

## LESS IS MORE? MICROCREDENTIALS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEGREE-AWARDING TRANSLATOR EDUCATION

**ŁUKASZ BOGUCKI**

Institute of English Studies  
University of Łódź, Poland  
lukasz.bogucki@uni.lodz.pl

### **Abstract**

Microcredentials have recently attracted substantial attention in academia. While short, practice-oriented courses and the concept of lifelong learning (e.g. Jarvis 2009) have been around for decades, the idea of receiving credit in the form of open digital badges and stacking them to form a personal portfolio is new – and exciting. Add to it the ongoing discussion on the decline of the university diploma as such, and a viable alternative to traditional translator education looms in the distance.

This paper explores the rise of microcredentials in general and in language and translation studies in particular. The numerous approaches to translation competence (see Quinci 2023 for a more recent one) seem to be in agreement that it is a construct made up of several subcompetencies. It is logically sound, therefore, to acquire these subcompetencies separately in the process of competence development that is individual and free from the typical constraints of university education, such as completing it in the allotted time. However, this system means that there is no authority to tell the trainee that they are „competent enough”, other than perhaps the employer, who chooses to hire them or not. As regards the translation market, microcredentials are too new to be universally recognised, so for the time being translation agencies will prefer more traditional qualifications. This, in turn, leads to higher education institutions shying away from offering them (and students from taking them), since they do not yet constitute a fully-fledged qualification. The paper includes a presentation of a pilot microcredential on offer at University of Lodz, as well as the results of a focus group survey on microcredentials in translation.

**Keywords:** microcredentials; open badges; translation competence; translator education

### **1. A turn for the small. Microcredentials in academia.**

In recent years, microcredentials have taken academia by storm at all levels of the higher education system. University chairs, departments and institutes worldwide are introducing them to refresh and update their study offer, while university

senates, councils and governing bodies are developing guidelines and criteria<sup>1</sup>. Finally, the European Commission recognises the prominent role of microcredentials in the European Education Area<sup>2</sup>. The policy responses to credential proliferation are thus generally positive. In line with the Council of the European Union's recommendation of 16th June 2022<sup>3</sup>, microcredentials are seen as concomitant to lifelong learning and employability. The recommendation acknowledges the need for continual skill and knowledge updates in an ever-changing world, particularly in light of post-Covid changes (synchronous and asynchronous online tuition) and inclusive education. It states that one way to achieve this is through "small, tailored learning experiences". At the time the document was issued, microcredentials were not seen as replacing traditional qualifications, such as university degrees. However, as the study below will demonstrate, these small forms have the potential to become the standard proof of competence in the foreseeable future, contingent on widespread adoption. Traditional degrees allow the student a certain degree of flexibility through electives, individual study programmes, selectable seminars, etc. The Bologna process, exchange programmes such as Erasmus+ and European Credit Transfer System have given candidates, students and graduates the freedom to make choices regarding the content of their education, rather than merely pursue a fixed, five- or six-year cycle at their home university. Microcredentials are a further step toward user-driven higher education; institutions offer a range of short courses and students collect them, building a qualifications portfolio. Those are stackable and it is up to the student which ones they will obtain. At the same time, it is at the employer's discretion which ones (and how many) they will deem sufficient to hire a candidate. Before microcredentials become a practical alternative to the degree, certain conditions must be met, though, such as large institutional adoption and employer recognition (see Section 5 below).

Microcredentials are a novelty only insofar as the form is concerned; the content is not markedly different from what higher education institutions worldwide have offered for years. Short, practical courses to supplement qualifications are nothing new. The notion of lifelong learning has already been firmly established within the domain of social sciences (cf. Jarvis 2009). Consequently, the idea to acquire novel skills and competences, in addition to cultivating existing ones, beyond the rigid framework of university study programmes has been a subject of discourse for some time. What sets microcredentials apart from traditional training courses is stackability: they are presented as open digital badges that can be accumulated to make up a personal

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<sup>1</sup> The Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education, for instance, issued guidelines for the implementation of microcredentials, complete with instances of good practice from two Polish universities, in October 2023.

