

INTERNSHIPS FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS STUDENTS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYERS – CHALLENGES, PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to present the findings of a study on the experiences of employers taking on interns and to attempt to answer the questions whether students undertaking work placements are prepared for them, what competences they should possess to make full use of the opportunities offered by employers, and to what extent universities can collaborate with businesses and institutions hosting interns to optimise the process of organising and implementing work placement programmes in the era of Economy 4.0.

Design/methodology/approach: This paper presents the results of qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews conducted with 11 employers/work placement supervisors at companies that offer work placements to students, and reflects on the challenges and issues associated with organising such placements.

Findings: An analysis of the respondents' comments enabled us to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the interns in terms of their readiness for work, professional and psychosocial competencies, the problems and challenges faced by employers during the internship, and recommendations for higher education institutions, as well as to highlight areas of tension between different aspects of the respondents' comments.

Practical implications: The results of the research may contribute to the modification of education programmes and internship programmes, and thus to the effective preparation of students for professional work in the labour market conditions of Economy 4.0.

Originality/value: Previous research presented in the literature on this subject has focused mainly on the students' perspective, whilst in the available publications that do take the employers' perspective into account, the findings are based on statistical data or document analysis. There is a lack of in-depth reflection on employers' experiences in a specific professional field. This article aims to fill this research gap.

Keywords: professional practice, professional competences, psychosocial competences, Economy 4.0, translation profession.

Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

As the economy transitions towards Industry 4.0, characterised by increasing process complexity, digitalisation and project-based work, the way in which employee competences are defined is changing. It therefore seems appropriate to adapt the training of young people to the evolving demands of the modern labour market. One of the tools facilitating this process is student work placements. These constitute an extremely important component of academic education, significantly influencing students' readiness to enter the labour market seamlessly, whilst enabling employers to recruit potential, career-focused employees.

The research on work placements presented in the literature to date has focused mainly on the students' perspective, whilst the employers' perspective – their needs, the challenges associated with organising work placements, and their level of satisfaction – remains largely under-explored. Furthermore, in the available publications that do take the employers' perspective into account, the results obtained are highly generalised, based on statistical data or on an analysis of documents defining learning outcomes in the context of work placements. The authors focus primarily on the labour market's general expectations of university graduates without specifying particular fields of study, or on the mutual expectations and benefits of cooperation between universities and employers (see Lis-Lemańska, 2013; Cieciora, 2017; Modrzejewska, 2023; Handzel, Kowalczyk, 2023). There appears to be a lack of in-depth reflection on employers' experiences within a specific professional field.

This article aims to fill this research gap. It is the result of the second phase of a research project focusing on work placements for students of applied linguistics. Its aim is to present the findings regarding the experiences of employers hosting interns and to attempt to answer the questions of whether students undertaking work placements are prepared for them, what competences they should possess to fully benefit from the opportunities offered by employers, and to what extent the university can collaborate with businesses and institutions hosting interns to optimise the organisation and programmes of professional placements in the era of Economy 4.0.

2. Labour market transformations in the era of Economy 4.0 – redefining the profession of translator

In the global economy, language competences are undoubtedly an important advantage in the professional environment. Employees who speak foreign languages are of great value to organisations because, according to Konrad Klimkowski, communication competences, including the ability to mediate effectively between languages and cultures, are essential for the

smooth functioning of various organisations: companies, cultural institutions, governmental, non-governmental and international institutions, as well as religious and faith communities (Klimkowski, 2015, p. 163).

In the opinion of Karl-Hubert Kiefer and Paweł Szerszeń, the importance of foreign language competences is revealed in circumstances where at least two conditions are met: 1) there is a cross-border exchange of both tangible and intangible goods, such as banking, transport and medical services, as well as the transfer of rights or information, 2) in communication situations, whether initiating or accompanying such circumstances, when at least one of the participants gives up using their own native language in favour of the language of at least one other interlocutor (Kiefer, Szerszeń, 2015, pp. 129-130).

Klimkowski points out that although knowledge of foreign languages is usually sufficient for employees of an organisation to communicate on a daily basis in the workplace, there are certain types of interactions for which they need the help of specialists, i.e. interpreters, who provide services to support communication and interpersonal cooperation, e.g. in the European Commission, the European Parliament, during scientific conferences or business meetings (Klimkowski, 2015, p. 163).

