts, translation in such disciplines as sociology and philosophy requires translators to interpret and explain the knowledge to target readers by referring to the original contexts (Schögler, 2019). In other words, HSS texts are produced by field experts for their peers; through the texts (wording, presentation of evidence, argumentation, citation, etc.), they attempt to have disciplinary communication with potential readers to move the subject concerned forward based on existing knowledge of the subject. If translators are not as qualified as their peers, it would be challenging for them to comprehend the original texts, let alone mediate the differences between two knowledge systems. Therefore, subject-specific knowledge as well as knowledge of the contexts where the original texts take shape are preferred competences, though they were not rated as important as others.

This study also elicited the participants' views as to which type of translators constitutes ideal candidates for HSS translation. Since recruiting subject experts with translation and language skills or generic translators with mastery of subject knowledge is a daunting task, a compromise may be made between subject knowledge and translation skills. They believe that generic translators, with or without specialist knowledge, are better candidates than their subject-expert counterparts, seeing translation-specific skills as more important than subject knowledge (Table 6). This echoes their rating that "pre-existing subject-specific knowledge" is not the top one of all competences. Anyway, the inadequacy in subject knowledge can be complemented by the "ability to document relevant literature and learn it quickly". Considering the disciplinary backgrounds of the participants (linguist translators: 48%; field-expert translators: 50%), the finding deserves attention because both groups of translators believe that translation-specific skills are more important than subject knowledge.

Items	Min	Max	M	Median	SD
A generic translator with SOME specialist knowledge in the field concerned	2	7	5.59	6	1.54
A generic translator with NO specialist knowledge in the field concerned	1	6	4.22	4	1.49
A subject expert with SOME training experience in language and translation skills	1	7	3.54	3	1.58
A subject expert with LIMITED language and translation skills	1	5	2.17	2	1.15

Table 6. The possibility of being good HSS translators for different types of translators.

Another question concerns the difficulty of finding different types of translators. A subject-expert translator with some language and translation skills is the most difficult one to find in the market (Table 7). What comes next is a generic translator with some specialist knowledge in the field concerned.

If their ratings on the four types of translators' possibility of being good HSS translators and those on the difficulty in finding them are taken into consideration, generic translators with some specialist knowledge are a more feasible choice than subject experts.

Items	Min	Max	M	Median	SD
A subject expert with SOME training experience in language and translation skills	1	7	4.11	4	1.36
A generic translator with SOME specialist knowledge in the field concerned	1	7	4.09	4	1.35
A subject expert with LIMITED language and translation skills	1	6	3.43	4	1.27
A generic translator with NO specialist knowledge in the field concerned	1	7	2.76	2	1.50

Table 7. The difficulty in finding different types of HSS translators.

The results confirmed and updated the competences for HSS translation proposed in the literature. Although it was proposed that HSS texts should be ideally translated by field experts (ACLS, 2006; Wallerstein, 1981), the current findings indicate that both linguist and field-expert translators believe that linguist translators, with or without specialist knowledge, are better candidates for HSS translation than their field-expert counterparts. It is hoped that the verified competences here can serve as supplementary evidence to clarify the misunderstanding that translation is only technical or instrumental (Bielsa, 2022, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023a; Cussel et al., 2023b).

6. Conclusions and implications

This study aims to examine translators' perceptions of difficulties in and competences for HSS translation. The results indicate that the proposed difficulties in the literature are confirmed by HSS translators. Creative intervention is the most encountered challenge. Those concerning subject-specific knowledge, terms, concepts, cultural differences, and context- or language-specific elements also occur frequently. The difficulty in bridging differences in rhetorical conventions is not as frequently encountered as is expected. Moreover, the low quality of source texts is a difficulty ignored in the literature. The results also suggest that conceptual articles are more difficult to translate than empirical ones and that the most challenging sections of articles are theoretical frameworks, article titles, and abstracts.

As for competences, the results suggest that those proposed in the literature (extra-linguistic knowledge, communicative and textual competence, and strategic competence) are all rated as important. Instrumental competence, which was ignored in the literature, is also rated as important. Moreover, the participants believe that translation-specific skills are more important than subject knowledge and that generic translators with some specialist knowledge are more feasible choices than subject experts.

A comparison of the means in the perceived difficulties and competences between linguist and field-expert translators indicates that no significant differences exist between the two groups (except one competence: familiarity with the target contexts to which the target texts are to be introduced and interpreted).

