

**Promoting an identity framework for
language teachers in translator and
interpreter education**

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Abstract

This conceptual paper offers a perspective on translation and interpreting (TI) students' language education and examines it in the context of research on teaching and learning in higher education (HE). First, the paper responds to scholarly debates about the nature and the relevance of language learning and teaching that is translation- and interpreting-oriented. For this purpose, it situates TI students' language education within the discourses of translation pedagogy and translation teacher development. The paper then turns its attention to the emergence of TILLT (TI-oriented Language Learning and Teaching) as a sub-field in Translation Studies. After addressing key questions of acknowledgment and recognition, the paper discusses an identity framework for TILLT teachers, consisting of four components. The paper concludes that TI students' linguistic competence, their educators, and the discipline of Translation Studies all benefit from TILLT teachers who actively engage in SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning).

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore translation and interpreting (TI) students' language learning and their educators' ways of language teaching in TI degree programs. In the paper, I adopt the perspective of a practitioner-researcher and base my reasoning on twenty years of teaching experience of German as L1 and L2 in an academic TI study program at the bachelor's degree level. This means that the paper neither deals with translation activities in the language classroom nor with the teaching of translation and/or interpreting in TI education. Consequently, no particular focus will be placed on translation or interpreting teachers but rather on language teachers in TI education who are no TI professionals themselves (Seidl 2021).

My German L2 teaching experience for international exchange students at a university language centre over the same period helps me to be aware of the differences between these two educational settings. The main objective of language classes in a TI degree program is to prepare students linguistically for the actual TI classroom. Conversely, language education in a study abroad setting must serve the needs of incoming students, e.g. Erasmus students, to better master their stay abroad in terms of language skills, irrespective of their degree program. More precisely, the following sections are based on experiential and practical knowledge gained in two different language teaching settings in HE. Both settings have one thing in common: both are German as L2 classrooms—the one at the university language centre and the one in a TI degree program—and both are prototypically multilingual classrooms with no shared L1 between the learners. However, the classroom in the TI program is only TI-discipline-based, whereas the one in the study abroad setting is multidisciplinary with a variety of exchange students' background in terms of different degree programs. In the spirit of self-directed professional development (Mercer et al. 2022), Seidl and Janisch (2019) compared and contrasted their didactic approaches when teaching in a study abroad setting as opposed to one with a focus on TI. By bringing together the perspective of a trained TI professional, language teacher, and teacher educator (Janisch) with that of a language teacher and teacher educator (Seidl) they concluded that TI students are expected much higher performance levels regarding, *inter alia*, linguistic accuracy, textual analysis, appropriate use of register or intercultural awareness.

Such endeavors that aim at connecting foreign language competence and translation competence are supported, among others, by Seel et al. (2023) who highlight the importance of a different approach to TI-oriented language education as opposed to general language education. However, in contrast to that view, Hao and Pym (2023, 225) argue that translation scholars should "no longer seek to distinguish [themselves] from language

education, for example by insisting that translation requires a special type of language learning". Nevertheless, in the remainder of the paper, I will do exactly that by stressing the relevance of language learning and teaching that is deliberately TI-oriented.

2. TI-oriented language learning and teaching

One of the most important aspects of TI-oriented language education is that students as future TI professionals must be made aware from the beginning of their studies that their own communicative goals are not at the heart of their academic education. Rather, they learn how to act communicatively on behalf of others, either with spoken, written or signed language. Yet, due to the fact that language teachers in TI programs are often professionals in language teaching but not in TI, they must be equally made aware of the above in that they must know (or learn) how to teach according to their students' professional future as language service providers (Cerezo Herrero & Schmidhofer 2021; Seidl 2021).