The fourth industrial revolution, based on information and communication technologies, robotics and intelligent production systems, has significantly influenced the requirements for professional competences in many fields. Klaus Schwab notes that traditional definitions of employee qualifications focus on advanced or specialised education and a set of specific competences within a profession or field. However, due to the accelerating pace of technological change, the fourth industrial revolution will increasingly require employees to constantly adapt and learn new skills and ways of working in different circumstances (Schwab, 2018, p. 65). This means that today's labour market values not so much specific professional qualifications as the competences needed to perform a certain range of tasks.

Klimkowski notes that, like many professions requiring specialist competences, the profession of translator is also undergoing significant changes. Back in the 1990s, translators performed relatively repetitive tasks. Nowadays, when looking for their place in the job market or trying to redefine their activities, translators must demonstrate flexibility and a willingness to undertake a range of activities that support linguistic and intercultural communication, which do not necessarily fall within the scope of traditional translation, e.g. helping clients edit texts and prepare slides for product presentations, participating in such presentations and advising on content, structure, intended communication effect, as well as linguistic correctness – both in their native and foreign languages (Klimkowski, 2015, pp. 165-166). In the reality of Economy 4.0, translators must demonstrate a much broader set of competences than just knowledge of foreign languages.

Based on the literature on the subject, Olena Shelest-Szumilas compiled a summary illustrating changes in employment in the context of the development of the 4.0 economy. The author took into account three areas of change: 1) the nature of work and tasks performed,

2) forms of employment and work organisation, 3) employment structure and competence profiles. Analysing the phenomena and trends identified by the researcher that are causing changes in the labour market, it can be seen that intellectual competences, teamwork skills and the ability to perform cross-cutting tasks are becoming increasingly important. Automation and cooperation with artificial intelligence-based systems are replacing routine, repetitive tasks, leading to the dematerialisation of work and increased standardisation in selected professions. Employee mobility and flexible forms of employment are on the rise, and work is increasingly being performed online, using digital platforms and mobile applications. Relations between employees and employers are becoming less formalised. Employment takes the form of task-based, project-based or casual work, and professional development is no longer linked to a single career path but is shaped by experience gained in various organisations. New professions are emerging and traditional jobs are being transformed, which means that new skills need to be acquired. There is a clear polarisation of employment. On the one hand, the share of the simplest professions in the labour market is increasing, and on the other, those that require very high qualifications. At the same time, the demand for professions with a moderate level of competence is falling. More and more people are choosing to work for themselves, which indicates growing autonomy and individualisation of career paths (Shelest-Szumilas, 2022, p. 41).

In summary, flexibility, readiness to adapt to continuous learning, creativity in problem solving, a change in approach to work organisation, as well as digital skills and the ability to work with technology, and in the case of translators, an understanding of how machine translation works and its limitations, are becoming key for the Economy 4.0.

In the context of employee competences, it is worth referring to Bińczycki, Łukasiński and Dorocki, who have compiled a list of those that they consider to be key for Industry 4.0. The researchers divide competences into four areas: social, cognitive, professional and personality. They consider social communication, the ability to work in a multicultural team and emotional intelligence to be important aspects of social competences. Cognitive competences include creativity and innovation, the ability to think independently, internal discipline, the ability to adapt to emerging changes and mobility in terms of place or country of employment. According to the authors, professional competences include openness to new technologies, the ability to operate modern machines, multitasking and knowledge of foreign languages. Personality-related competences include assertiveness, coping with stress, maintaining a work-life balance, and loyalty to the employer (Bińczycki, Łukasiński, Dorocki, 2023, pp. 85-93).

It seems reasonable to say that in the case of translation work, the above-mentioned characteristics can also be translated into specific professional requirements, conditioned by the building of professional relationships and contacts with clients from different countries, including remotely, and the possibility of using CAT tools or AI technology.

3. Internships for applied linguistics students – future translators

Academic training for translators usually takes place in the field of foreign language philology or applied linguistics. The studies shape the language competences of future translators through courses such as specialised language, specialised translation and, above all, practical language learning. The programme also offers subjects such as translation theory, which provides a theoretical foundation for practical language and translation competences. Most often, young adults' first contact with the realities of the labour market is through student internships.

Katarzyna Klimkiewicz defines student internships as an element of the education programme that can be described as a teaching method aimed at improving the competences of higher education graduates, enabling them to link theoretical issues with the problems of professional life, allowing them to gain experience and preparing them to enter the labour market (Klimkiewicz, 2015, p. 94).

