

## Instrumental Competence Development of Internship Students in English Translation and Interpreting Department

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**Abstract:** This study explores the development of instrumental competence among students of the English Translation and Interpreting Department at Sakarya University during their internships. Instrumental competence, defined as the ability to effectively use technological tools in translation processes, plays a crucial role in modern translation education. The research specifically examines how fourth-year students' proficiency in Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools, machine translation systems, and digital resources evolves throughout their mandatory internships. Additionally, the study assesses students' perceptions of their academic preparation and how well university courses equip them to meet the technological demands of the translation industry. Using a qualitative research design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 students who completed internships in translation companies. The findings highlight that internships significantly enhance students' instrumental competence, particularly in using CAT tools and other digital resources. However, gaps were identified in the curriculum, particularly in offering practical experiences with advanced translation technologies. Recommendations are provided for improving translation education to better bridge the gap between academic learning and professional technological requirements. The study underscores the importance of internships in advancing instrumental competence, suggesting that hands-on experience with industry-standard tools is essential for students' success in the field, ensuring they are adequately prepared for real-world challenges.

**Keywords:** Translation Competence, Instrumental Competence, Internships in Translation, Translation Technologies, Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT)

### 1. Introduction

Translation competence encompasses a range of skills crucial for effective translation performance. Pym (2003, p. 492) simplifies translation competence into two core elements: the ability to generate multiple solutions to a translation problem and the ability to choose the most appropriate one. However, more comprehensive models, such as PACTE (2003, p. 7), offer a detailed understanding of translation competence, identifying instrumental competence—proficiency in translation tools—as a distinct and essential component:

*“The instrumental/professional sub-competence was defined as the knowledge and abilities associated with the practice of professional translation: knowledge and use of all kinds of documentation sources; knowledge and use of new technologies; knowledge of the work market and the profession (prices, types of briefs, etc.).”*

Instrumental competence refers to the ability to use translation technologies such as Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools, terminology databases, and other digital resources critical in modern translation practices. Commonly used tools include SDL Trados, MemoQ, and Wordfast, alongside machine translation engines like DeepL, and quality assurance tools such as Xbench. Mastery of these tools significantly enhances a translator's efficiency, consistency, and accuracy, making instrumental competence an indispensable skill in today's market (Eser, 2013, p. 32; Okuyan, 2019, p. 102).

Şahin highlights the significant role of technological tools in all stages of translation and interpreting processes. He emphasizes that computer assistance is present in nearly every aspect of translation, with its importance becoming even more pronounced in technical translations. Using the European Union as

an example—an organization responsible for one of the highest volumes of translation worldwide—he illustrates the extensive integration of computer technologies. These technologies facilitate various stages of the translation process, including the receipt and allocation of translation tasks, communication between units, the translation itself, and the storage of translations for future use (Şahin, 2013, p. 14).

In her doctoral thesis, Türkmen discusses Translation-Oriented Technology Sub-competence, which closely aligns with the concept of instrumental competence. Referring to the study by Can and Türkmen titled *"The Functions of Independent Final Formatters in Translations into a Foreign Language: A Case Study with Translation Studies Students,"* she explains that computer-aided translation tools are categorized into two main types: a) Translation Software (TR) and b) Translation Assistive Software/Translator Assistive Software (TAP). The study classifies TR as software specifically designed for use in translation processes, highlighting their primary functions as being directly related to translation. Conversely, TAP is defined as software or applications created with translators in mind, offering functionalities that support translation tasks. Examples of TR include SDL Trados, Across, MemoQ, Wordfast, and Google Toolkit, while TAP includes tools such as word processors, online document management systems, online/offline dictionaries, optical readers for digitizing source texts, and document management software (Can & Türkmen, 2018, pp. 46–47, as cited in Türkmen, 2019, p. 38).