<sup>2</sup> <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/higher-education/micro-credentials> (accessed on June 6th, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02)) (accessed on January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2025)..

portfolio of qualifications. These, in turn, can be stored at a repository, referred to as a clearinghouse. One such database is Credentify, which accumulates verified credentials and provides detailed information about them<sup>4</sup>.

Open digital badges may have a broader application. The concept can be tracked back to the inception of merit badges awarded to scouts for achievements, however unprofessional it may sound. They are also widely used online, either informally (in social networks) or institutionally in the industry and third sector organisations. Microcredentials are typically the preserve of formal education in academia, but a university credential may have the form of a digital badge, which can be presented outside the university context.

The Common Microcredential Framework<sup>5</sup> is an attempt to regulate the plethora of forms available at higher education institutions worldwide. As stipulated in the documentation, the total study time for a microcredential (including preparation and revision) must be between 100 and 150 hours. The qualification is at level 6 or 7 of the European Qualification Framework or equivalent, that is typically a bachelor or master university degree. Other common elements include a summative assessment awarding academic credit, a reliable method of ID verification and a transcript of learning outcomes. The framework is the subject of some controversy. On the one hand, microcredentials are intended as an out-of-the-box, deregulated solution for the deregulated market, like translation (more on that in Section 2 below); the end user decides which courses to take, while the industry eventually verifies whether the selection is suitable for employability – an approach that differs from the beaten path of the university degree. Furthermore, hard and fast rules may be ungeneralisable and unenforceable. For instance, the 100 – 150 hour duration may be considered excessive for microcredentials such as “Inclusive dance”, offered by University College Cork<sup>6</sup>; indeed, even a course in STEM subjects, such as “Railway engineering: design” offered by Deakin University, is only 60 contact hours<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, soft regulations in the form of guidelines or recommendations are desirable, contingent upon the regulatory body’s impartiality, reputation and expertise.

The European Universities Initiative, launched in 2019 as a component of the European education area (European Commission 2024), which brings together over 570 higher education institutions united in 65 alliances, is an excellent milieu for the development of microcredentials. The European alliances collaborate internally to foster academic exchange between the (usually 8 to 10) universities forming the alliance. They also develop joint study programmes, double degrees, summer schools and frequently microcredentials offered to the entire student

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<sup>4</sup> <https://microcredentials.eu/outputs/microhe-outputs/wp4/credentify/> (accessed on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/the-common-microcredential-framework> (accessed on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2025).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ucc.ie/en/fint/theatre/news/inclusive-dance-cork-modules-launched-.html> (accessed on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.futurelearn.com/microcredentials/railway-engineering-design> (accessed on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025).

community of the alliance, which usually numbers in the hundreds of thousands. Consequently, universities, which might otherwise lack resources to offer such courses, can tap into the expertise, potential and assets of their alliance partners. For instance, University of Lodz shares the UNIC alliance with University College Cork, which is a beneficiary of the Irish government's Higher Education Authority funding to develop a system of microcredentials, in conjunction with 6 other Irish universities.<sup>8</sup> While the UNIC universities are not in a position to use the funding, they can benefit from the know-how obtained by UCC as a grant holder.

In essence, microcredentials are widely seen as a breath of fresh air in the otherwise stagnant and ossified higher education system. The open badges are aesthetically pleasing and modern in their design, and the substance is equally appealing. Microcredentials facilitate a number of key benefits, viz. enhanced freedom of choice, greater flexibility, international collaboration and improved employability. They require a significantly lower level of commitment than fully-fledged degree-awarding education, while remaining up to date by virtue of a streamlined planning and acceptance system (see below). Nevertheless, user-dependence may be a potential threat. The user is merely presented with an assortment of courses, much like products on a supermarket shelf. Ultimately, it is their decision which of these will be beneficial to their diet, or in this case career development. Let us look at a case in point, viz. microcredentials in translator education, to see whether the pros outweigh the cons.