Work placements for students of applied linguistics enable them to gain experience not only in translation, but also in functioning in an authentic institutional, business or cultural environment. In addition to developing key and multifaceted translation competence (see: Pietrzak, 2017, pp. 203-206), internships allow students to familiarise themselves with the specifics of specialist language, the nature of which depends on the profile of a given institution or company. They enable students to come into contact with various fields of translation, such as tourism, medicine, law, technology and literature, and thus encourage them to make an informed choice about their future professional specialisation.

The experience gained during internships allows students to face a variety of challenges typical of the work of a translator, such as terminological, technical or cultural difficulties. In this way, internships prepare students to confront real professional problems. In addition, they stimulate the development of independence, decision-making skills and the ability to act in real-life situations. Cooperation between universities and institutions and companies in the organisation of internships benefits both parties – it provides students with access to practical knowledge and experience, while enabling employers to recruit promising candidates (Klimkiewicz, 2015, p. 96).

The objectives of professional internships for translation students can be systematised in several dimensions. Firstly, an important element is gaining knowledge about the organisation and specific functioning of the company or institution where the internship takes place. Secondly, the opportunity to perform tasks requiring language competences plays a key role, including, among others, handling contacts with contractors, conducting telephone conversations, obtaining information from the media, drafting letters and offers, performing translations and analysing legal documentation. Thirdly, internships enable students to acquire practical skills related to both the specifics of the institution's business operations and the nature of specialised translations.

Another area involves developing an awareness of the cultural conditions of a translator's work, which is particularly important in the context of international organisations. It is equally important to improve self-reflection competences – analysing one's own successes and difficulties encountered while performing tasks – and to develop organisational competences, such as effective planning and rational management of working time. Finally, internships provide an opportunity to develop teamwork skills, which are an indispensable part of preparing to function in complex institutional and project structures.

Students of applied linguistics at the Silesian University of Technology complete a 6-month internship during their studies. First- and second-year students complete their internship in the summer, after the end of classes, for a period of 2 full months, while third-year students complete their professional internship during the academic year for the same period.

When confirming the completion of a student's professional internship, the employer assesses the following aspects of their work:

1. the student's attitude, including: independence, initiative and openness to change, attitude in the face of problems, responsibility, commitment and conscientiousness,
2. social competences and skills, i.e.: ability to work in a team, ability to behave in difficult and stressful situations, communication competences, politeness and kindness, quality of contacts with colleagues, management and external clients, willingness to critically evaluate one's own work,
3. quality of work and organisational competences: quality of tasks performed, timeliness of tasks performed, degree of use of specialist knowledge acquired during studies, planning and organisation of work.

Each of the above areas is assessed on a 6-point scale, from very good to unsatisfactory.

4. Research perspective and methodology

The aim of the study in the project presented here was to ascertain the views of employers collaborating with the university on the organisation of work placements for applied linguistics students, regarding their experiences of this process, their assessment of the students' preparedness to carry out practical professional tasks, the problems they encountered whilst working with interns, the potential benefits of the placements, and their expectations and needs regarding cooperation with the academic community.

In the study, we posed the following research questions:

1. How do employers assess the preparation of applied linguistics students undertaking internships in terms of language, translation, communication, digital and psychosocial competences?
2. What problems and challenges arise during the work placement process from the employers' perspective?
3. What recommendations do employers make regarding ways to improve the effectiveness of professional training for linguistics students?

We situate our study within the interpretative paradigm, giving it an exploratory nature. To carry out the project, we opted for a qualitative model utilising in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This research strategy enables us to elicit interpretations and the meanings attributed to the interviewee's description of the world and their experiences (Kvale, 2012, p. 42). Despite the limitations of the chosen approach, such as the local nature and subjectivity of the knowledge obtained, it should be emphasised that its advantages outweigh the identified shortcomings. The data obtained within this framework are unique and cannot be obtained by other methods, as they result from allowing the research participants to speak freely (Bauman, 2010, p. 103). They therefore constitute a significant source of new knowledge and enable an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under study. The interviews were conducted in September 2025 with 11 employer representatives, mainly company owners or, in the case of larger enterprises and institutions, individuals designated to supervise students. The selection of interviewees was purposeful; employers who had been taking on applied linguistics students for work placements since the programme's inception in 2019 were invited to participate in the study. The main selection criteria were the length of cooperation with the university and a willingness to participate in the study. Ultimately, the study involved owners or representatives of translation agencies (8), companies in other sectors of business cooperating with foreign partners (2), and a government institution (1).