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of competence plays a pivotal role in Translation Studies and the training of professional translators. Researchers have emphasized the significance of competence as a critical factor that influences the professional success of translators in the market. Odacıoğlu and Köktürk have underscored how competence shapes the professional skills of translation trainees, emphasizing its inclusion of the technological tools used in the translation process (2015, p. 1087). In this context, the effective use of technological tools and related competencies emerge as essential components of translation education. Not only do translation technologies play a crucial role, but research methods, terminology management, and sectoral knowledge are also integral to competence development. Furthermore, in her study, Okuyan emphasized the importance of competence-based educational models for advancing translation education in a globalized world, highlighting that proficiency in translation technologies is a distinguishing factor in the industry (2019, p. 62). Similarly, Göpferich examined the pivotal role of competence development in helping translators adapt to the innovations of the digital age, arguing that technological proficiency is indispensable for modern translators (2009, p. 13).

Market expectations play an important role in shaping translation education. Curriculum designs are updated to align with the real-world demands that translators face in the field, ensuring that students can find jobs immediately upon graduation. The expectations of translation employers generally require translators to possess both technical and interpersonal skills. Particularly, in addition to technological competence, time management, client relations, and stress management skills are of critical importance to the professional success of translators, as noted by the European Master's in Translation - EMT (2022). Therefore, the curriculum must be designed in a way that facilitates students' adaptation to market demands. Similarly, in his study, Odacıoğlu emphasised that aligning the curriculum with market demands is crucial for helping students acquire the necessary technological and sectoral competencies:

*"It is also important to adapt to translation technologies, based on the effort factor, self-awareness and self-consciousness, in transforming the translation competence into the translator competence. As a matter of fact, what is mostly expected of translator by the translation market is the ability to use new technologies in translation, especially in terms of written translation. Recently, translation performance has also begun to be provided by a number of machine translation systems and CAT tools based on the productivity, especially in the context of pragmatic texts such as user manuals. This is a positive*

*development in terms of reducing the workload on a translator who will translate for long hours. The above mentioned sub-competences (instrumental sub-competence etc.) was actually developed by observing the place of technology in translation (2021, p. 987)”.*

Finally, Orozco and Albir argued that the curriculum should be practice-oriented and that theoretical education should be enriched with applications that support sectoral competence development:

*“Building measuring instruments would be useless unless an application is provided, and in fact, while building the three instruments presented in this article we already had in mind a possible application: a research project to study the acquisition of translation competence in trainee translators. The project has been fully designed according to the requirements of the scientific methodology of research, and we hope that the study will indeed take place in the near future (2002, p. 387).”*

Among the key competencies in translation, instrumental competence has gained significant attention from researchers in recent years. Although it is referred to under various names, such as ‘knowledge of electronic tools’ (Yazıcı, 2007, p. 139), ‘instrumental sub-competence’ (PACTE, 2011, p. 33), and ‘technology competence’ (EMT, 2022, p. 9) the core concept remains the same: the ability to effectively use technological tools in translation processes. Yazıcı (2007, p. 139) defines instrumental competence as proficiency in computer skills, including knowledge of software programs, translation memory systems, and database creation. PACTE (2011, p. 33) emphasizes that this sub-competence involves the use of information and communication technologies, as well as document processing resources, such as dictionaries, electronic corpora, and parallel texts. Similarly, the EMT, (2022, p. 9) highlights that technological competence encompasses software usage, database management, and the adaptation to new technologies in the translation industry.

Another researcher, Canım Alkan, who analysed the responsibilities that trainees will face in translation internship, addressed the issue as follows:

*“During their internship, translator candidates acquire new knowledge and develop new skills. For example, they can learn about organisational culture, communication styles and corporate correspondence. They can develop the ability to use the software used in translation. They can put their teamwork skills into practice and make progress in this field. The internship is also a good opportunity to introduce oneself to the business world and develop professional contacts. The translator candidate may not be planning to work at the internship centre after graduation, but he/she can find a suitable job by using the contacts he/she has developed here” (Canım Alkan, 2015).*

Internships play a crucial role in academic programs by offering students the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in professional settings. This practical experience allows students to transition smoothly into the workforce while gaining the skills necessary for their future careers. According to Beard (2007, p. 211), internships foster both personal and professional growth by providing students with practical insights into their chosen fields. Kolb’s (1984, p. 20) Experiential Learning Theory further supports the idea that learning through direct experience is essential for long-term skill acquisition. This holds particular importance in translation and interpreting programs, where students are exposed to real-world translation tasks that integrate the use of Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT) tools and other industry-standard technologies.