## **2. Microcredentials for translation trainees.**

There are manifold approaches to teaching translation (see e.g. Giaber 2018 for a case study). It appears to be a rational proposition to provide students with ample practice, since arguably the best way to learn the tricks of any trade is by doing it. However, sometimes less indeed is more. In the 1990s, at the ITIRI (formerly ESTI, School for Translators and Interpreters) in Strasbourg, where I briefly studied, practical French – English translation classes entailed the instructor meticulously analysing approximately 200 source texts in preparation for the course, before selecting just one that was the most suitable, i.e. the most challenging to translate. The students then worked together on this single, approximately 1,500-word text over the course of the entire semester, effectively translating three to four sentences during one contact hour. When asked whether they thought they should be getting more practice during their university education, they responded that they were already receiving ample training through their engagement as freelance translators. They appreciated the instructor's expertise and the ability to brainstorm numerous solutions to multifaceted translation problems and apply procedures for untranslatability before eventually agreeing on the most suitable target language version. Granted, such was the prevailing approach in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, but today students will typically have

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<sup>8</sup> <https://microcreds.ie> (accessed on March 27th, 2025).

other expectations (cf. the discussion on Humboldtian vs. future-proof education below).

Translation seems a good case in point to study the market potential of microcredentials. In many countries, it is not a regulated profession (see Pym et al 2013), therefore no degree is formally required to translate, except for sworn /certified translators (though the ultimate criterion is usually a state exam, not a degree; moreover, the degree does not necessarily have to be in translation or even in languages). Furthermore, even though schools of translation and interpreting exist and flourish, it is a common scenario to develop translation and interpreting competence as part of language studies. It would therefore seem prudent to offer a wide range of small, practice-oriented learning experiences in different aspects of translation (terminology and translation management systems, localisation, AI-powered translation, machine interpreting, translation service provision, etc.) and encourage stacking them to provide an alternative to a traditional translation or language degree - a larger, albeit still homogeneous credential. A portfolio of microcredentials is more tailored, more hands-on, more comprehensive and can be achieved more quickly. However, before it does become a viable alternative to traditional university education, numerous awareness-raising campaigns are needed for employers to embrace the concept and consider it as a sufficient qualification. Market needs analysis (Li, 2024:34) is key in translator education; it becomes the more important if education is accredited through a portfolio of small-scale, tailored courses.

In the contemporary academic landscape, it is hard to imagine a university course in translation that makes no reference or recourse whatsoever to generative artificial intelligence (GenAI). This technology has permeated into the practice (and consequently the theory) of translation, revolutionising the translation process and – in the opinion of some – endangering the translation profession (see Kornacki and Pietrzak 2024 for a survey on attitudes to GenAI). Artificial intelligence develops at a breathtaking pace and translation trainers must keep up to speed lest their instruction is outdated and no longer relevant. This is challenging at the best of times and practically unfeasible in the ossified environment of academia, which requires course syllabi weeks in advance and programme descriptions sometimes years in advance. Furthermore, the taxonomy of learning objectives may lack the requisite flexibility to facilitate the acquisition of skills enabled by technological progress. This is where microcredentials provide a viable solution. It is considerably easier to design an up-to-date course in translation if it is meant to be short, adaptable and sit largely outside the standard academic curriculum, thus free from the constraints of traditional university education (see Section 5).