The interviews, which lasted on average around 45 minutes, were conducted in person or via Zoom. The standard interview script comprised 10 questions and was divided into three sections corresponding to the research questions. However, the order of the questions was flexible, and the scope of the researchers' inquiries depended on the interviewee's engagement. The content of the interviews was recorded, then transcribed and coded. The research findings were obtained through thematic analysis, which assumes an active role for the researchers in the process of knowledge construction and takes into account the subjective and interpretative nature of qualitative research (Braun et al., 2019).

The analysis process was multi-stage and involved: a thorough examination of the empirical data, the inductive (data-driven) generation of codes, the construction of categories, and the identification of themes. Subsequent stages involved reviewing and refining the themes, identifying sub-themes, and developing a coherent analytical narrative that addressed the research questions. During the analysis, we used ATLAS.ti software for coding and organising

the data. We mapped the relationships between themes using hand-drawn concept maps. This combination of tools enabled both the systematic organisation of the material and its in-depth, creative interpretation. The analysis was conducted by two researchers in accordance with the principles of reflective thematic analysis. In subsequent stages, we compared our interpretations and discussed the emerging codes and themes. This collaboration took the form of a dialogue and served to deepen the reflective nature of the analytical process, rather than to achieve coding consensus. This approach constituted a form of researcher triangulation, enhancing the transparency and reliability of the analysis (validation). To convey a full picture of the nature of the narratives, we quote excerpts from the participants' original statements in the article. The statements have been anonymised, and the participants are identified by the symbol R, numbered from 1 to 11.

5. Analysis of the research data obtained. Results and their interpretation.

In the first stage, we obtained 156 codes, from which we identified 14 categories. We then formulated three themes based on these. Analysis of the collected data enabled us to identify the categories described below, which provide answers to the research questions posed.

5.1. How do employers assess the preparation of applied linguistics students undertaking internships in terms of language, translation, communication, digital and psychosocial competences?

5.1.1. Motivation and willingness to learn

According to employers, linguistics students are motivated, ask specific questions and show interest in the practical aspects of the job.

R6: "I think they are very nice, intelligent, willing to cooperate and motivated. So my overall assessment, if I may put it that way, or experience, is positive. And the strengths of the students that are visible are their willingness to work and their willingness to learn. We also pass on a lot of knowledge, for example, about performing and describing certified translations, so here too I see that there are specific questions, you can see that these students are interested in how they are done, and you can also see this willingness to learn something".

R3: "The students are bright, punctual and to the point. We have no complaints".

5.1.2. High level of foreign language proficiency

Almost all employers emphasise the very good language competences of the interns. Here are a few examples:

R3: “Your students are the best-prepared interns we have. I have also noticed that their additional language competences, which they learn from scratch, are at a very good level”.

R1: “Their language competences are definitely very good. The question is how to apply them. We often throw them in at the deep end: they can, for example, interview Piast footballers. And these are people who can cope, who are already prepared linguistically, even with Spanish, much better than, for example, in secondary school. It is clear that people who are interested in foreign languages go into linguistics. The only problem is that they need somewhere to apply this knowledge later on”.

R6: “Language preparation – we don’t see students making any glaring basic mistakes”.

5.1.3. Reliability and meticulousness

Employers emphasise punctuality, accuracy, conscientiousness and even humility in accepting constructive criticism.

R7: “I think we noticed that they approach their tasks very meticulously. We have never had to give anyone a negative review”.

R8: “Most of them are very responsible people who perform their tasks reliably”.

R4: “Our experience with students has been very good overall. They were very reliable, hard-working, eager to work, learn and find out what the job of a translator entails. Their strengths include reliability; they took the work I assigned them seriously and wanted to do it well”.

5.1.4. Communication competences and openness

Employers describe interns as open-minded, willing to talk, well-prepared in terms of interpersonal competences in direct contact with colleagues, which distinguishes them from students of other universities.

R8: “Their strengths are communication competences. Compared to other universities, yes, they are definitely very communicative students who want to work, they don’t slack off (laughter). When it comes to soft competences, such as communication, they are very well prepared”.

5.1.5. Intimidation when dealing with customers

According to the interviewees, students feel insecure in direct relations with customers, especially in difficult situations, and need support and gradual introduction to the realities of the profession. Although communication competences were mentioned in the context of the trainees’ strengths, the interviewees also noted difficulties in this area.

