How committed are you to becoming a translator? Defining translator identity statuses

DOI: 10.1080/1750399X.2021.1968158

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

Link to publication record in Manchester Research Explorer

Citation for published version (APA):

Published in:
The Interpreter and Translator Trainer

Citing this paper
Please note that where the full-text provided on Manchester Research Explorer is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Proof version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version.

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Explorer are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Takedown policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please refer to the University of Manchester’s Takedown Procedures [http://man.ac.uk/04Y6Bo] or contact uml.scholarlycommunications@manchester.ac.uk providing relevant details, so we can investigate your claim.
How committed are you to becoming a translator? Defining translator identity statuses

Néstor Singer

Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, The University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom

Department of Linguistics and Literature, Universidad de Santiago de Chile, Santiago, Chile

nestor.singer@usach.cl, ORCID 0000-0001-7772-9906

PLEASE NOTE

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, 22/08/2021, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1750399X.2021.1968158
How committed are you to becoming a translator? Defining translator identity statuses

Research on translator identity is scarce in the translation literature. This study explores translator identity in the context of translator education. Translator identity is understood here as the students’ perceptions concerning 1) the translator they envisage to become and 2) the competence they perceive to be developing in order to translate effectively. Concretely, the paper examines translation students’ fluctuation in their translator identity statuses, i.e. the degree of commitment to their translator identity, over the course of one year. To do this, twelve participants from two different Chilean translator programmes engaged in three semi-structured interview rounds during the fourth year of their studies. Thirty-six interviews were transcribed and annotated using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The emerging themes suggest a crisis-reflection-reconnection process leading to commitment development, which was determined by 1) the participants’ immediateness of action taken after a crisis and 2) their emotional inclination. These elements impacted their subsequent attitude towards practice, their self-efficacy beliefs and their academic performance. The participants’ experiential accounts enabled the definition of identity statuses for the translator education setting: achievers’ commitment remained constant during the year, while conservers and seekers suffered a loss of commitment triggered by external sources, particularly from supra-contextual crises.

Keywords: translator identity; identity status; translator education; commitment

Introduction

In Chile, translation programmes last between four and six years (Basaure and Contreras 2019). During that period, students experience a series of situations that can increase their
drive to become translators and practise their profession upon graduation. However, many students finish their programme with the firm conviction they do not want to translate, and they pursue other language-related occupations. It seems that, while some students conclude their studies feeling like translators, others cannot identify themselves as such. This research examines the students’ commitment to their translator identity, that is, the extent to which they are willing to exercise their agency and assume personal responsibility in their process of becoming translators.

According to Toury (1995), the development of translator identity would involve the acquisition of a set of norms that governs translator-related behaviour in a given situation. In the Chilean context, there have been some attempts to understand how this process occurs by exploring translator trainees’ perceptions at different stages of their education (Samaniego 2017; Singer, López, and Basaure 2020; Singer, Rubio, and Rubio 2019). However, these only suggest limited episodic insight as to how students develop their translator identity. This study aims to explore their reported commitment by examining their identity status, i.e. their level of commitment to their translator identity (Marcia 1966; Kroger and Marcia 2011), by addressing the following research questions:

1) What are the influencing factors involved in the development of the students’ commitment?

2) How do the students’ translator identity statuses fluctuate during the fourth year of their programmes?

3) How can identity statuses be defined in the context of translator education?

To answer these questions, twelve participants of two different Chilean translation programmes were individually interviewed on three occasions during their fourth year. Their
experiential accounts were then examined using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009), which highlights the value of the particularity of each of the participants’ experiences, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the students’ commitment to their translator identity developed.

2 Translator identity in translation education

In this study, translator identity refers to the contextualisation of the students’ occupational identity, i.e. ‘the conscious awareness of oneself as a worker’ (Skorikov and Vondracek 2012, 693). According to Meijers (1998), adolescence usually is considered the stage at which this identity begins to develop as individuals attempt to link their beliefs about some occupations to their own capabilities and career motivations.

Tan, Van der Molen, and Schmidt (2017) suggest that post-secondary and higher education provide the context in which students integrate pre-requisite knowledge and skills needed with the norms that regulate the practice of the occupation. In translator education, translation programmes usually enable students to develop their professional set of skills, knowledge and values that govern the translator occupation in a society. conceptualisation of the translation occupation and the extent to which they perceive to have developed their translator competence (Hurtado Albir 2011), i.e. the declarative and procedural knowledge needed in order to translate effectively.