Another advantage of microcredentials in the field of translation is motivation. Students pursue university education for a variety of reasons, those of GenZ not necessarily identical to those of GenX or millennials, for instance. Universities find themselves in a state of flux, torn between the traditional, Humboldtian model

(see e.g. Anderson 2020) and education for the future, focusing on transitive skills, characterised by lifelong learning, a problem-based approach and a student-centred environment. Many advocate the latter in theory, but in practice they seem entrenched in the former as a comfort zone, as it is easier, cheaper, more aligned with the current legislation and external assessment criteria, even if generally isolated from the outside world as an ivory tower. In translation education at university level, the fine line between teaching and training is often blurred. The Humboldtian model favours translator education performed by academics who are theoreticians, linguists or literary scholars, lecturing on untranslatability and translation strategies. The establishment of a catalogue of translation and interpreting microcredentials, developing transferable skills, problem solving, communication, collaboration and community involvement, is bound to increase students' motivation to engage in education. In a world where translation theory, should one desire to absorb it, is virtually at one's fingertips, while translation practice is evolving rapidly, fuelled by headway in translation technology and stakeholders' changing expectations, knowledge-based, teacher-centred translator education confined to university halls and its rigid programmes, will struggle to garner sufficient interest. Short, hands-on, flexible courses seem necessary to supplement – if not wholly replace – the prevailing model.

As previously indicated, the concept underpinning the microcredentials portfolio is that its holders are at liberty to determine which credits (and how many of them) to obtain. However, employers will typically require a particular skill set from candidates. In practice, therefore, while learners are at liberty to select their own areas of study (as opposed to being required to learn a specific curriculum as part of a degree-awarding programme), a lack of certification in a field deemed to be of particular importance by an employer may have a negative impact on their employability. Therefore, close cooperation between higher education institutions and stakeholders representing the labour market is key: employers should not only communicate their needs and requirements to academia, but preferably commission (and pay for) courses that HEIs will offer. This ideal scenario, however, is more realistic in STEM subjects (IT, biomedical sciences, engineering etc.) than humanities. As regards translation and interpreting, it seems that the notion of translation (and interpreting) competence is a good indicator of what courses trainees should take to be competitive on the job market. However, it is not a binary notion, but a spectrum. Just like language competence can be achieved to a minimal or proficient degree (A1 vs. C2 as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, for instance<sup>9</sup>), subcompetences in translation and interpreting can be accomplished at various levels. For instance, Chesterman (1997: 147-150) mentions five: novice, advanced beginner, competence (*nomen omen*), proficiency and expertise.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages> (accessed on March 31st, 2025).

It is outside the scope of the present chapter to elaborate on translation competence and its subtypes. Numerous studies (Göpferich 2009, Kiraly 2015, PACTE 2020, Quinci 2023) have demonstrated that it is a multifaceted notion and that, predictably, it takes more to translate than merely language knowledge. One approach to developing translation competence, therefore, would be to offer short, focused courses to acquire one or two subcompetences. Globally, the offer would form a broad catalogue, and the trainees would be at liberty to pick and choose.

In theory, microcredentials have the potential to provide a credible alternative to conventional translator training at university level, whether as an integral component of bachelor's or master's degrees in languages or as standalone degrees in translation. The crux of translator training lies in the cultivation of translation competence, complemented by a substantial amount of practical training. It is easy to imagine that translation competence is developed through a series of short courses, each mastering one or more subcompetences. Furthermore, trainees are permitted to select from an array of supplementary courses practicing skills often absent from traditional degree programmes due to various constraints including staff shortages. Illustrative examples of such supplementary courses for translation and interpreting trainees include desktop publishing, touch typing, public speaking, stress management, plain language or language for specific purposes (see also Section 6 below).

### **3. The current offer – microcredentials in translation and interpreting.**

Luckily, academia is recognising the potential of microcredentials in developing translation and interpreting competence. The need to offer participatory, market-based education in translation is not new. For instance, Plaza-Lara (2018) lists 10 courses on translation project management and another 11 courses on translation profession offered by Spanish universities at the time. They were all integrated into various translation and interpreting degrees, but would work as independent microcredentials, except that no such concept was operational in Spain (or anywhere else) in 2017, when the research was done.