R6: “As for shortcomings and difficulties, I don’t see any. They are a little intimidated when dealing with customers. They have a right to be. But they also receive feedback from us, and we try not to expose them excessively or put them in contact with customers

in difficult situations. Such difficult situations are not yet at the stage where they need to be resolved”.

R10: “Perhaps a lack of ease in communicating with foreign-language customers. In such interactions, face-to-face or over the phone. When it comes to writing text, replying to emails, that’s all fine. However, if a customer comes in and speaks, and now it often happens that it is not a customer who speaks pure English, there is slight resistance and confusion on the part of the students”.

R2: “Contact with the customer – it’s hysteria and panic. A lack of confidence in communicating in a foreign language. A person who chooses to study this should have these predispositions”.

R7: “At the beginning, cooperation and contact with the customer. The problem seems to me to be a bit generational; we also work with young people and it is often the case that these people do not quite feel at ease in such interpersonal contacts and teamwork. They often live in a media-driven world: social media, phones, so anything that requires them to focus on a specific task works great, but working with people is difficult for them”.

5.1.6. Problems with working on formal documents

According to the interviewees, students lack reading comprehension skills in a formal context. They note that filling out formal documents, such as official forms, is difficult for students.

R10: “Filling in an official form is also black magic. They cannot read and understand the instructions on how to fill in the form”.

5.1.7. Good level of basic digital competences

According to the respondents, students demonstrate high basic digital competences, especially in text editing and formatting, which is crucial in the work of a translator. Despite generally high digital competences, many employers report problems with using spreadsheets or more advanced word processing functions. These problems occur mainly at the beginning of the internship and are quickly resolved with the support of the team. Interns also cope well in situations requiring graphic or technical solutions.

R7: “Text editing, text formatting. When it comes to the skills we require, the trainees are doing well. When it comes to text editors or, for example, some graphic solutions, because the client requires, for example, that the form of the document be preserved, we have not had anyone have a problem with this, so I think that digital competences are high”.

R2: “They can use Word reasonably well, and Excel absolutely not”.

R8: “When it comes to shortcomings and difficulties, it is definitely the use of word processing programmes and Excel. I know that these are people focused on translation, but we often have documents with 8000 cells in Excel. For example, a user manual or the coding for a machine. And this has to be translated in Excel so that the company

can use the translation. And this is a big problem. Excel is a tool that is particularly common in technical translations. Machine manuals are usually written in Excel. Word processors and Excel are the basic tools. I assume that not everyone will work as interpreters, so if they want to find a job, they need to learn how to use these tools”.

R6: “Editing text – this can sometimes be problematic, but we are able to resolve it quickly. And it tends to happen at the very beginning”.

An analysis of the interviewees’ comments suggests that students’ competences are generally viewed positively, particularly in terms of motivation, reliability and language competences. At the same time, there is a clear need to improve interpersonal communication competences in direct contact with customers, especially in stressful and unpredictable situations.

5.2. What problems and challenges arise in the internship process from the employers’ point of view?

Based on the interviewees’ statements, we have identified several key challenges that employers face when organising student internships.

5.2.1. Too many internship hours and lack of flexibility in terms of completion dates

Respondents raised concerns regarding the organisational aspects of work placements. The most frequently mentioned issues were the number of placement hours required and the need for greater flexibility in the organisation of placements.

R1: “It would be better if internships were organised during the academic year, i.e. greater flexibility on the part of the university would be advisable”.

R8: “To be honest, we are sometimes surprised by the number of internship hours. It is very high. On the one hand, for organisational reasons on the part of the intern, it is sometimes difficult to reconcile certain matters. Secondly, supporting the intern for 8 hours a day, seven days a week, also makes our work and organisation a little more difficult. Because, obviously, there has to be someone who can help this person if necessary”.

R10: “It would be good if students could work online, as this makes things much easier”.

R 3: “Students often have the same timetable, so you have to arrange it so that as many people as possible can do the internship. Also, they should call in advance. Then it is easier to organise. They have their own desk and computer here. We will be happy to accept them in the future. But it would be good if students had more flexibility in terms of the timing of their internships, then we could take 2 or 3 people at the same time”.

R11: I wonder if such a large number of internship hours is really necessary... With fewer hours, it would be easier to find them a placement”.

R8: “I know where the number of hours comes from, I know the difference between a general academic profile and a practical one. I don’t know if you have any leverage with the ministry (in terms of reducing the number of internship hours)”.