There are five factors in the development of occupational identity –or translator identity in this case (Tan, Van der Molen, and Schmidt 2017). Three of these, namely having knowledge of the occupation, having the professional as a model, and having experience with the occupation, are usually provided by translation programmes. The remaining two are
regarded as critical as they relate to the personal dimension of each student trying to develop their translator identity: preference for the occupation and professional self-efficacy beliefs. The first one is the extent to which students are committed to their training and translator identity, while the second relates to ‘the confidence that [they have] in their abilities to translate’ (Haro-Soler 2017, 199). These two factors could explain why some students finish their programmes feeling –or identifying themselves as– translators, while others do not. The subsection below focuses on how these two factors impact the development of the translator identity.

2.1 Exploring identity statuses

Marcia’s (1966) identity statuses are descriptions of behaviour that suggest the extent to which an identity has been formed. These draw on Erikson's (1968) work on identity development in adolescence, which proposes that, when choosing an occupation, individuals experience commitment to the profession accompanied by a period of reflection. These constitute the two fundamental factors in identity statuses: commitment is ‘the degree of personal investment the individual has expressed in a course of action or belief’ (Kroger and Marcia 2011, 33-34), while exploration refers to the instances following an episode of crisis in which people rethink and evaluate possible courses of action regarding their identities. Crises challenge individuals’ sense of self-continuity and self-recognition, leading to the exploration that could either increase or undermine their commitment.

Individuals can display high or low levels of commitment and exploration, which generates four possible identity statuses: identity achievements, foreclosures, moratoriums and identity diffusions. Although these terms are commonly employed in identity theory, there is no precedent for the use of these nouns in translation studies, which is why this study
uses the terminology proposed by Helson and Srivastava (2001) while adhering to Marcia’s (1966) original definitions: achievements are achievers, foreclosures become conservers, seekers are seekers and identity diffusions become the depleted. Table 1 below illustrates how these identity statuses result from the combinations between commitment and exploration.

[Insert Table 1 here]

Achievers and conservers share a high level of commitment, but they show significant differences. Achievers have clear goals in their lives and are likely to continue pursuing their objectives until they succeed. Because of this determination, they are unlikely to be persuaded to quit in exploration stages. They are also able to accept others’ points of view and consider these reflectively and non-defensively. Conservers, on the other hand, seem very committed, but present an underlying fragility due to their low exploration. This explains why they maintain their positions defensively and why they struggle to consider other opinions. They do this by sheltering in socially accepted constructs and by establishing differences between themselves and others, which is why Kroger and Marcia (2011) claim that the longer individuals hold this status the more guilt or shame they feel when they detach themselves from their beliefs.

Seekers and the depleted have a low level of commitment. Seekers are in the process of defining themselves by exploring several identities or pondering possible courses of action. They engage in existential dilemmas that could either result in becoming achievers or, in case of continuous vacillation, they may develop anxiety or even depression. The depleted display a lack of exploration and an inability to commit to their identities. They look for potential
ways to define themselves in others, but they are unable to do so. They tend to experience a sense of emptiness derived from their feelings of being lost or isolated.

The descriptions of these statuses can be further complemented by including individuals’ emotional inclinations. According to Arciero and Bondolfi (2009), individuals move along two emotional clines as they experience the world: they can either have an *inward inclination*, i.e. their emotional stability is anchored to their own selves, or an *outward inclination*, in which their emotions stem from external sources. Therefore, achievers and seekers display an inward inclination due to their commitment to their own personal goals, while conservers and the depleted show a more outward inclination due to their reliance on others to define themselves. Emotional inclinations add an additional dimension that is helpful in order to understand the fluctuations of the participants’ translator identity statuses.

3 Methodology

This qualitative study is conducted from an hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm, which aims to interpret the psychological processes that may underlie individuals’ accounts of their lived experiences (Howitt and Cramer 2017). These are captured in the *narratives* that emerged from semi-structured interviews. In Ewick and Silbey's (2003) view, these brief narratives display three critical features: selection of relevant past experiences, temporal order, and an organisational overarching structure. In other words, they reveal part of individuals’ self-continuity in the development of their translator identity, which sheds light on the commitments and crises experienced during that process.

3.1 Settings and participants
Two translation undergraduate programmes were contacted to take part in this study. One was Licenciatura en Lingüística Aplicada a la Traducción (LLAT) (BA in Linguistics Applied to Translation), a ten-semester programme in which the first three years are aimed at developing B and C language\(^1\) proficiency and cultural knowledge before starting with translation theory and practice from the sixth semester onwards. At LLAT, English is the main B language with Japanese as a C language or Portuguese an additional B language. The second programme was Traducción Inglés-Español (TIE) (English-Spanish Translation), which is nine semesters long and is more professionally oriented in that students are exposed to translation theory and practice early in the programme. These two programmes represent the two most common types of translation curricula in the country (Singer forthcoming). It is also worth noting that students develop their B language proficiency concurrently with their translation skills in both programmes.