In translation and interpreting, internships bridge the gap between academic learning and the profession’s practical demands. Students are introduced to critical tools like CAT tools, terminology management systems, and quality assurance software, all of which are fundamental for modern translation work. These tools fall under what PACTE (2003, p. 6) describes as instrumental competence, a key component of translation competence. As Pym (2003, p. 494) argues, internships are crucial for developing problem-solving skills, allowing students to navigate real-world challenges and select appropriate solutions during translation tasks.

For translation students, internships serve as a period where both technical skills and interpersonal abilities are sharpened. Eser (2013, p. 15) notes that internships not only help students improve their instrumental competence but also enhance their time management, client communication, and adherence to deadlines. Rothman (2007, p. 140) adds that internships facilitate networking and forming professional relationships, which are essential for career advancement.

The research will assess how well students adapt to industry-standard technologies and how these experiences prepare them for the professional translation environment. Building on previous studies, such as those by PACTE (2003) and Eser (2013), the study will also examine the broader impact of internships on students' professional development, particularly regarding real-world translation projects and client interactions. This study will offer insights into how internships influence the professional growth and readiness of translation students, particularly in terms of their technological skills and adaptation to industry standards.

### **3. Research Questions**

This study aims to analyse the development of Instrumental Competence of Sakarya University English Translation and Interpreting 4th year students by asking the following questions through the face-to-face interview method, one of the semi-structured interview techniques:

1. How do translation interns integrate digital tools (CAT tools, machine translation) into their daily tasks, and what impact do these tools have on their instrumental competence?
2. How do interns self-assess their instrumental competence development during and after their internship experience?
3. How does working in specific translation industries (legal, technical, medical) during internships enhance or challenge the development of instrumental competence?

### **4. Method**

#### **4.1. Research design**

This study was conducted within the framework of a descriptive research model. The study adopted a qualitative approach to examine the translation competence gains of Sakarya University Department of Translation and Interpreting students during their internship and the impact of this process on their professional competencies. Semi-structured interview techniques were used to collect the data. The interviews were conducted with intern students in the Department of English Translation and Interpreting. According to Foddy (1999, p. xi), semi-structured interviews arise from a set of pre-prepared questions that pave the way for more in-depth reflection but also carry the focus of the study.

#### **4.2. Participants**

This study is based on qualitative interviewing (Byrne, 2004, p. 219). Data included in this study were gathered from one-on-one interviews with 15 undergraduate students from English Translation and Interpreting Department at Sakarya University. The selection of interview participants was based on two criteria: (i) the students participating in the interview must have completed their mandatory internships required for the translation profession, and (ii) they must have completed their internships at a translation company.

#### **4.3. Data collection and procedure**

Based on qualitative methods, a few open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews were created to offer descriptive records of the study's questions with the aid of scrutinizing the related/comparable works (Eser, 2013; Okuyan, 2019).

The 27-question Turkish interview was conducted online with 15 students who completed their mandatory internships in the Department of English Translation and Interpreting. The interview consisted of 10 sections: (i) Academic and Professional Background (Q1–3), (ii) Internship Information

(Q4–5), (iii) Translation Competencies and Practices (Q6–8), (iv) Language Proficiency and Skills (Q9–11), (v) Technical and Digital Skills (Q12–15), (vi) Cultural Competence (Q16–17), (vii) Time Management and Stress (Q18–19), (viii) Feedback and Evaluation (Q20–21), (ix) Professional Development (Q22–23), and (x) General Evaluation (Q24–27). Due to the large dataset, only selected findings related to the research objectives are presented in this paper, with other findings reported in another study (Ekşioğlu, under preparation). Ethics approval was obtained according to the decision numbered 74 and dated 18.09.2024 of the Sakarya University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee.