Currently, SUNY Old Westbury, a public college in New York State, offers a microcredential in foundations of Spanish translation. Students are required to complete four courses: two in the Spanish language, a translation workshop and a seminar in translation techniques<sup>10</sup>. Te Pūkenga, a vocational institution in New Zealand, offers a microcredential in liaison interpreting<sup>11</sup>. Université Sainte-Anne in Canada also offers one in interpreting, in tandem with a local translator and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oldwestbury.edu/programs-courses/foundations-spanish-translation-microcredential> (accessed on March 25th, 2025).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.unitec.ac.nz/career-and-study-options/social-work-and-community-development/liaison-interpreting-theory-and-practice> (accessed on March 26th, 2025).

interpreter association and a translation agency<sup>12</sup>. More locally (in Europe), University of Limerick has a microcredential course in healthcare interpreting<sup>13</sup>. Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, a leading institution when it comes to translator and interpreter training, offers a similar course in techniques of community interpreting<sup>14</sup>. University of Tartu was the European pioneer, with a microdegree (as it was called at the time) in “CAT tools, machine translation and web-based tools on the basis of EU texts”, offered as early as 2021<sup>15</sup>. On offer is also a course on linguistic accessibility and machine translation, taught at Tampere University<sup>16</sup>. These courses are credit-bearing at EQF<sup>17</sup> levels 6 or 7, corresponding to university degrees. Candidates are typically required to possess relevant foundational skills, such as advanced language knowledge; at that point, they are ready to pursue specialised training in areas such as strategies of interpreting or translation technologies.

Let us now look closer at one such course, designed and offered locally, at University of Lodz.

#### 4. The pilot project – AI and technology for translators

University of Lodz is but one example of a European higher education institution that has adopted microcredentials in an attempt at diversifying the study offer. As is the case at virtually all universities in Poland, University of Lodz has a wide offer of non-degree-awarding postgraduate studies (*studia podyplomowe*<sup>18</sup>). These programmes typically span two or three semesters; they tend to be extramural, practical and vocational, fee-paying, without a final dissertation, awarding a certificate instead of a degree. Recent years have seen a decline in the popularity of this particular educational model, a phenomenon that can be attributed in part to the broader demographic shift that has impacted universities, and in part to the rapid obsolescence of the educational content provided. Postgraduate studies on particular aspects of law, management or economic trends, for instance, tend to have a limited operational lifespan (unless the given university system allows for a quick and seamless update), because legal

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.usainteanne.ca/en/news/universite-sainte-anne-begins-micro-credential-program-with-course-for-interpreters> (accessed on March 26th, 2025).

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.ul.ie/gps/courses/communication-and-interpreting-in-the-irish-healthcare-system-module-bm4071> (accessed on March 27th, 2025).

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.uab.cat/web/postgraduate/microcredential-in-techniques-for-interpreting-in-public-services-and-community-settings/general-information-1217916968009.html?param1=5055\\_en/](https://www.uab.cat/web/postgraduate/microcredential-in-techniques-for-interpreting-in-public-services-and-community-settings/general-information-1217916968009.html?param1=5055_en/) (accessed on March 27th, 2025).

<sup>15</sup> [https://european-masters-translation-blog.ec.europa.eu/articles-emt-blog/microdegree-program-translation-technology-and-machine-translation-2022-06-27\\_en](https://european-masters-translation-blog.ec.europa.eu/articles-emt-blog/microdegree-program-translation-technology-and-machine-translation-2022-06-27_en) (accessed on March 27th, 2025).

<sup>16</sup> [https://microcredx.microcredentials.eu/catalogue\\_items/linguistic-accessibility-and-machine-translation/](https://microcredx.microcredentials.eu/catalogue_items/linguistic-accessibility-and-machine-translation/) (accessed on March 27th, 2025).

<sup>17</sup> <https://europass.europa.eu/en/description-eight-efl-levels> (accessed on October 27th, 2025).