The fourth year was selected because it presented a common ground between the two programmes due to the high concentration of translation course units. This choice minimises significant curricular differences that could impact the participants’ perceived experiences. Students were invited to participate and twelve voluntarily enrolled to take part in this study: six participants from LLAT and six from TIE. Two of the participants at TIE were from the 2015 cohort, while all other ten were from the 2016 cohort. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used throughout the paper: Aurora, Daniela, Fran, José, Ignacio and

\(^1\) B language is the main language from and into which students usually translate. C languages are those in which students are less proficient and mostly translate from that language into their A or B languages (Hurtado Alír 1999).
Luna are the LLAT participants, while Ana, Cora, Lorena, Matilda, Nicole and Vai are the TIE participants.

3.2 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

This study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the participants’ narrated experiences during the 2019 academic year and explore the essential constructs, i.e. the core set of properties that encapsulate the meanings given to those lived experience (Gallagher and Zahavi 2012). According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), IPA is based on three key philosophical principles: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. Phenomenology emphasises the experience of individuals who are situated in the world, and how they focus their attention to specific situations or objects (Gallaher and Zahavi 2012). Hermeneutics, i.e. the theory of interpretation, explains how people analyse their experiences and provide them with meaning based on their sameness (Merleau-Ponty 2012). Idiography emphasises the value of the particular and the individual in the generation of knowledge (Lundh 2015). Therefore, IPA explores the meanings with which individuals provide their experiences and, by comparing their individual narratives, it is possible to make a generalisation as to how a phenomenon is experienced by a certain group of people (Howitt and Cramer 2017; Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009).

The participants’ narratives are generated by using semi-structured interviews which, as pointed out by Smith and Osborn (2015), are the primary source of data in IPA. Each

---

2 Participants received an information sheet explaining the purposes of the study and then signed an informed consent. They were guaranteed anonymity and reminded of their right to withdraw at any time of the study. This research complied with the requirements of The University of Manchester Research Ethics Committee.
participant was individually interviewed three times during their academic year, generating a total of thirty-six interviews. The first one, the anchorage, (INT0) was conducted in May 2019, while the assessment interviews, (INT1) and (INT2), were conducted in July 2019 and January 2020, respectively. The interview guides for these semi-structured interviews had four dimensions: conceptualisation of the translator and the translation occupation, commitment to their translator identity, translator self-efficacy beliefs and perceived academic performance. The narrated perceptions and behaviour emerging from the interviews are then examined and matched to Marcia’s (1966) descriptions of identity statuses in order to determine the participants’ commitment to their translator identity.

The interviews varied from 12 to 15 questions which were majorly open-ended, neutral and without complex jargon, as suggested by Smith and Osborn (2015). The focus of the anchorage was to establish an initial outline of their essential translator-related constructs by exploring the participants’ school performance, their motivations to study the programme, their perceived academic performance in the first three years in the programme, their conceptualisation of the professional translator and their current degree of commitment to their studies. The assessment interviews aimed to examine whether the constructs elucidated in the narratives of the anchorage interview had changed. They also explored the perceived challenges and opportunities for the participants’ translator identity development, their commitment and translator self-efficacy beliefs.

The interviews were conducted in Spanish by the researcher and they varied from 25 to 60 minutes in length. These were audio-recorded, generating slightly over 23 hours of data. Transcripts were then initially annotated with descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments. The first ones highlighted the objects that structured the participants’ experiences,
while the second focused on the language in which those objects and meanings were narrated. Conceptual comments involved a hermeneutic move on part of the researcher, in which connections were made between what participants experienced and the overarching understanding of their translator identity statuses. These annotations were cross-referenced to determine the initial emerging themes, which were further examined to identity the relationships between them to propose overarching super-ordinate themes. The process was carried out for each of the participants’ interviews. Once all transcripts of an interview round were analysed, the super-ordinate themes were cross-referenced to outline the essential constructs associated with the development of commitment and translator identity status.

Excerpts presented in the following section have been translated from Spanish into English by the researcher. Brackets have been added with missing references to facilitate reading flow, while ellipsis is indicated by suspension points. The audio-recordings corresponding to the fragments were listened to again during the translation process so that any emphasis or mark in their spoken narrative were present in the translation.