#### **4.4. Data coding and analysis**

Upon completion of the data collection using semi-structured interviews and transcription of the interviews, both researchers reviewed the transcriptions to ensure their reliability. Subsequently, the transcriptions were translated into English with a positivist approach. Saldanha & O'Brien (2013, p. 177) argue that researchers who adopt a positivist stance and believe in the objectivity of the research project are more inclined to be comfortable with using translated texts, assuming that it is feasible to be a completely neutral translator.

The analysis proceeded to the next stage by coding the data through the identification of features such as similarities and differences in the transcriptions. These codes are defined as the most fundamental segment or element of the raw data that can be evaluated meaningfully about the phenomenon (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). This involved the adoption of a data-driven coding approach, also known as the inductive approach. This implies that the inductive analysis process includes coding the data without attempting to fit it into a predetermined coding framework or the researcher's preconceived analytical idea (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83).

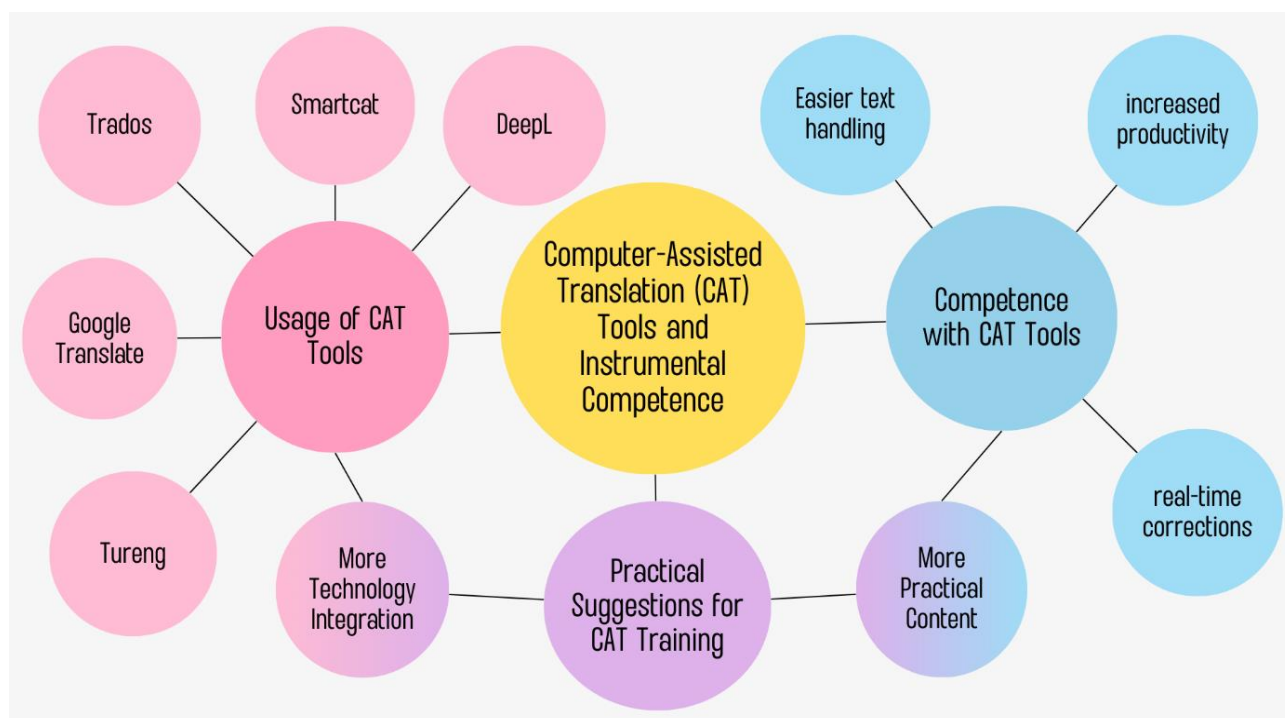
As we conducted the data coding process for this study, we used a qualitative thematic analysis approach to uncover meaningful insights. Thematic analysis is "a process of segmentation, categorization and relinking of aspects of the data prior to final interpretation" (Gbrich, 2007, p. 6, cited in Matthews & Ross, 2010, p. 373). The coding procedure involved analysing the answers given in the interview and identifying sub-themes and categories. We approached the data with an open mind and a commitment to impartial exploration, without any existing coding framework or analytical bias. By immersing ourselves in the data, we aimed to capture the essence of the information by recognizing naturally occurring patterns, themes, and recurring concepts. This inductive approach facilitated a comprehensive examination of the data, allowing for the discovery of new perspectives and nuanced interpretations. By employing this adaptable and data-focused coding process, our goal was to ensure the integrity and validity of the analysis and establish a strong basis for the research findings.

