

TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS FACING TRANSITION. PATTERNS AND CHALLENGES OF GLOBALISATION

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Abstract

In the present context of globalisation and information technology, it has become almost impossible to perceive the world as being a body of disparate units. On the contrary, not only do these units coexist, but they interact and merge with other realities. Nowadays, translators and conference interpreters play an important role worldwide. Their job has become more and more challenging because of the IT tools and strong competition in the field. It is worth noticing that there have been many changes during the transition period from communism to capitalism and, particularly, after Romania's accession to the European Union in 2007. Translators and interpreters have to face the challenges of quality, efficiency, deadlines, proficiency, and ethics. This article aims at emphasizing the place occupied by these two professional categories in Europe and, particularly, in Romania.

Key-words: *translator, conference interpreter, globalisation, transition, challenge*

1. Translators and conference interpreters – professionals in a globalised world

All of us have probably heard about these two professions several times, but only very few people know exactly what they really mean in terms of qualification, skills, knowledge, or tools used. That is why our paper aims to clarify these two terms by offering definitions and emphasizing on the activities performed by translators and conference interpreters at present.

The activity of *translation* has a long tradition and has been largely practiced throughout time, but in today's globalised world its role has become of utmost importance. Nowadays, cultural exchanges have been growing and international communication has been intensifying. That is why the phenomenon of translation has become fundamental. Irrespective of the field in which it is used and the purpose it serves, today's communication among humans depends very much on translation.

Munday states that: "The term translation itself has several meanings: it can refer to the general subject field, the product (the text that has been translated) or the process (the act of producing the translation, otherwise known as translating)" (MUNDAY, 2012, 2).

When going from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL), the translator must take into account linguistic factors, but because translation also implies a shift between two different cultures, it is crucially important to also consider cultural factors.

More often than not, the definition of a *conference interpreter* is misunderstood. "Even though they are called interpreters, they do not sing, they do not play an instrument, but they do another amazing thing: they facilitate understanding and communication among people who do not speak the same language" (OLT, SZASZ, 2017, 108).

It is not only about a good command of one or several foreign languages and one's mother tongue. It goes beyond language proficiency by its incredible mix of competencies and skills, including listening, public speaking, mental agility, the use of information and communication technology (ICT), or the sense of tracking time. Moreover, the interpreter needs to know how to

extract key concepts and to express ideas using connectors and having a very good command of set phrases.

Conference interpreting involves oral performance *par excellence*. That is why, a pleasant pitch of voice, good diction, charisma, and even acting skills come to complete the interpreter's profile. S/he will thus render the message fluently and naturally.

2. Lost in Transition

We all know that the European Union promotes linguistic diversity in Europe. 'Unity in diversity' is the *mot d'ordre* in this framework characterised by the harmonious co-existence of so many languages. When Romania joined the European Union in 2007, Romanian became an official language and, consequently, many jobs were created for Romanian translators and interpreters in the European institutions. In the meantime, many of them continued to work on the internal market or to combine these two as freelancers accredited by the European institutions.

If, in the case of the translators and interpreters working in Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg, things are properly set, for those activating on the Romanian market there are many aspects that need to be improved.

First of all, the process of obtaining the authorization to work as a sworn translator or interpreter with the court, the police department, the registrar's office, or the notary public contains several steps that might last long and discourage the young people wanting to enter the market soon after graduation.

Second, the collaboration with the offices of the notaries public has become more complicated since the introduction in 2017 of certain provisions that render bureaucratic aspects even more chaotic and the number of official procedures greater.

Starting 2018, the Romanian Ministry of Finance also implemented different regulations concerning the declarations of revenue translators and interpreters have to fill in and submit in order to pay taxes to the budget for the activities they perform. It is rather a context of uncertainty that makes these professionals tense and worried about the evolution of their jobs in the future.

Moreover, the EU passed the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) to protect the data privacy of its citizens and reshape the way organizations approach data privacy. The new law adopted by the European Commission and which became enforceable on May 25, 2018, also obliges translators and interpreters to remain cautious and up-to-date all the time by participating in the informing sessions about private data processing.

While this may be good news for citizens, GDPR will require significant attention to how they store, manage, and secure personal and sensitive data. It is aimed to be rather a friendly tool which creates a relationship of trust and responsibility among the operators that collect and transfer such data and the natural persons whose information is processed and not a means of authority and control.

It gives up excessive formality and bureaucratic barriers imposed in order to obtain data transfer authorisations, leaving the Member States the possibility to set a legislative framework for data protection. This is beneficial at international level as it creates a unitary policy and unic transfer and security procedures.

It is no wonder that these two professions are considered highly demanding and stressful. If we take the case of translators, they have to deal with long, unclear, and specialised documents, short deadlines, translations tools, or negotiations techniques in order to obtain good quotes. Interpreters, in their turn, are not more privileged. They often meet fast speakers who read their texts, frequently change the subject matter, or have difficult accents. Furthermore, they are confronted with poor booth conditions, such as low visibility of the speaker or the visual aids, poor equipment, warmth or cold, lack of ventilation. Not to mention preparation difficulties related to the lack of background material or too little time to prepare.