4 The development of translator identity statuses

This section examines the processes by which participants develop commitment to their translator identity. It aims to address the first research question by identifying the essential constructs that appear to underlie the development of commitment. Then, it examines how these constructs engage in the crisis-reflection-reconnection process experienced by participants during the events that occurred in their academic year.

4.1 Initial critical themes
The participants’ narratives in the first interview suggest four super-ordinate themes or factors that have an impact on their commitment to their translator identity, namely self-description, practice, self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. First, regarding the participants’ *self-description*, ten participants describe themselves as insecure and shy individuals who struggle to socialise, particularly with large groups of people.

I regard myself as a normal person, motivated to learn, curious, maybe, hardworking, too. [I’m also] shy at times, maybe with some difficulties to socialise, especially in situations where the public overwhelms me, so to speak (…) (Lorena, INT0, TIE)

The second theme is that of *practice*. Participants identify practicing translation as the main means by which they can improve their translator skills. In their view, practice refers to instances of learning in and outside the classroom.

I feel that practice, regardless of the field I want to specialise in, is my main way of getting better. It’s not like you are a good translator from one day to the next. (Daniela, INT0, LLAT)

…The practice I’ve had in translation has quite improved my writing skills and everything I like really, so it makes me happy to have improved (…) I like translation, so I really push myself and I’m constantly in contact with the [English] language… (Vai, INT0, TIE)

Participants identify that practice requires personal investment of time and effort in order to have the effects Vai mentions above. In this sense, classroom practice is highly valued, as comments and feedback from the group and lecturers can help them develop their translator skills.

It helps me to give my opinions easily and, that way, I can also improve my translations because I can share all my opinions or what I’ve found and get feedback on those opinions
and comments (...) as we’ve been together for four years, we know each other and that helps me not to feel so, like, too self-conscious about what I’m saying. (Nicole, INT0, TIE)

The third theme emerging from the participants’ narratives is self-efficacy beliefs and, particularly, the apparent positive effect practice has on them. This seems to allow them to be more confident during the translation decision-making process. In Daniela’s narrative below, this increase in her self-efficacy beliefs has led her to use translation techniques and other strategies she did not use before:

…When I started the course unit (...) I found it a bit hard, but when you attend lectures, practise and all that, you start to feel more confident. And that affects confidence a lot, because you doubt everything you write, especially when you’re learning to be a translator. So I say, ‘right, should I translate it like this or not?’ [But] when you start to develop more confidence, you start using more translation techniques, too. I don’t know, now I dare to modulate, for example, I make transpositions and all those things when before I was more literal… (Daniela, INT0, LLAT)

The fourth theme is academic performance, which is conceptualised as the means by which the participants’ translation skills and self-efficacy beliefs are ultimately assessed. While most participants conceive such behaviour as obtaining good grades, others, like Aurora, regard it as the learning process whereby she can develop her translator skills:

…I got very good results in English-Spanish Translation 1 and 2. As a matter of fact, I was exempted from the final exam in those two course units. (...) It reinforces the idea that I’m good at this and I like doing this – I like translating. (Ana, INT0, TIE)

…I didn’t get] the best grades, but I do feel I learned a lot and that’s what matters, like ‘OK, I didn’t have high grades in English or anything, but I learned a lot’. When
reviewing my tests, I paid a lot of attention [to them], so in terms of quantitative performance, as in grades, no [my performance wasn’t good], but everything that I learned, yes, a lot. (Aurora, INT0, LLAT)

This duality of academic performance accounts for the fact that some students, despite not obtaining high grades, still perceive improvement in their training. However, for most participants, grades that do not meet their expectations have a detrimental effect on their self-efficacy beliefs:

…I know I’ve done well, but I remember that at the end of, I don’t remember if it was Introduction to English-Spanish Translation or the second course unit we had last year, but we had a test and I got, it was not a fail grade, but it was way lower than I expected. And I felt so sad, so, so sad. I had passed and had no issues with the course unit, but to see I that had so many mistakes in the translation did get to me. (Fran, INT0, LLAT)

Fran’s narrative shows that the negative impact of her grade seems to have not only affected her translator self-efficacy beliefs, but also her overall self-esteem. Continuous episodes of low grades could potentially lead to periods of exploration in which participants ponder whether choosing translation as an occupation was appropriate:

[In the previous semester], I had the typical vocational crisis when I thought this is not what I wanted, that this won’t pay off, that I’m going to starve to death, that I can’t imagine myself doing this for the rest of my life. That added up to other things that I was experiencing at a personal level. So, at that time I was like ‘do I really want to do this?’ (Matilda, INT1, TIE)

What Matilda is describing in her narrative is an episode of crisis in which she experiences a loss of commitment to her translator identity. The next subsection discusses how these themes appear to interact when participants face challenges.
4.2 From crisis to reconnection: developing commitment

As participants experience their programme, they face a series of crises that challenge their translator beliefs and related behaviour. For the participants, these situations are especially critical when it comes to their academic performance and their shyness.