This kind of academic language learning and teaching within TI education has first been coined TILLT by Cerezo Herrero and Schmidhofer (2021), the acronym standing for Translation- and Interpreting-oriented Language Learning and Teaching. Schmidhofer, Cerezo Herrero and Koletnik (2021) later introduced the abbreviation and the concept to a wider community with the aim of drawing attention to the specificity of TILLT and of promoting it as a field of academic enquiry. Figure 1 is inspired by Loughran (2009, 198) who discusses "scholarly teaching [...] as something carefully and thoughtfully developed over time in response to the subtleties of the specific issues, ideas, concepts, and knowledge to be taught". Since in TI education, translation- and interpreting-oriented language (TIL) has to be taught, Figure 1 illustrates TIL as the first component of TILLT, i.e., the object of study. However, this kind of language and language use also has to be learned by students, which is reflected in the relationship between learning (L) and teaching (T) in the second and third components of TILLT.

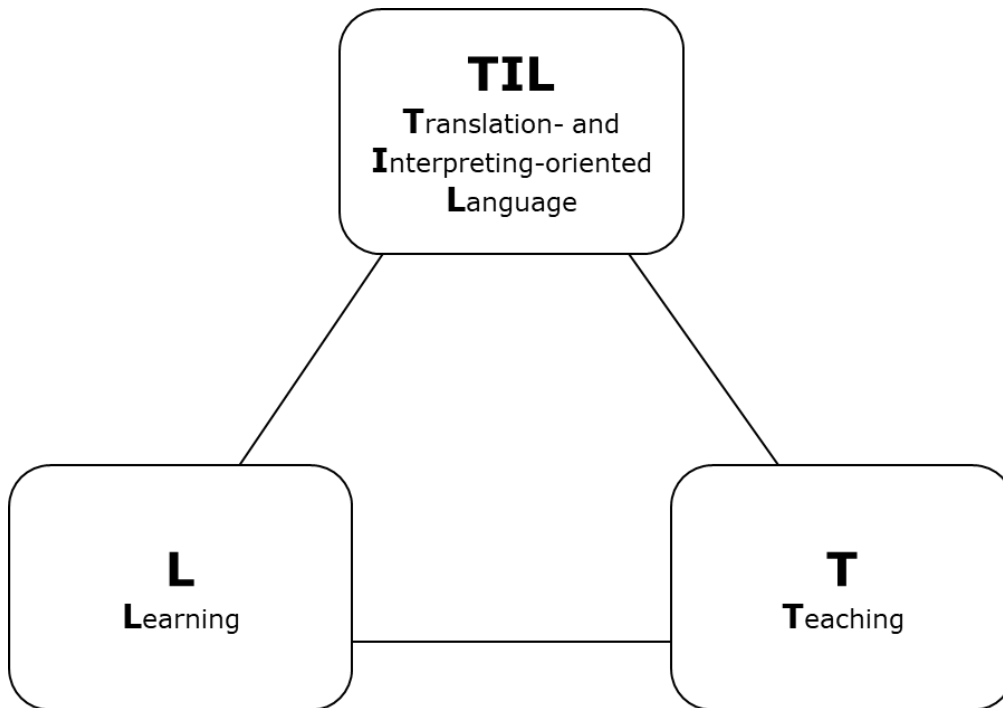


Figure 1. The constituent parts of TILLT (source: author's own)

It was an important milestone that Cerezo Herrero and Schmidhofer (2021) set with their seminal publication in which they took stock of 25 years of research on language education in TI programs in the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and created a new abbreviation, i.e. TILLT. However, an important next step was and still is to respond to and engage in scholarly debates in Applied Translation Studies about the nature and relevance of an emerging sub-discipline such as TILLT.

3. Questions of acknowledgement and recognition

TILLT has been described as “some kind of no-man’s land” between the disciplines of Translation Studies and Language Learning and Teaching (Schmidhofer 2022, 265). In order to bridge this gap, it has been argued that TILLT “should have a place at conferences about Translation Studies and Foreign Language Teaching where researchers have the chance to meet other colleagues and future collaboration can be discussed and undertaken” (Cerezo Herrero & Schmidhofer 2021, 38). It follows that a prerequisite for that to happen or, even better, for tackling inter- or transdisciplinary research projects is mutual recognition as legitimate disciplines within their own right. With the intention of establishing TILLT as a field of its own within Translation Studies, Cerezo Herrero et al. (2021) suggest, as one example, its promotion in the realm of Language for Specific Purposes.