#### **4.5. Findings**

The analysis of the research results, depicted in Figure 1, provides insight into several significant issues conveyed by the themes concerning translation technologies and CAT tools in the context of instrumental competence.

**Figure 1**

*Themes, Sub-Themes, and the Relationship Between (Sub)Themes*



It is an undeniable fact that CAT tools help the translator to do the most work in the fastest way and speed up the translation process. Tools such as DeepL, Google Translate, and Smartcat were frequently mentioned as essential for completing tasks efficiently. Participants highlighted the importance of these tools for automating certain aspects of their work, especially in handling large volumes of text. In addition to these core technologies, supportive tools like Microsoft Word and PDF editing software were also commonly used to format and revise documents during the translation process. Interestingly, some participants mentioned the use of more traditional tools, such as printed dictionaries and physical resources, which demonstrates a varied approach to translation depending on the context or personal preference.

**Table 1**

*Use of Translation Technologies*

Category	Participants	Description
Extensive Use of Translation Technologies	P1, P8, P9, P12, P15	These participants mentioned using multiple translation tools such as CAT tools, DeepL, machine translation, and other applications frequently during their internships.
Moderate Use of Translation Technologies	P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P10, P11, P13, P14	These participants confirmed using translation technologies, including computers, Word, and online dictionaries but did not emphasize extensive or advanced tool usage.
Limited or Minimal Use of Translation Technologies	P5	This participant indicated minimal use of translation technologies, focusing more on non-technological tasks like reading, writing, and using a printer.

This study aims to determine the variety, frequency and level of use of these tools by 15 trainee students during their compulsory internship in the field of translation and interpreting. At the end of the interview, it was aimed to reveal findings that would contribute to the development of instrumental competence by asking the trainee students what should be added to the CAT course related to instrumental competence after their internship experiences. Firstly, answers were sought to the question of whether the trainees used translation technologies during their translations. Participant 1 compared more than one translation tool during the interview and answered as follows:

“Yes, I used many applications under translation technologies.”

Out of 15 participants, 4 of them said that they used the translation tool DeepL and 3 of them said that they preferred computer programmes such as Word which facilitated the translation process. Participant 1:

“I can say that it has replaced Google Translate, especially DeepL. Since it is supported by artificial intelligence, it gives more meaningful results in long texts. It may not give the desired results in short texts. I also looked up words on Tureng. I used Word and Adobe's PDF applications frequently. I also used Google a lot for my research.”

They stated that they were able to handle the creation of data such as tables in the texts in a short time with various text editing programs such as Word. Participant 3 gave information about this issue as follows:

‘Yes, we used computers and got help from Word to create tables.’

Participant 5 and Participant 6 stated that they did not use translation technologies very much.

The use of translation technologies is widespread among participants, and there is a clear reliance on both advanced tools and simpler resources to assist in different aspects of the translation process. This suggests that, while technology plays a crucial role, traditional tools still hold value in certain contexts.

The majority of participants reported feeling confident in their ability to use translation tools, though their level of proficiency varied. While some described themselves as highly proficient or even expert users of tools like CAT software, others identified as having intermediate skills. The internship experience played a significant role in improving participants' proficiency with these tools, as many reported developing their skills through hands-on practice during their internships. Despite this progress, some participants acknowledged that there are still areas where they need further improvement, particularly when it comes to gaining practical experience with certain tools.