4.2.1 Immediateness of action in commitment development

Academic performance, particularly grades and their student-related behaviour, is identified as one of the main sources of crises among participants. It can also potentially affect the overall self, as experienced by Aurora:

… Japanese was really hard for me, in fact, after I failed, I mean, I didn’t fail the first semester, I passed, but during the second semester I had loads of problems because of the strike and all, so we finished the semester very quickly because we had to finish it. So, in the second semester, I couldn’t deal with Japanese, like I couldn’t find anybody to support me, to ask for help. It was really difficult… (Aurora, INT0, LLAT)

Aurora’s crisis comes from her inability to recognise herself in this new setting, i.e. her incapacity to produce the same previous successful behaviour as a student. This suggests a rupture in her self-continuity and an inability to respond to the situation that she was experiencing, which eventually led to her distress (Berzonsky 2011). Similarly, all other participants experienced situations in which they were unable to verify their translator identities and which triggered a process of metacognitive analysis. In this process of reflection, participants evaluate potential courses of action.

…I had my first fail grade in a translation test, and it was a very low fail (…) So, I obviously questioned my capacities a lot (…), but [I] considered it like one of those moments that shake
you, so to speak, when you’re drowsy and then you realise, ‘no, you do like this. Go on. Maybe what you’re doing is not enough’. So, I said, ‘OK, I need to do something,’ (…) I searched for texts from webpages like the WHO, which have official translations, so I took the English translations and translated them into Spanish and then compared them to the originals and I identified my mistakes… (Daniela, INT1, LLAT)

At first, I was worried because I sincerely didn’t expect the grades I obtained: the first grades were around 3.83 and then during the semester they improved, reaching fours, not fives, but it was really hard for me (…) It was hard, even shocking, because I started to reconsider [what I’d done]: I started to think what I was failing at, why I was failing and what I could do to improve. Of course, my lecturer recommended grammar books, style books to improve these weaknesses, which is still something I need to do, I must say. I still haven’t done it yet, but I hope to do this over the summer break. (Ignacio, INT1, LLAT)

In Daniela’s and Ignacio’s narratives, the crisis is triggered by low grades in a translation course unit. This lowers their self-efficacy beliefs at first, then they explore potential solutions to their situation. Although both participants show a recommitment to their translator identity after their reflective move, the outcome is slightly different: Daniela takes swift action and develops strategies to cope with the situation during the semesters, while Ignacio recognises what needs to be done, but he has not taken action yet. In some cases, participants are unable to do anything, either because they do not know how to do it or because their current state of mind does not allow them to, like in José’s case:

When we started to translate more, I started to do badly and the confidence I had started to disappear, but I don’t find it something bad really (…) [I’m putting my studies on hold,

---

3 The grading scale in Chile goes from 1.0 to 7.0, with 4.0 being the passing grade.
because] first (...) I plan to attend therapy for a while to rediscover my past self, the one that was motivated and I also think that I need some time to reconnect with Japanese, especially.

(José, INT1, LLAT)

In his narrative, José outlines a series of long-term sub-goals related to his translator identity, as he claims to be currently unable to carry out any concrete actions because of the circumstances in which he finds himself. This delay in action can occur because the crises have led to a situation in which previous commitment seems to have faded and he has entered a phase of high exploration, which is typical of seekers. Thus, it seems that the participants’ recommitment to their identity is related to the *immediateness* of the course of action taken.

4.2.2 Insecurity: between outward and inward polarities

Personality traits, mainly the participants’ shyness and insecurity, are narrated as an obstacle that impedes their development of self-efficacy beliefs, particularly when combined with their perceived academic overload:

I’m very insecure and that’s affected me along with the stress I had during the first semester. It was, like, it generated problems to visualise myself and continue. I couldn’t see myself like beyond [that point]. I felt so stressed at that time that I didn’t see myself going on [studying] (...) Insecurity and all that distracted me from the fact that I liked being a translator, like it overshadowed it (...) I think I’m a good translator, but I still cannot say it with confidence because of my insecurity, but I think [that when] I check and compare my translations with those of my first year, I mean, second year, I’ve improved a lot. (Vai, INT1, TIE)

Vai’s excerpt is revealing in that she is still unable to identify herself as a ‘good translator’ because of her insecurity, although she acknowledges her improvement as a
translator and regards herself as a good one. She later describes this insecurity as stemming from her perfectionism and her inferiority complex, which is also shared by Luna.