At any rate, for TILLT research and practice to thrive and to become a fully-fledged field of research that stands alone it is of utmost importance that it “set[s] itself up as an interdisciplinary field of enquiry with firm links to other disciplines” (Schmidhofer 2022, 278). Schmidhofer (2022, 278) calls for TILLT to widen its scope if it does not want to “go around in circles”, suggesting links to research on material development, computational linguistics, but also on topics such as enculturation and professional identity. We can assume that if TILLT as a branch of “disciplinary teaching research” (Tight 2020, 418) within research on HE gains recognition as a sub-discipline of Translation Studies, of Translator Education or of Translation Teacher Education, its recognition as a field worth of research and scholarly activities would entail status, linked with funding, maybe even with professorships.

However, in the context of TILLT, acknowledgement and recognition also touch upon more personal issues in terms of questions such as ‘Who is recognized and valued as a TILLT teacher?’ This is where matters of identity, legitimacy, and membership in professional communities come into play. Identity tensions may arise when TILLT teachers with no background in TI (as myself) ask themselves ‘Do I belong in TI programs? Should professional translators be teaching these language classes instead of me?’ In my view, this thinking reflects a deficit-oriented approach, by enacting one’s identity from the perspective of ‘the other’, i.e., TI experts. In stark contrast to that I believe that a focus on one’s strengths – in this case expert knowledge in language learning and teaching in HE – is much better than a focus on the compensation for deficiencies. The next section offers one way of looking at TILLT teachers by adopting an identity-based approach.

4. An identity framework for TILLT teachers

Over the course of twenty years of German L1 and L2 teaching in an academic TI study program at the bachelor’s degree level, I have perceived some marginalization of language education in the broader TI education space. In fact, Seel et al. (2023) remind us that a scholarly debate about the teaching of languages for undergraduate TI students only began in the late 1990s. Yet, also at the practical level of curricular decisions and departmental structures students’ language education should not be relegated to the periphery. My attempt to understand this experience of perceiving TILLT being considered less important than actual translation and interpreting classes, led to the conceptualization of an identity framework for TILLT teachers whose four interrelated constitutive parts are illustrated in Figure 2 and will be discussed in what follows. In this paper, the identity framework will be embedded, for the first time, within the broader context of research in disciplinary teaching in HE (Loughran 2009)

in order to build, maintain and extend robust scientific structures for the professional practice and academic field of TILLT. For a more comprehensive description of TILLT teacher identity, see Seidl (2023).