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.uni.lodz.pl/studia-podyplomowe> (in Polish); (accessed on June 9th, 2025).



ramifications or market realities tend to change, and the course is rendered irrelevant. Furthermore, candidates frequently express a strong interest in studying a specific component of the programme, yet exhibit minimal enthusiasm for exploring the other classes available. Consequently, they perceive no compelling rationale to undertake the entire two-semester course<sup>19</sup>. It is logical, therefore, to extract a part of the study programme and transform it into a self-standing, fully-fledged, more intensive, shorter and more economical course awarding a microcredential.

To this end, University of Lodz has developed a system whereby proposals of courses leading to microcredentials are submitted to an internal committee made up of representatives of university authorities, course designers and education experts. The proposal is seen as independent from the core study programmes offered by the given institute or department. It is assessed on relevance, compatibility with market demands, feasibility, validity and quality, among others. Wherever possible, employers are consulted with regard to market attractiveness and employability. Once a course is completed, its participants receive a digital badge that is compatible with the Europass standard<sup>20</sup>.

At present, the university offers a single microcredential in translation (apart from a couple of others, for instance on entrepreneurship and TEFL): a two-day on-site weekend course on translation technology and AI-driven translations. It is geared at less experienced translators and translation trainees. In terms of European Quality Framework, it is equivalent to level 6. The ideal candidate has a university degree (not necessarily in translation, but typically in language, linguistics or literature) and the ability to produce texts in at least two languages, but lacks experience in translation technology and the translation market. The course provides a comprehensive overview of the entire translation service provision cycle, from text processing, through OCR software, CAT tools to GenAI in translation. It necessitates a hands-on approach, therefore each student is seated in front of a computer equipped with the necessary software.

The feedback received thus far indicates that candidates who previously expressed concern about postgraduate studies offering too many irrelevant courses, now advocate for the microcredential course to be even more streamlined than it already is. The candidates expressed considerable interest in the GenAI component, while maintaining a relatively neutral stance on the guidance provided on translation memory tools. This is undoubtedly due to the incredible popularity (and admittedly still widespread ignorance) of artificial intelligence, but what the candidates seem to be overlooking is the fact that current CAT tools also utilise GenAI solutions to a large extent.

Hands-on training in the use of technology runs the risk of quickly becoming outdated; this threat is particularly apparent in the case of GenAI, where major

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<sup>19</sup> This is evidenced by prior market research, surveys among students pursuing lower-level degrees and discussions during events such as open days and education fairs.

<sup>20</sup> <https://europass.europa.eu/en> (accessed on March 24th, 2025).

updates are released practically on a monthly basis. As indicated above, this is where microcredentials have a clear advantage over conventional university tuition, which often necessitates a more protracted period to be up to speed with recent advancements. Notwithstanding, the underlying theoretical assumptions (for instance the supposition that technology speeds up the translation process while maintaining terminological consistency, but quality issues are notorious) remain valid over the course of numerous software / system updates.

A survey conducted in anticipation of the launch<sup>21</sup> revealed that the preferred tuition method is on-site rather than online. Systematic online teaching was introduced in most higher education institutions worldwide at the turn of the decade as a pandemic measure, usually thrust upon teachers and students in haste, rather than being the result of a gradual development process. Despite the significant refinement of the technology since that time, there has been a general shift in attitudes, with distance learning now being regarded as a matter of choice rather than necessity. However, the prevailing approach remains on-site tuition, with the online option being predominantly utilised by non-traditional<sup>22</sup> or non-local students.

In the case of a course on translation technology, the prerequisite, quite obviously, is access to the aforementioned technology. An on-site course will usually guarantee such access, but licence requirements should be consulted to check for provisions regarding the use of software and databases for teaching. Furthermore, the number of places will be naturally limited to the number of licences and workstations, a constraint that is not applicable in the case of an online course. However, an instructor teaching an online class has practically no way to oversee the students' individual workstations, administer troubleshooting or indeed check what they are doing in class; thus, a distance course in translation technology allows insight into the translation product, but is much less helpful when it comes to monitoring the translation process. The market of online courses in general is much more competitive. Candidates from all over the world have the opportunity to benefit from tuition at world's leading universities<sup>23</sup>. Moreover, the courses are often free of charge; it is only the credit that incurs a fee. One way toward increased popularity and eventually broad recognition of microcredentials is thus to charge

<sup>21</sup> Feedback from the University commission, instructors and candidates over a series of meetings.