I definitely feel more [confident] than before, but I still don’t feel that confidence of saying ‘I’m a good translator’. It’s like there are comments that classmates or teachers make [about me] and I say like, ‘yes, I do it well, but not that well’ (…) It’s just I always think that it can be better and I always think, ‘no, the others do it better than me’. I always have that thought. (Vai, INT2, TIE)

…I’m a bit scared to show my translations at times because I feel they’re always wrong, always wrong. And, I don’t know, I feel that everyone else’s translations are better than mine, but I think that’s a self-esteem issue more than anything else [because] (…) from the last interview, I’ve achieved some goals and found some new ones. I’ve learnt a lot, a lot this semester in comparison to others, maybe. (Luna, INT1, LLAT)

Both Vai and Luna seem to display a conserver identity status, in that their apparent high commitment to their translator identity is very susceptible to external disruptions. In other words, they seem to display an outward emotional inclination: they judge the value of their work from other peoples’ perspectives. Conversely, Cora, who is also insecure, can overcome this personality trait by committing herself to her translator identity:

I’m a person who’s not very confident in herself, in general, not just professionally. So, whenever I have to submit a translation, insecurity starts to kick in, like, ‘this can be wrong’ or ‘this segment, no, it’s wrong,’ (…) [But in class] I cannot remain in doubt (…) I really cannot remain quiet in class. I speak, even though I don’t want to do it, I end up asking, giving my opinion. I find that what I say in class cheers me up as compared to the results I get in tests. (Cora, INT1, TIE)
Cora’s commitment to her translation identity-related goals to overcome her insecurity presupposes an inward emotional inclination. Therefore, Cora shows an inward inclination, which could potentially help her verify her translator identity and develop an achiever identity status, while Vai and Luna display an outward inclination that is associated with conservers.

The discussion in these sections suggests that commitment seems to be developed through a crisis-reflection-reconnection process. Achievers’ high commitment appears to be associated with the immediateness of the actions that participants take and an inward emotional inclination. When participants take action in their practice, their self-efficacy beliefs increase, leading to better performance. Conversely, commitment decrease in conservers and seekers is connected to their delay in taking action or an outward emotional inclination. This usually triggers a delay in action in their practice, resulting in low self-efficacy beliefs and then in low academic performance. Based on their narratives and commitment fluctuations, the participants’ translator identity statuses during the anchorage and first assessment interview are displayed in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 here]

4.3 A crisis beyond the crisis

The crisis-reflection-reconnection process outlined in the previous sections is experienced in a relatively stable context within the translation programme. During the second semester, Chile became the setting of social unrest (Ansaldi and Pardo-Vergara 2020) in which people demonstrated against the socio-political structure that had governed the country for the last 30 years. The demonstrations and rioting led to episodes of extreme violence in which the
social structure that provided a framework to the participants’ experiences became unstable. The difficulties they faced during this supra-contextual crisis, i.e. a crisis beyond the scope of their programmes, led to a disconnect with their translator identity and subsequent loss in commitment, as expressed by Aurora in her narrative:

…The [main challenge was] the situation in the country, because I was on track and motivated, and when everything exploded it was a bit complex and it might have been too much for me mentally. So, there was a moment when I was very anxious. I was down [and] didn’t know what to do. There were days when I wanted to disconnect from everything, I didn’t want to talk to anybody, and it was like I don’t want anything, I don’t want to know anything, because I guess what was happening was very shocking… (Aurora, INT2, LLAT)

In the face of this disruption to their lives, four participants began to ponder whether it was worth continuing to study translation, particularly due to the potential low employability in the aftermath of the crisis. This situation made Matilda’s translator identity status go from achiever to seeker:

… [As a translator], even though when things are OK, it’s hard to get a job, now it’s gonna be a thousand times harder (…) I’ve been thinking, ‘what if translation is not my thing?’ Maybe I could also focus on other areas and, maybe, if I don’t find a job in anything that I like (…) I thought of doing an MA in education and also teach. (Matilda, INT2, TIE)

Matilda was the only achiever who suffered a significant change in her identity status. The other participants who held an achiever identity status have managed to reconnect with their translator identity by using different strategies to cope with the situation. Some participants, like Aurora, have sought professional support to face the stress and difficulties, while others have tried to overcome them on their own.
I went to see my psychologist and had to talk about the things that were affecting me and, well, she’s wonderful, she always helps me. So, like, she helped me in many ways. I was very overwhelmed and she told me, ‘look, start little by little. Pick up those things that you like or things you were working on’. From there, I’ve slowly worked on some things until now that I’ve returned to all of this again. (Aurora, INT2, LLAT)

To summarise, the crisis-reflection-reconnection cycle is also evidenced in the third interview narratives. However, the possibility to recommit to their identity critically depends on the participants’ identity statuses at the time of the crisis: conservers or seekers suffered a loss of commitment that made them re-evaluate their vocation, while achievers managed to remain recommitted to their translator identity and, in doing so, they managed to cope with the challenges posed by the supra-contextual crisis.