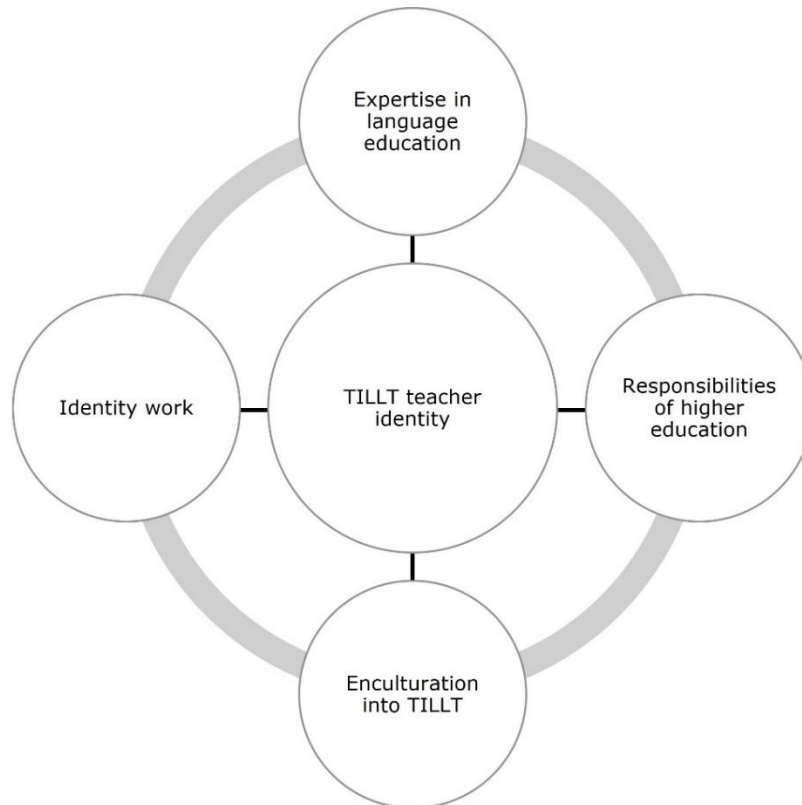


Figure 2. TILLT teacher identity (Seidl 2023, 69)

4.1. Expertise in language education

Starting from the top of Figure 2, we find one of the key strengths of TILLT teachers, i.e., their expertise in language teaching methodology. Language teaching professionals make autonomous and expertise-based decisions in terms of planning entire course outlines as well as planning and delivering individual lessons. However, the TILLT context depends heavily on students' capacity for independent language learning. Consequently, Schmidhofer (2022, 274) emphasizes TILLT teachers' role as "advisors in the development of learner autonomy, since a considerable part of language development must occur outside the classroom".

4.2. Responsibilities of higher education

Helping students to become independent language learners and users implies teachers' willingness to take into account potential challenges that undergraduates encounter during their first years of HE. Considering that

this is primarily the time when language courses in TI programs are offered, teachers act responsibly if they consider several variables such as “age, maturity and world experience, the educational background of the new generations, their expectations, and the ‘myths’ they hold about translation and Translation Studies” (González Davies 2005, 69). Contemporary HE prepares students “for ever more diverse professional roles in ever more complex sociotechnical environments” (Massey 2022, 130). However, Barnett (2022, 128) warns against privileging mainly employability, as this neglects “the potential of the curriculum as a space in which thought, critique and imagination might be nurtured”. After all, according to Barnett (2022) any curriculum in HE represents an expression of pedagogical responsibility towards the ultimate purpose of HE which is fostering a more humane, just, and democratic society.

4.3. Enculturation into TILLT

If TI students are responsible for their own (language) learning, the same holds true for their teachers. It seems fair to suggest that TILLT teachers with no TI background have the responsibility to gain informed awareness of this disciplinary environment. Without focusing on TILLT in particular, Massey (2022, 128) calls on all teachers in TI programs to “develop in their institutional contexts in the same way that students do in their own situated contexts of learning”. As regards TILLT teachers with a disciplinary background in linguistics and language education, it seems reasonable to assume that for them it is equally relevant as it is for their students to gain “familiarity with the ways of the discipline community [i.e., Translation Studies] – the taken-for-granted purposes, values and methods, the history of key debates, the influence of leading figures – as well as its culture of method, argumentation and communication” (Northedge & McArthur 2009, 113).

The TILLT classroom lends itself well to support students in developing a “service-oriented mindset” (Schmidhofer et al. 2022, 99) by socializing them “into a professional culture of language service provision” (ibid., 107). Cerezo Herrero et al. (2021, 150) aptly describe the role of TILLT teachers in this process of enculturation:

This development in self-perception from language user to language expert and incipient professional translator and interpreter can be supported within TILLT by teacher intervention and the support of personal learner development [...] Texts and topics brought to the classroom by teachers can touch upon different aspects of the profession(s) and the requirements for it. This will help students identify with the goals set by the programme and the language

modules, make them their own and take responsibility for their own learning process.

Based on the premise that HE education students are responsible for their own learning, it can be assumed that their teachers are equally responsible for their own professional development. This is highlighted in the last constituent of this identity framework.