**Table 2**

*Competencies of Using Translation Technologies*

Category	Participants	Description
Highly Competent	P1, P7, P8, P10, P12, P14, P15	These participants consider themselves highly competent, mentioning sufficient skills, improvement after internships, or praise from their superiors.
Moderately Competent	P2, P4, P5, P6, P13	These participants rate themselves at a good or average level, noting that while they have sufficient skills, there is still room for improvement.
Less Competent	P3, P9, P11	These participants feel they are not as skilled in the use of these tools, acknowledging a need for improvement or a lack of expertise.

Participants generally perceive themselves as competent users of translation technologies, but there is a spectrum of expertise ranging from intermediate to advanced levels. The internship period was valuable for skill development, though it also highlighted the need for continued practice and growth in tool usage.

Participants reported that technological tools are predominantly used for written translation, with much less reliance on them for oral translation tasks. For written translation, tools like DeepL, Smartcat, and Word were regularly employed to manage and streamline translation workflows. However, when it came to oral translation, participants revealed a preference for more manual methods, possibly due to the limited availability or suitability of existing technological tools for this mode of translation. While many participants felt comfortable using tools for written translation, a few noted that they still required more training or experience to achieve a higher level of proficiency, especially in oral translation contexts.

**Table 3**

*Use of Technological Tools in Translation Technologies*

Participant	Translation Tools (Online programs, CAT tools)	Online Dictionaries (Dictionaries and online resources)	Office Software and Other Technological Tools
P1	DeepL, Google	-	Word
P2	Online programs	Online dictionaries	-
P3	ChatGPT, CAT tools	Dictionaries	-
P4	DeepL, Yandex Translate	-	-
P5	-	-	Computer, Word
P6	SmartCat, MateCat	-	Word
P7	Smartcat, Trados, DeepL, MateCat	-	-
P8	CAT tools, Copilot	-	-
P9	DeepL	Tureng	Word
P10	-	Online dictionaries	Word
P11	CAT tools	Tureng	-
P12	DeepL	Dictionaries	-
P13	ChatGPT, DeepL	-	-
P14	-	-	Computer, phone
P15	DeepL, Smartcat	-	Word

There is a clear divide between the use of technology in written versus oral translation. While tools are extensively used and participants feel confident in their ability to handle written tasks, oral translation remains more reliant on manual processes. This highlights a gap in technology adoption for oral translation that could be addressed through further training or the development of more specialized tools.



Participants frequently expressed the need for more practical exercises to be integrated into their CAT (Computer-Assisted Translation) courses. They felt that while theoretical knowledge was important, the course would benefit from a greater focus on hands-on training, particularly with industry-standard tools such as CAT software and Trados. Practical work was viewed as essential for helping students master the tools they would be expected to use in professional environments. Many participants recommended reducing the amount of theoretical content to create more time for application-based learning, which they believed would better prepare them for real-world translation tasks.

**Table 4**

*CAT Course Improvement Suggestions*

Participant	More Practical Content and Practice	Course Structure and Teaching Methods	Technical Tools and Resources
P1	One semester should focus on practice	One semester on basics, the other on practice	-
P2	-	The lecturer should provide more one-on-one teaching.	-
P3	-	No suggestion	-
P4	More translation technology applications could be shown	-	-
P5	-	-	More emphasis on shortcuts and keyboard shortcuts
P6	More practical content	-	Word
P7	-	-	The department should have a Trados membership
P8	Opportunity to experience all CAT tools	-	-
P9	Could be like the translation practice course	-	-
P10	-	Can be taught as a discussion on translation	-
P11	More criticism	-	-
P12	More practice	-	-
P13	-	No idea	-
P14	More emphasis on programme and practice	-	-
P15	Can be extended to two semesters	-	-

There is a strong desire among participants for a more practical, application-oriented approach in CAT courses. They believe that increased hands-on training with tools like Trados would provide them with

the skills needed to succeed in the translation industry, highlighting a potential area for curriculum improvement.