5.2.2. *Premises and staffing constraints*

Despite their willingness to cooperate, employers, especially owners of translation agencies, can only take on a small number of students for internships due to limited capacity to provide workstations and staff supervision.

R6: “We just have to keep an eye on the number of interns so that there aren’t too many of them. This was a problem in the early years, at the beginning of our cooperation. Now we know how many students we can take on and when. There’s no point in exceeding this number, because they might not be able to fill all those internship hours with work. The number of students in a given period is fairly fixed”.

R8: “Logistics. Our office is not very spacious, so we are not able to accept many interns at once”.

5.2.3. *Protection of customers’ personal data and confidentiality of documents*

Due to the fact that we work with confidential documents or documents subject to personal data protection, employers must select the materials made available to interns.

R7: “We are subject to a lot of confidentiality regulations, so we prepare excerpts from documents that do not contain any personal data, so as not to get involved in GDPR training processes and not to sign confidentiality agreements. In fact, the selection of documents that we can make available is quite limited. The issue of data confidentiality and the number of documents that can be translated. Documents related to trade secrets, for example, are probably the biggest organisational challenge”.

R8: “The GDPR is definitely a challenge. It is a significant limitation for us. I can give them licences, legal or technical documents to translate. I can share them with them and there is no problem with that. Medical texts – students will definitely not get those. We would have to put a lot of work into anonymising those texts. Then it would not make sense to prepare such a translation”.

From the respondents’ perspective, the greatest challenges are organisational and structural in nature, rather than substantive. They relate primarily to the number of placement hours, staffing and premises constraints, and legal requirements concerning professional confidentiality and the protection of personal data.

5.3. What recommendations do employers make to increase the effectiveness of the professional training of linguistics students?

According to the respondents, students undertaking internships are well prepared in terms of theory, but need support in developing certain competences. One of the recommendations made by the interviewees was to supplement the preparation for professional internships with meetings with representatives of the labour market, who could present their requirements and expectations towards future interns.

5.3.1. Developing personal and interpersonal competences

The respondents' comments suggest that students need support in developing their professional interpersonal competences and teamwork abilities.

R11: "In this regard, the most important competences are openness to new activities. This would be important, and of course interpersonal competences, at least at a basic level. In my opinion, it would also be useful to place emphasis on teamwork".

5.3.2. Exposure to technical and formal documents

Employers emphasise the importance of placing greater emphasis on formal and technical documents during academic studies.

R6: "I think that the University prepares students very well. Perhaps a little more practical, functional and official documents could be used during practical exercises. But that's just from our point of view, because we have the most of them".

R9: "The demand for technical translation is growing, so if the University of Technology had the opportunity, it would definitely be technical vocabulary, e.g. machine operating manuals, technical specifications. Not many people want to do this. Technical vocabulary, it is worth being well prepared for this – there is money to be made and there is definitely a demand for it".

The research identifies areas for the development of apprentices' competences based on market demand.

5.3.3. The need for a realistic presentation of the specifics of the translation profession

During the interviews, the interviewees also note significant discrepancies between students' perceptions of the translator's role and the reality of the job. They emphasise the need to prepare young people for the realities of working as a translator in the business world.

R7: "Students should already know a little about the work of a translator, because sometimes the expectations of young people clash with reality. Often in private conversations, often unrelated to internships, they think that they sit and translate and that it is easy, simple and pleasant, but this is not always the case. Interns may observe difficult situations when something goes wrong, someone does not arrive, and there is a negative reaction from the customer. When problems arise with a customer, it comes as a surprise to these young people. [...] Sometimes, unfortunately, as interns, they are also given tedious tasks related to archiving documents or tidying up. I think this is valuable in that they also learn at this point that this job is not just about translation and that's it, but that there are also certain procedures for handling documents. Whether it's a matter of GDPR or how long to keep these documents. Unfortunately, it's also a bit of a generational thing, I would say that young people want to get something done and move on. It's not always the case, it's not always possible".

Employers also raise the issue of compliance with regulations in the context of the GDPR or professional secrecy.

5.3.4. *Strengthening cooperation between universities and employers*

Several interviewees also expressed a willingness to strengthen their cooperation with the university, offering to contribute to the educational process by organising meetings and training sessions.

R1: “I could come to you and run a training session on how to implement internships well and effectively”.

R5: “It would be good to organise a mini job fair for students, a meeting for current and former students who already work in various corporations, in various places. Maybe conduct interviews with employers, ask questions about expectations, what the current labour market needs are, and make this knowledge available to lecturers”.