4.4. Identity work

According to Clarke (2009, 187), it is a teacher's "ethical obligation" to deliberately engage in identity work since their work as education professionals shapes the identities of their students. He describes identity work as indispensable if teachers "wish to exercise professional agency" (ibid.), striving for development and growth. Teachers also need to engage with the identities of their students by creating "opportunities for them to explore their changing identities and to imagine possible future identities" (Barkhuizen & Strauss 2020, 16). Barkhuizen and Strauss (2020, 13-14, original emphasis) therefore underline the process of "*doing* identity (it is relational) rather than *being* or *having* an identity (i.e., it is not interior and fixed, or something we possess)".

It is important to emphasize that engaging in TILLT teacher identity work does not happen automatically with the assignment of the role as a TILLT teacher. Kanno and Stuart (2011, 239) underline that in comparison with an assigned role, "identity involves inner commitment". They remind us that identity and practice are mutually constitutive by stating that "[p]ractice shapes identity, whereas identity, in turn, affects practice" (ibid., 245). If we define the TILLT classroom as tailor-suited language education for future TI professionals, it is important that TILLT teachers make it a habit to reflect on their professional identity, their pedagogical decisions, and practices in order to "make more sense of the curriculum and how appropriate it is for their learners" (Barkhuizen & Strauss 2020, 17). Yet, as a matter of fact, TILLT teachers are often employed part-time in academia. This begs the question whether academic leaders in TI programs can expect casual academics, often with precarious short-term contracts, to be committed to and invested in TILLT teacher identity work.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This paper set out to make a case for TILLT and its recognition as both an academic discipline as well as a scholarly practice. Researchers and practitioners in the field have convincingly argued that the communities of Translation Studies/Translator Education and Applied Linguistics/Language Education would both benefit from a fruitful transdisciplinary collaboration

(Massey 2022; Schmidhofer et al. 2021; Seidl & Janisch 2019). First steps consist of engaging in a respectful, appreciative dialogue aiming at mutual understanding and enrichment. Schmidhofer et al. (2021, 72) highlight, for example, the entanglement between Applied Linguistics and TILLT.

The vast amount of research produced by applied linguists has not shed any light on how to tackle the methodological challenges posed by TILLT. Therefore, despite being the driving force behind any activity of a translating nature, the translators' (and interpreters') language competence, and consequently their language training, have not received sufficient attention to date.

TILLT in terms of the scholarly engagement with TI students' language learning activities and their teachers' teaching activities focuses its attention exactly on this relationship between learning and teaching, in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics of TILLT. Obviously, TI-oriented academic language learning and teaching are inextricably linked. Therefore, a focus on HE teachers provides one feasible way of creating a scholarly base from which the teaching part of TILLT can be examined. In his discussion of professional knowledge of teaching, Loughran (2009, 200) argues as follows:

[T]he activity of teaching produces practical knowledge. However, [...] we likely do not recognize practical knowledge unless we become conscious of it in some methodical way. [...] [T]here must be a mechanism for teachers to recognize, articulate, and build upon their knowledge of practice in real and meaningful ways.

As I have argued elsewhere (Seidl 2021), a dialogic exchange between students and teachers in TILLT classes, but also between TILLT teachers, could support their professional growth in the sense of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). In a bottom-up and self-directed approach to professional development (Mercer et al. 2022) TILLT teachers could use their actual teaching experiences as a basis for reflection. However, much remains to be done in order to establish a TILLT teacher identity and community. For example, I do not know of any continuing education program specifically for TILLT teachers nor of any professional development for TILLT teacher educators.

In terms of recommendations for action, efforts should be intensified to establish an international network devoted to TILLT, consisting of practitioners and researchers who wish to improve pedagogy and share educational innovation. In addition, a global TILLT community would profit from its own organization, conferences, specialized academic journals, professional associations, and special interest groups that facilitate

communication and promote exchange of ideas as well as conceptual and theoretical development. At any event, the goal of TILLT-related education research is ultimately to improve teaching and learning and as such serves the most important stakeholders in HE, who are the students themselves.

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