<sup>22</sup> The term „non-traditional” refers to students who work full-time, look after children and are older than typical age. See <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs/web/97578e.asp> (accessed on April 11th, 2025).

<sup>23</sup> For instance, see the current offer from Harvard University:  
[https://www.harvardonline.harvard.edu/brand-th?utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&utm\\_campaign=fy25\\_all\\_intl&utm\\_content=brand&keyword=harvard%20online%20courses&matchtype=e&keyword=harvard%20online%20courses&matchtype=e&gad\\_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAAou4sP-PuLJaHqMOM2xVS47YKfWBp&gclid=CjwKCAjw--K\\_BhB5EiwAuWYoykVb677ukn7pfusfPKcQQ-x2qR90XKq05-JkTn4I1YIFDKvZ8UzsgRoCI-cQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.harvardonline.harvard.edu/brand-th?utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=fy25_all_intl&utm_content=brand&keyword=harvard%20online%20courses&matchtype=e&keyword=harvard%20online%20courses&matchtype=e&gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAAou4sP-PuLJaHqMOM2xVS47YKfWBp&gclid=CjwKCAjw--K_BhB5EiwAuWYoykVb677ukn7pfusfPKcQQ-x2qR90XKq05-JkTn4I1YIFDKvZ8UzsgRoCI-cQAvD_BwE) (accessed on April 11th, 2025).

for the credential only, with the content freely available at no cost. However, this scenario necessitates subsidy and is practically unfeasible on-site.

With the Lodz pilot project currently generating only limited interest, a post-launch study was conducted to investigate how to improve not only the particular course, but the general visibility and applicability of microcredentials on the translation market.

## **5. The study – what will the market require?**

A focus group study (n=8) among local translation service providers (students, researchers, freelancers and translation agency managers, two participants from each category) confirms that interest in microcredentials as a method of certifying (sub)competences is high, but awareness is low. Each participant said that they would welcome microcredentials in higher education and vocational training in general and nearly all of them (except for one of the students) said that they might eventually work for translator and interpreter training at large. However, only two participants (one a student and one a researcher) had previously heard of microcredentials and only one (the researcher) believed that they could currently (or in the nearest future) constitute an alternative to formal translator education. The participants reached a consensus on the existence of a conundrum: higher education institutions are reluctant to offer microcredentials, other than perhaps a very small number of pilot projects, as the feedback that they receive from the labour market is that the university degree remains the main employability criterion. The predominant argument advanced is the excessive atomisation of education: an intensive weekend course or even a three-week summer school cannot possibly compete with a fully-fledged two- or three-year degree, never mind that the workload per day and the proportion of hands-on tuition are much higher in the former case. However, the study reveals that translation may be the domain where the vicious circle is comparatively easily disrupted. The two employers participating in the focus group said that they would hire suitable candidates without a degree, but with a set of pertinent microcredentials as evidence of the (sub)competences that they normally require from their staff. They insisted, however, that they would need to ascertain that the credentials be issued by institutions of repute; in principle, they would accept a microcredential from the same institution that they would accept a diploma from, working on the assumption that the institution would ensure the quality and relevance of the courses that they offer.