5 Translator identity statuses: fluctuations and definitions

This section addresses the remaining two research questions of this study. The first part focuses on the fluctuation of the participants’ translator identity statuses throughout their fourth year and on the points that foster and undermine their commitment. Based on these findings, the second part redefines Marcia’s (1966) descriptions for the four identity statuses in the context of translator education.

5.1 Fluctuations of identity statuses

The participants’ narratives encapsulate their perceived experiences and behaviour which reflect their level of commitment to their translator identity across the academic year. For example, Matilda started the study displaying clear features of an achiever:
…[Although] I feel that I still need to learn a lot, I’ll probably achieve all the goals I’ve set for myself this year, like growing academically (…) So, up to now, I consider that I’m OK, that I’m on my way of becoming a professional [translator] and when I graduate next year…I’ll have all the necessary tools to succeed. (Matilda, INT0, TIE)

In her second interview, she still held on to the idea that translation is what she wanted to do as a profession despite the vocational crisis experienced in previous years:

…I think I must be very committed, regardless of all that’s happened during these four years studying here (…) cuz’ when I started thinking what else I could study…I realised that I didn’t want to study nothing else, I don’t like anything else. I like English, I like to communicate and… being able to transmit the message. (Matilda, INT1, TIE)

However, when compared to her narrative in the third interview round, there seems to be a significant shift. Due to the difficulties posed by the social unrest, she entered an exploration stage in which she welcomes the possibility of becoming an English language teacher:

…IIf translation is not my thing, I might opt to work in another area (…) I like [translating], I like it, that’s why I studied this, [but] I think there are things that don’t depend on me and what I want to be. I still have that determination to become a translator, but if the context, the situation, whatever is going on doesn’t make it possible, I’ve got to look for other options. (Matilda, INT2, TIE)

Matilda’s example shows how a student with an achiever identity status during the first two interviews can become a seeker due to the supra-contextual crisis. Fluctuations also occur because of the participants’ insecurity and academic performance.
The participants’ narratives suggest that five out of twelve participants kept their identity status throughout the year. Daniela, Ana, Lorena and Nicole display a high level of commitment across the interviews in which they envisage themselves as professional translators. Luna presents prime features of a conserver across interviews, namely 1) her outward emotional inclination, i.e. how others judge her actions and work, and 2) the strong impact that low grades have on her self-efficacy beliefs.

The other seven participants experienced changes in their identity statuses. Aurora, Cora and Vai seem to have developed more commitment at different points during the year. Aurora started applying the professional support she received from her therapist to overcome her trouble dealing with low grades and, although she still occasionally performs worse than she expected, she is now able to cope with it and has clear translation goals involving activism. Similarly, Cora moved from general, insecure narratives to more concrete goals and objectives. In her view, practice played a critical role in proving her self-efficacy beliefs. Vai struggled with her insecurity during most of her year, but in her last interview, and despite the social unrest, she was able to visualise herself as a professional translator and she was eager to enter the professional market. Her self-efficacy beliefs as a translator have also impacted positively on her overall self-esteem, which has allowed her to partially cope with her insecurity and shyness.

Conversely, Fran, Ignacio, Matilda and José displayed a loss of their initial commitment. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the progressive loss of commitment in Matilda’s case stems from the apparent lack of job prospects in the field. Although this was absent in the first interview, it became significantly prominent during the third one. This informs many decisions she has taken during the year and, despite her
commitment to become a translator, becoming a language teacher has become a plausible option in the light of the social unrest. Fran and Ignacio have also experienced the same vocational re-exploration: Fran considered studying language teaching because some close friends in the programme were also pondering the idea, while Ignacio saw language teaching as a complement to translation because he really felt motivated to do it. In José’s case, his initial responses indicated a series of mental health issues that impeded the development of commitment to his translator identity status, which has resulted in his current withdrawal from the programme in order to resolve his situation. He intends to return to the programme, obtain his degree and then pursue further studies in language teaching. A summary of all the participants’ identity statuses during the three interviews can be found in Table 3.