## 5. Discussion

When evaluating the findings of this study alongside the literature, a recurring theme emerges: the critical role of internships in fostering the instrumental competence of translation students. This aligns with what the literature, particularly studies like those of Okuyan (2019) and PACTE (2011), emphasize about translation education. These studies highlight the necessity for proficiency in translation technologies—whether referred to as CAT tools, machine translation, or database management—as a core component of modern translation competence. The findings here echo these sentiments, with the majority of students reporting that their internships were a primary avenue for developing these technical skills.

One interesting contrast between the literature and findings is the variance in tool usage. While the literature advocates for a comprehensive command of tools like SDL Trados or MemoQ (Eser, 2013), the student interns seemed to lean heavily on widely available tools such as DeepL and Google Translate. This suggests that while advanced software is vital in theory, practicality often dictates tool choice, especially when accessibility and ease of use become priorities. Perhaps it's a reminder that even the most high-tech of industries still have a human element—students will naturally gravitate towards tools that provide the least friction, balancing efficiency with ease.

The findings also support Kolb's (1984, p. 21) theory of experiential learning, which asserts that students acquire skills most effectively through hands-on experience. The students in this study demonstrated a marked improvement in their instrumental competence during their internships, particularly when it came to the more practical application of digital resources. Interestingly, while internships are generally designed to help students master these technologies, it became clear that some participants still rely on non-technological resources, such as physical dictionaries. This might be a nostalgic attachment to the 'old school,' or perhaps it reflects a gap in how current curricula address the balance between traditional and modern tools.

Moreover, the interns' self-assessment of their competence is a telling insight into how confidence in one's skills grows—or, in some cases, stalls—during the internship period. As the literature review suggested, market expectations are shifting, and students must possess both the technical and soft skills to thrive. Yet, the findings highlight a tension: while some students confidently reported high levels of competence, others revealed a need for more practical exposure, particularly in oral translation tasks. Rothman (2007, p. 142) supports this, arguing that internships are pivotal for honing such real-world abilities, yet the variability in student experiences suggests that not all internships are equally beneficial.

One could argue that internships are like CAT tools themselves: some offer smooth, seamless results, while others require a bit more manual tweaking. The literature paints an ideal picture of internships as the perfect bridge between academia and the professional world. However, the findings remind us that this bridge sometimes wobbles depending on the context—paid or unpaid, virtual or in-person, technology-focused or not.

In sum, while this study confirms the literature's emphasis on the importance of instrumental competence and the essential role of internships in developing this skill, it also suggests that there are nuances that future research might explore. Should translation programs re-evaluate their emphasis on theoretical over practical training, as some participants proposed? Should they adjust to accommodate the reality that not all students have equal access to advanced technology during their internships? These questions remain open, hinting that the gap between academia and the industry may need continual realignment.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of instrumental competence in the education of translation students. The findings suggest that while theoretical instruction is valuable, the hands-on experience gained during internships plays a crucial role in the development of technological skills. Translation education programs must strike a balance between theory and practice, ensuring that students are not only familiar with the tools used in the industry but are also proficient in applying them in real-world contexts. To better prepare students for the technological demands of the translation profession, more practical exercises should be incorporated into CAT courses, and opportunities for experiential learning should be expanded.

The translation industry will continue to evolve, and translators must be equipped with the skills to adapt to new technologies and workflows. As this study has shown, internships are an essential component of translation education, providing students with the opportunity to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and professional practice. Future research should explore the long-term impact of internships on translation competence, particularly about technological proficiency and adaptability.

The research conducted with 15 participants addresses a gap in translation studies, but it has limitations. One of these limitations is the small participant size and the restriction to the English Translation and Interpreting department. Conducting the study with students who have completed internships in all Translation and Interpreting departments in Türkiye could yield more generalizable results. Additionally, it is possible to convert this qualitative study into a quantitative study by analysing the frequency of terms in the interviews.

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