Of course, at present, they are struggling to improve their work environment and well-being by following recommendations to reduce stress levels.

3. Future Challenges

Quality, efficiency, deadlines, proficiency, and ethics are and will remain key elements for the professions of translator and conference interpreter. Here enters into discussion the good relation that should exist between universities preparing those specialists and the labour market acquiring them.

As demonstrated in the first chapter, translators and conference interpreters are required to exhibit a number of skills that are not necessarily linked to language competence. This is why the younger “sister” of traditional philology was born – the Applied Modern Languages specialization inside the Faculty of Letters of the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, where we teach.

From the very beginning, in 1991, it was designed as an inter- and transdisciplinary department, whose aim was to train professionals for an emerging market (translation and conference interpreting) in the framework of European integration. Consequently, the study of languages and linguistics is leaving its ‘ivory tower’ to promote the coexistence of several disciplines that may be subsumed to the generic term of ‘communication science’.

However, the didactic aims are numerous and are also oriented towards patterns of behaviours and market-related activities. While teaching, we try to alternate and combine goals in order to prepare the students for real-life situations. For instance, a translation seminar or a consecutive interpretation practical course imply more than mere translation. Undoubtedly, most of the abilities students have to possess are language and text-related, but we should not forget field competence.

Anyone not knowing what the translation or conference interpreting professions really involve, might assume that the people performing them are competent in all domains and can translate or interpret any kind of text or speech. However, this is only partially true. That is why, our role as teachers is to guide students to find resources that will help them explore the different fields and decide what is best for them.

In this respect, the texts and activities we propose in class belong to several distinct fields. We go from journalistic texts through culinary or tourism texts to reach economic, technical, medical, or legal documents towards the end of their studies at bachelor’s level. All this happens during the courses of translation, back translation, specialised translations, consecutive and simultaneous interpreting. In order to consolidate students’ knowledge, we also have special classes dedicated to international relations, European studies, law, management, marketing, economics, or accounting.

The most important aspect in terms of our pedagogy and methodology is that we try to adapt our teaching methods to every generation of students we have, to their knowledge, competence, skills, and background. Moreover, their suggestions and ideas are always welcome and often put into practice in class with very satisfactory implications on their performance.

Of outmost importance is the fact that we should never forget the fact that these generations are ‘digital natives’. They were born at the end of the ‘90s, when information and technology began to flourish and after the internet appeared, which practically influenced a lot on the development of their brain and way of thinking.

Very recently, the Romanian psychologist Mircea Miclea, a former minister of education and nowadays professor at the Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, made some very interesting declarations on this aspect with the occasion of a debate organized by the ‘Romania 100’ Platform. He states that we have a traditional vision on people’s mind and brain, but we omit the fact that during the last 20 years cognitive sciences have developed and bring us extremely interesting information on the way of thinking of young people nowadays.

If they are ‘digital natives’, we, their teachers, are ‘digital immigrants’, coming from another world, where there was no internet. We have other methods, tools, or hobbies. Consequently, at present, we are trying to adapt to this new reality, which is not very easy. That is why we should take into account these differences when we teach our students because if we ignore them, they might not be interested in following the courses anymore.

The young generation nowadays prefer multimedia content, with which they entered into contact at a very young age. Whether this is good or bad, it is not our purpose here. But at least one thing is clear: they prefer audio and video materials and not print texts anymore. No wonder they will not be enthusiastic at all about our courses if we do not adapt them to their needs. It is as if we totally ignored what happens in their brain.

It goes without saying that the multimedia content needs to be very well organized. Research shows us how to do it so that students take maximum cognitive profit out of this. Here comes the inestimable role and duty of the teacher: staying informed all the time and trying to adapt to the continuously emerging needs of their students.

4. Conclusions

Translating and conference interpreting are not fixed activities. They change with every single text or speaker. Consequently, teaching those two subjects is not an easy task either. For this reason, teachers and students should collaborate in order to find the best methods and ways of approaching these fields. A transdisciplinary approach, like the one at the AML Department, comes to perfectly fit students' needs to acquire fundamental skills in order to be good professionals, able to overcome every obstacle they might encounter.

The requirements of the labour market perfectly justify this integrative method of teaching and learning. Irrespective of their field of activity, such professionals have to go beyond the frontiers of their specialization and to acquire knowledge from different disciplines as well. This is what we teach our students: to dare go beyond the limits of linguistics and collect any useful data from the surrounding environment and use them from problem solving.

For sure, the future of translators and interpreters relies on their adopting and developing IT tools and multimedia content during their training and further development. Obviously, machine translation and machine interpreting will also evolve. However, taking into account the overall context of translators and interpreters' training and given the different skills and abilities they need in order to do their job, we can be sure that the inestimable role of the human being will never disappear. Thus, both translators and conference interpreters should permanently insist on virtual learning and skill acquisition in their daily practice and continue their multifaceted development, which is crucial for their career.

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