[Insert Table 3 here]

In summary, most achievers tend to display a consistent level of commitment during the year, while conservers and seekers experience fluctuations. These fluctuations are the result of two factors. First, the immediateness of the actions taken after a crisis, which seem to suggest that achievers tend to recommit quicker and more concretely to their translator identity as compared to conservers or seekers. Second, the emotional inclination participants have affects how they engage with issues in their contexts, particularly supra-contextual crises that represent a major challenge to their translator identity goals and beliefs.

5.2 Redefining identity statuses

The participants’ narratives in this study provide a contextualisation of how identity statuses can inform students’ level of commitment to their translator identities. Achievers show the highest degree of commitment and an inward emotional inclination, which makes them less
likely to change their goals and better at coping with situations in and outside their programme. After a crisis, they tend to take quick action to recommit themselves to their studies, which reflects their strong sense of purpose. Moreover, they are able to conceptualise their programmes as the means by which they can achieve a greater goal: becoming a translator.

Conservers see themselves as translators, but grades and other external-bound perceptions affect their commitment to their identity, particularly by undermining their self-efficacy beliefs. They feel unprepared to enter the job market, but they are committed to keep learning to be at some point ready to do so. They identify courses of action after a crisis, but they may delay taking prompt action. In addition, they conceive the completion of the programme as their final goal, which partially explains the high value given to grades.

Seekers are partially committed to their translator identity. They struggle to visualise themselves working as professional translators and evaluate other vocational options during or after the programme. In this sense, their commitment to their translation education is the means to achieve another professional purpose in their lives, but not translation. They tend to display an inward emotional inclination, although loss of commitment may lead them to generate an outward inclination.

The depleted are students who have succumbed to external issues or personal conflicts to the point that they can no longer reconnect with their translator identity and have withdrawn from the programme. They have little, if any, interest in completing the programme and become translators.
These translator identity statuses could, therefore, explain the students’ differences in their commitment to the profession towards graduation and their early detection could help lecturers provide support and guidance accordingly.

**Conclusions**

This study has explored the narratives of twelve undergraduate students during the fourth year of their training. The development of commitment seems to respond to a crisis-reflection-reconnection process by which participants experience adversity and then take action. Immediateness and emotional inclinations play a prominent role in the development of commitment when combined with other factors that emerge from the participants’ narratives: practice, self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance. Thus, prompt action takes in practice lead to higher self-efficacy beliefs and better academic performance, ultimately resulting in more commitment. Conversely, loss of commitment seems to be related to a delay in taking action in practice, which then leads to low self-efficacy beliefs and low academic performance. This process underlies the development of commitment and translator identity statuses of participants during the study and has allowed for the redefinition of identity statuses in the context of translator education. Five participants do not suffer any changes, while the remaining seven did: three moved to a higher level of commitment, while the other four showed a considerable loss, particularly during the social unrest in late 2019.

This paper contributes to translator education by integrating aspects of identity theory in order to understand how students develop their translator identity during their undergraduate studies. The translator identity statuses could be used as an observable reference point from which the impact of pedagogical innovations or strategies in and outside
the translation classroom can be assessed. Moreover, future research could potentially involve the creation of instruments, such as scales or questionnaires, which can be administered to translation students to determine their translator identity statuses. This would provide trainers and lecturers with additional input to plan their lessons and coach their students according to how committed they are to becoming translators.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr Maeve Olohan, Silvana Núñez and José Gustavo Góngora for their support and feedback on my work.

Disclosure

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References


Samaniego, Malena. 2017. ‘Undergraduate Translator Education in Chile - an Inquiry into Teacher and Student Thinking, Learning Experiences and Teaching Practices’. PhD, The University of Arizona.


Singer, Néstor, Manuel Rubio, and Raquel Rubio. 2019. ‘Enseñanza de lenguas: una comparación de las representaciones sociales de alumnos de primer y quinto año de


Word count: 7,990
Table 1. Marcia’s (1966) identity statuses using Helson and Srivastava’s (2001) terminology.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Interview rounds</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>INT0 (May 2019)</td>
<td>INT1 (July 2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LLAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignacio</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Participants’ translator identity statuses during the first semester 2019.
Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>INT0 (May 2019)</th>
<th>INT1 (July 2019)</th>
<th>INT2 (January 2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LLAT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daniela</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fran</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>José</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Depleted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignacio</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luna</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lorena</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matilda</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicole</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
<td>Achiever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vai</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Seeker</td>
<td>Conserver</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Fluctuation of the participants’ translator identity statuses during their fourth year.