This research has confirmed and updated the difficulties in and competences for HSS translation recorded in the literature. The findings provide food for thought if we consider the current status of English as an academic lingua franca in HSS disciplines. Although the use of English as the academic lingua franca may lead to potential epistemological monoculture (Bennett, 2013a, 2023), reinforce English hegemony and the Anglophone community as the centre of knowledge circulation (Bielsa, 2023), and deprive local communities of access to knowledge (Warchał & Zakrajewski, 2023), a growing number of HSS scholars are constructing and disseminating knowledge in English (Bielsa, 2023; Kulczycki et al., 2018) for better international exchanges and collaboration, central recognition, and positive performance evaluations (Bielsa, 2011; Cussel et al., 2023b). Non-Anglophone scholars are disadvantaged compared with their Anglophone

peers because they have to dedicate additional time, effort, and money to translation or editing services for the production of publishable English articles (Bennett, 2023; Cussel et al., 2023b). Given the difficulties in and competences for HSS translation, finding qualified translators and producing desirable English texts through translation are challenging. That said, it seems that the existing inequality between Anglophone and non-Anglophone scholars and that between English and other alternative means of knowledge construction and dissemination are being exacerbated.

What are the implications for the stakeholders in HSS translation? Scholars aiming to publish in English through translation should be familiar with the difficulties in HSS translation and if possible, improve their bi-literacy levels so that they know their original way of knowledge construction may be alien to Anglophone readers and thus they can work in collaboration with their mediators to get their knowledge across linguistic and epistemological borders through assimilatory or reflexive strategies (see Cussel et al., 2023a; Kelso et al., 2023). Familiarity with the required competences is also helpful for them to look for the right translators.

Academic translators, if they know the difficulties and competences, can have a better awareness of the differences between general translation and HSS translation. Since HSS translators not only reinterpret meaning but also recreate meaning (Bielsa, 2011), such knowledge may serve as the basis for deciding when they need to consult authors for mediation advice, which is common in translation (Cussel et al., 2023a; Kelso et al., 2023), evaluating the impact of translation strategies on reception, and making self-assessment of qualifications before accepting translation assignments.

If editors and reviewers of international journals bear in mind the difficulties and competences, they would be more tolerant of the language qualities of English articles submitted by non-Anglophone authors and of alternative ways of knowledge construction so that those authors may stop feeling the discrimination or unpleasant responses reported in the literature (Cussel et al., 2023b). The observed deviations from the Anglophone norm can be attributed to epistemological differences, difficulties in rendering HSS texts across cultures and languages, and challenges in securing ideal translators

Given the difficulty of finding translators familiar with the domain specialism for HSS translation (Bielsa, 2023), translator trainers may consider incorporating the difficulties and competences for HSS translation into

academic translation courses. HSS programme leaders may also consider offering translation courses for their students so that they can undertake translation work, as suggested by Gibb (2023).

The current findings may help clarify the misconception that translation equals mechanical interlingual transcoding and improve the unacknowledged status of HSS translators. In particular, HSS translation commissioners may find them useful when recruiting translators because both linguist and field-expert translators believe that generic translators are better candidates than their subject-expert counterparts, seeing translation-specific skills as more important than subject knowledge. This is different from the assumption that field-expert translators are preferred HSS translators.

One limitation of this study concerns sampling. Given the convenience sampling strategy, the findings may not be generalised to the whole population. However, convenience sampling made it possible to collect data that would not have been feasible otherwise.

As an exploratory descriptive study of an underexplored topic, it is believed that the translators' perceptions can confirm the existing claims in the literature. Future qualitative designs may be used to focus on one specific disciplinary niche and examine the relevant difficulties in or competences for translation between two specific languages.

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Appendix

Academic platforms

Cairn.info. <https://www.cairn.info/>

OpenEdition. <https://journals.openedition.org/>

SciELO. <https://www.scielo.org/en/>

HRČAK. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/en>

Taylor and Francis. <https://www.tandfonline.com/>

Translators' associations or groups

Books and Ideas. <https://booksandideas.net/>

Association of Literary Translators of France. <https://atlf.org/>

Flanders Literature. <https://www.flandersliterature.be/translators>

Mediterranean Editors and Translators. <https://www.metmeetings.org/>

Association of Translators and Publishers in the Social Sciences. <https://www.atessfrance.org/>

Swedish Association of Professional Translators. <https://sfoe.se/en>

Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters. <https://aiti.org/en>

Spanish Association of Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters. <https://asetrad.org/>

Belgian Chamber of Translators and Interpreters. <https://www.cbti-bkvt.org/>

Institute of Translation and Interpreting-Spanish Network. <https://www.spanish-translators.org/>

American Translators Association. <https://www.atanet.org/>