Overall, the participants agreed that the following steps are required for the establishment of a stable system of microcredentials and its recognition in the translation market (and potentially elsewhere):

- a wide-ranging awareness campaign, involving traditional and social media as well as trade fairs and conference presentations;
- endorsement and guidelines from relevant ministries, national education bodies, the European Commission Directorates-General, etc.;
- adoption by a large number of higher education institutions, to ensure competitiveness and diversity and prevent bias and monopoly;
- the introduction of an external and impartial benchmark, standard or norm against which microcredentials could be assessed, ideally followed by the establishment of an evaluation / accreditation agency to that end; a possible criterion would be employability, i.e. whether holders of a given microcredential are competitive on the job market;
- a sufficiently wide and varied offer, to ensure that all the required (sub)competences can be developed;
- recognition by leading stakeholders;
- a wide body of research, particularly in the social sciences, as well as independent expert appraisals, to ensure microcredentials as such are not just an ephemeral fad, but a new and promising trend in education and training.

Unless the above conditions are met, microcredentials in translator training can only serve as “an icing on the cake” of traditional degree-awarding education, rather than a standalone, self-sufficient alternative. However, some of these steps are already being taken, so a revolution in recognising translation and interpreting competences may be imminent.

The empirical component has its limitations; though the number of participants is typical for a focus group study, it may be seen as insufficient to support meaningful conclusions. As a result, the findings are largely broad and intuitive and cannot be considered as a substantial empirical insight into the reception of microcredentials. In future research, it is worthwhile applying methodological triangulation and juxtaposing the present study with a quantitative one, such as a questionnaire among university policy makers, faculty, and students. Once microcredentials achieve widespread recognition, longitudinal studies of learning outcomes would help understand whether they do fulfil their role as an alternative to fully-fledged degree-awarding university education.

## **6. Conclusions – a hybrid approach.**

On the whole, microcredentials can form one of several possible pathways in translator education. The prerequisite is mutual trust: employers must refrain from undermining microcredentials as inferior to the traditional degree, while universities must ensure that adequate quality assurance systems are in place and that the offer is sufficiently comprehensive. There are precious few studies examining employer recognition of microcredentials in general, let alone

translator education; those that exist usually take the form of white papers (see e.g. Ghosh and Bowles 2025).

The role of stakeholders is of paramount importance. Clients may require translation trainees to possess specific (sub)competences relevant to their line of work, such as translating highly specialised terminology or operating proprietary software. These may be too niche to be part of a standard study programme; however, the client may commission a tailored course, so as to avail of workforce that would not just have basic training but also targeted qualifications. Feedback from associations such as FIT or AIIC would also be invaluable in building a global system of translation microcredentials and developing codes of good practice.

A probable scenario is a hybrid one, essentially similar to the Bologna process, where the bachelor's degree provides foundational education, while the master's delves deeper and leads to advanced career opportunities. In a hybrid translator education model involving microcredentials, the traditional degree programme would cater for the general language subcompetence (typically, a prerequisite for enrolment would be the possession of this competence at a certain level) and extralinguistic subcompetence, to use PACTE (2020) terminology, i.e. a sufficient command of language-cum-culture, knowledge about the world and about translation in general. In Poland, these skills are generally taught as part of translation tracks / specialisms within language study programmes (philologies). The remaining subcompetences would be the preserve of a wide offer of microcredentials, with courses ranging from touch typing, public speaking, stress management, memory and concentration training, plain language, technology for translators, translation management system, localisation tools, translation service provision, knowledge of the work market, data mining to subject knowledge in specialised areas. While the foundational knowledge would be expected of every trainee, the portfolio of microcredentials showcasing the specialised competences would differ depending on a given trainee's predilections, preferences and envisaged career paths. The two pillars, the generic foundation and the diversified specialised skills, would contribute to the development of – to use PACTE's nomenclature again – the central strategic subcompetence that controls the entire translation process.

The actual mechanisms by which microcredentials might be included in formal translator education would be designed by each degree-awarding institution. That said, a pre- and post-implementation external quality assurance system would be recommended. Policy-makers would issue guidelines and catalogues of good practice (see Section 5 above), while accreditation and quality assurance bodies would periodically ensure that microcredential-based tuition remains up to par and that its learning outcomes are equivalent to those achievable through traditional study programmes.

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