In summary, employers’ comments offer recommendations centred on three key areas: strengthening interpersonal competences, increasing students’ exposure to technical and formal documents, and deepening cooperation between universities and the labour market.

6. Interpretation of the results in the context of thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke

Based on the above categories, we have identified three themes:

1. “Students – valuable competences capital vs. lack of market experience”

Employers paint a positive picture of students as well-prepared and promising professionals. They highlight their motivation, reliability, communication competences, high level of foreign language proficiency and basic digital skills. It is worth noting that interviewees rate students’ communication competences as high, whilst at the same time highlighting their shyness and communication barriers when dealing with clients, particularly foreigners (cf. Budzanowska-Drzewiecka, Marcinkowski, Motyl-Adamczyk, 2016, pp. 60-62). This points to a discrepancy between communication within a familiar group of colleagues and professional communication, which often requires intercultural interaction involving the negotiation of meanings and spontaneity in the use of a foreign language in business communication. The key challenge is not a lack of knowledge, but a lack of experience in the context of professional responsibility and situational pressure. This can be interpreted as the difference between communication in a safe and predictable situation and market-based communication, which requires greater stress resilience, adaptability and situational flexibility – in other words, competences that form part of the concept of social competences in Industry 4.0 (see Bińczycki, Łukasiński, Dorocki, 2023, pp. 85-93; Shelest-Szumilas, 2022, pp. 39-48).

2. “The transition from perception to reality – areas of tension

It is clear from the interviewees’ comments that, whilst students demonstrate a committed attitude towards their tasks and can boast a good knowledge of foreign languages, their awareness of the realities of a translator’s day-to-day work is limited. Students’ perceptions of a translator’s work are shaped during lectures and on the basis of academic experiences. University courses prepare young people in terms of subject matter and specialist competences, but do not take into account the practical aspects of working within an organisational environment. Tasks requiring non-linguistic skills prove problematic, ranging from the use of tools such as spreadsheets, through the drafting and completion of formal documents, to routine office work such as organising and archiving documentation. The picture of a translator’s daily work presented by the interviewees confirms Klimkowski’s earlier observations regarding the diversity of tasks performed by translators today, who often operate in the labour market as self-employed professionals. This aspect is discussed in greater detail by Katarzyna Klimkowska and Konrad Klimkowski in their monograph *Kształtowanie kompetencji świadczenia usług tłumaczeniowych z perspektywy przyszłych tłumaczy*, in which they highlight a range of competences related to the provision of translation services, covering both interpersonal and service aspects.

3. “The institutional framework for cooperation – between openness and constraints

Employers value their cooperation with the university, as students carrying out the tasks assigned to them during their work placements significantly lighten the workload of staff (cf. Modrzejewska, 2023, pp. 85-86) At the same time, employers point to certain limitations in the organisation of work placements. According to their suggestions, cooperation with the university requires systemic adjustments. Problems include the statutory number of hours, a lack of flexibility in the imposed dates for placements, and staffing constraints within organisations. Professional confidentiality, e.g. GDPR regulations, hinders the integration of trainees into all of the employer’s activities. In the employers’ view, the university should enable students to complete at least part of their placements remotely. This way of carrying out tasks is common in today’s labour market. In their comments, employers recommend that language training should focus on specialist technical language. Although the demand for traditional translation services is falling, translation agencies continue to receive numerous requests for technical translations for industry. One suggestion for planning language training is therefore to develop proficiency in specialist technical language.

The thematic analysis points to clear tensions between students’ competence potential and the realities of the labour market. It highlights the value of work placements as a crucial transitional stage between academic education and professional work.

7. Conclusions, implications and directions for further research

Based on the thematic analysis of statements made by labour market representatives, we have drawn several conclusions regarding the preparation of applied linguistics students for work placements and their performance in the modern labour market.

Applied linguistics students at the Silesian University of Technology are perceived as intelligent, meticulous and eager to acquire new knowledge and skills, thereby developing their professional competences. Thanks to the hard work, commitment, responsibility and diligence of student interns, cooperation with them goes very well, and any difficulties encountered are marginal and relate to isolated cases. According to employers, the characteristics and attitudes listed above bode well for their professional future. Furthermore, high language and communication competences, which form the basis of a translator's work, set linguistics students apart from students at other universities, according to employers. Students' preparation in terms of basic digital skills is also rated highly and enables the effective completion of the placement. The difficulties encountered in this area relate to the use of Excel and the application of advanced word processing functions.

