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Back to basics in the classroom to prepare students for the future workplace: Investigating speed training for translators

Lynne Bowker and Cheryl McBride

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Lynne Bowker and Cheryl McBride
University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada
lbowker@uottawa.ca; cmcbr014@uottawa.ca

There has been a longstanding tension at universities with regard to the "skills vs. knowledge" debate. The press is increasingly reporting on a (perceived) "skills gap" between what employers expect and what graduates offer. Similarly, according to student satisfaction surveys, students want better preparation with regard to "professional skills." Universities are responding by introducing more skills into the curriculum, but they must ensure that such efforts do not undermine the delivery of foundational knowledge.

In translation, a challenge noted by both graduates and employers is the need for new recruits to meet tight deadlines. We have been exploring ways to introduce speed training into the curriculum in a way that allows students to develop the ability to work more quickly, while also giving them the opportunity to reinforce basic skills that are essential to developing a solid foundation in translation. These essentials include the ability to analyze and grasp meaning, to extract key ideas and structure from a text, to organize ideas, to convey ideas accurately and to recognize and avoid distortion in information transfer. The focus of speed training therefore remains firmly rooted in developing critical thinking skills, but with a view to simultaneously cultivating the ability to make informed decisions quickly.

We will report on an investigation in which twenty-one third-year students in the BA in Translation program participated in weekly speed training in the form of *précis* writing under strict time conditions. Students were surveyed about the experience at the beginning, mid-point and end of the Fall 2014 semester. Their *précis* were evaluated weekly, and their progress was tracked. The results show that students did improve their ability to work more quickly while still producing quality output, and that while they found the exercise challenging, they appreciated its value and felt better prepared to work under time pressure.

Lynne Bowker holds a PhD in Language Engineering from the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology in the United Kingdom. She is Full Professor at the School of Translation and Interpretation at the University of Ottawa, where she teaches and conducts research in translation technologies, language for special purposes, technical translation and translation pedagogy. She is the author of *Computer-Aided Translation Technology* (2002). Cheryl McBride holds and MA in Translation from the University of Ottawa. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Translation Studies at that same institution, where her research focuses on translation technologies. She has taught numerous undergraduate courses, including courses on French-English translation, documentation and lexicography, and translation technologies.