A thematic analysis of the empirical data also reveals certain tensions between students' academic preparation and the demands of the real-world workplace. It is worth noting that, whilst students' professional competences are rated highly, they require support in developing competences such as teamwork and interpersonal communication, particularly in stressful and unpredictable situations. In the opinion of employers, the university should also place greater emphasis in vocational training on practical skills, such as working with authentic official documents.

Another conclusion drawn from the study is the need to ensure that students are given a realistic picture of the translator's profession in today's labour market, as the modern translator's work is increasingly rarely limited to the act of translation itself.

A key finding of the study is the importance of cooperation between universities and employers. Respondents express a positive view of the very idea of work placements and recognise the benefits of having students within their organisations. At the same time, they highlight certain systemic limitations. From the employers' perspective, work placements should be better balanced in terms of duration and the level of support employers can provide. The need to manage the number of interns and their schedules was identified as the most significant organisational challenge. This is primarily due to space constraints and staffing conditions. Another obstacle to organising work placements is limited access to confidential documents, which is regulated by data protection legislation.

An effective way of making students aware of the realities of a translator's work and the changes taking place in the profession within the labour market in the Economy 4.0 is to organise meetings with professionals, as a complement to the teaching process.

In the context of the latest recommendation, we consider it worth noting the comments from employers, which indicate a well-thought-out and progressive approach to organising trainees' tasks, with a focus on a safe induction into the role and the opportunity to learn by comparison, alongside a gradual increase in independence and careful selection of a variety of document types.

R6: "Our practice is such that we start by giving them simple tasks. We send them a document and a template. Translations that were done earlier, but for a different client. Then, in the second stage, they do translations with a reference document. Not necessarily identical, but similar. And the third stage is that they do translations of not very long, not very complicated documents on their own from start to finish. But they don't really need any help, they are able to do it well from start to finish. And interestingly, even though there is no such requirement, they very often prepare these translations for us with all the formatting and in accordance with the rules for certified translations, so I have the impression that for them it is a practical course on how to do certified translations. So, the documents are not repetitive and predictable, although of course there are many of them. However, when we see that they can handle these completely simple things and also do well with the reference ones, we increase the level of difficulty and they do quite well with such simple translations of simple documents".

In one of the statements (see: 5.1.2., R1), the interviewee, whilst praising the trainees' language competences, also expresses concern about their professional future and whether they will be able to make use of their competences. In this section, we would therefore like to offer some of our thoughts on adapting translation teaching to the demands of today's labour market and the employment prospects for graduates in applied linguistics.

Digitalisation, a defining feature of the labour market in the Economy 4.0, including the development of artificial intelligence, is transforming – and indeed replacing – many professions, including that of the translator. As a language specialist and, to a large extent, a mediator between cultures, the translator is compelled to broaden the scope of their work. This point is highlighted by Klimkowski, whom we have cited. Applied linguistics continues to be very popular among prospective students who wish to develop their language competences and acquire professional qualifications that are valuable in the labour market. The role of educators responsible for language teaching should be to prepare language specialists who are flexible in applying their knowledge of foreign languages, not only in interpreting and translation, but also, and perhaps above all, in the fields of media, marketing and business. Those who see their professional future as being linked to foreign language competences will thrive in creative roles (e.g. creating posts, podcasts and newsletters; managing social media profiles for organisations operating in the international market; PR activities), analytical work (e.g. market research, customer feedback analysis) or in roles based on interpersonal relations (e.g. customer relations, recruitment in an international and multicultural workplace,

coordination of international teams, organisation of international events, hosting international conferences, moderating panel discussions). In the teaching process, alongside the development of language competences, soft skills should also be developed and strengthened, as well as the efficient and informed use of digital tools. Employees who can communicate fluently in foreign languages, understand cultural differences and are aware of their impact on business relationships will be a valuable asset to organisations with a global reach.

In summary, the study confirms that students of applied linguistics possess solid linguistic competences and significant potential for development; however, their successful entry into the labour market requires further strengthening of their practical and psychosocial competences. Cooperation between universities and employers, and the systematic incorporation of their experiences into the design of study programmes, can significantly contribute to better preparing graduates for the challenges of the modern labour market.

In light of the findings, we recognise the need for further research aimed at a more in-depth analysis of skills gaps from the comparative perspective of students, employers and the actual requirements of the workplace. It would also be worthwhile to investigate how students perceive the profession of a translator and how this perception changes during their studies and work placements.

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