

## Questioning Translation Services for the Community

Alexandru PRAISLER\*

### Abstract

*Romania's joining the European Union in 2007 has brought about the free circulation of citizens across the continent and the adoption of a common legislative frame among all member states. As a result, public institutions have had to take into account the wider community they are now addressing and to readjust their practices/strategies so as to fit the newer, changing context. Playing a major role in the process of internationalisation, translation has nevertheless remained in the background, with little attention and credit, hence with no financing and development policy. The aim of the paper is to propose a questionnaire to be officially applied to representative public institutions in Galati. Based on previous research carried out in the field, it summarises the essential aspects in the recent downgrading of translation services and is intended to raise awareness, eventually to reconsider the status of a profession.*

**Keywords:** language, community, translation, interpretation, public institution

### 1. Frame

The translation market in Europe revolves around the EU both as notion and as institution, the policies the latter issues being operative in all member states and enforcing the objectives, principles and guidelines according to which translators carry out their activities. The positive side to this is that these widely accepted frames facilitate social interaction at continental level, in keeping with the new status of citizens and citizenship, allowing increased mobility between countries and the formation of transnational ties. The downside resides in excessive bureaucracy and in translators being expected to make their way through numerous gate-keeping procedures efficiently and proficiently.

The practice of translation determines social status. The first contributing factor is the communicative competence of the translator, his/ her proficiency of language use in immediate speech situations. The second factor is related to context, to the institution of language in general and to the social institutions in which communication takes

---

\*Postdoctoral researcher, "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati, alexandru.praisler@ugal.ro

place in particular. The two should ideally function as one. In other words, personal qualifications and attributes are not enough for excellence in translation. Institutions have to acknowledge the necessity of quality translation services and to contribute to translator training in various ways. As Wagner, Bech and Martinez suggest in a section dedicated to the impact of EU enlargement on translation,

translators should not be expected to work in isolation from other fellow professionals, without the possibility of networking and sharing terminology; inexperienced, overworked or badly paid translators are the wrong choice for the job; translators need to be provided with legal and technical advice from other specialists; translators should be offered the possibility of attending initial, periodical or conversion training courses held by professional, highly qualified teachers and sponsored by the employer; to be recruited, translators need a university degree, usually of four years of study; translators have to be highly trained in their mother tongue as well; translators are required to know at least two official languages of the EU besides their mother tongue; translators should contact the EU institutions and universities in EU countries to find out more about required translator training; to be best informed, translators are expected to take part in conferences and workshops on the translation matters. (2002: 105-117)

In reality, however, things do not always go as expected. To reach an understanding of the pluses and minuses of social translation, as well as to allow the reconsideration of the translation profession, a survey has been initiated. The qualitative research under way involves analysis of documents and structured interviews (based on a questionnaire and a couple of guided commentaries). The questionnaire devised is intended for local public institutions providing services for the community, whose communication – accounted for by the current European circumstances – involves addressing the local, but also the international audience.

## **2. Proposed questionnaire**

The multiple choice questionnaire consists of twenty-four entries with four answer variants (a, b, c and d), the first three offering specific solutions and the fourth asking for completion. The aspects targeted, which inevitably overlap at times, may be grouped under the following categories: languages used; types of translation/ interpretation services;

translators/ interpreters – selection and contracting; perception and evaluation; communication channels, websites; linguistic strategy. Mention must be made here of the fact that interpretation has been added to the list although the data collected so far indicates that requests for interpretation services are extremely rare in public institutions. Also included in the questionnaire are two requests to provide information on documents and situations where English is used.

The items on language focus on translation/ interpretation services proper, on communication with the public in general, via the institution's webpage in particular. Reference has only been made to the mother tongue (Romanian in this case), to English and French. Previous research has shown that, if any at all, these are the two foreign languages usually employed in intercultural communication in Romania. French is still perceived as either rare or aristocratic, while the myth about English is that everyone under fifty speaks it relatively well – fuelled by the great exposure of the young to this international language taught in most schools, omnipresent on TV, widely used in the media and in virtual networks; emerging from the “entirely natural phenomenon” of English becoming a global language, with “the majority of non-native speakers us[ing] it as a lingua franca among themselves rather than as a ‘foreign’ language to communicate with native speakers” (Jenkins 2012: xi).

**Translation/ interpretation services are most frequently requested for**

- a. English
- b. French
- c. English and French
- d. other; please specify

**Communication with the public is achieved**

- a. in Romanian only
- b. in Romanian and in English
- c. in more foreign languages besides Romanian
- d. other; please specify

**The institution's webpage**

- a. includes information in Romanian and in several foreign languages
- b. includes information in Romanian and in English
- c. does not include information in foreign languages
- d. other; please specify

A number of five entries are related to types of translation and interpretation services. The aim is, on the one hand, to find out whether public institutions carry out such activities themselves, or whether they collaborate with others and, on the other hand, to make further inquiries into particulars of these activities, into the legality, reliability and professionalism of the end products. Since the premise assumed is that translations are specialised, in keeping with the profile of each and every institution, the type of interpretation frequently needed and organised is of special interest. This gives relevant information on how interactive, dynamic, real-time efficient and open to the international public the organisation is.

**The institution offers translation services**

- a. Yes. Its own services
- b. Yes. Through collaboration
- c. No
- d. other; please specify

**The institution offers interpretation services**

- a. Yes. Its own services
- b. Yes. Through collaboration
- c. No
- d. other; please specify

**The translations offered are**

- a. recognised by the institution
- b. authorised, legalised, stamped through institution services
- c. authorised, legalised, stamped by the beneficiary
- d. other; please specify

**The translations requested are**

- a. achieved by an authorised translator, legalised by a public notary, stamped and super legalised by the competent court of law
- b. achieved by an authorised translator, legalised by a public notary
- c. achieved by an authorised translator
- d. other; please specify

**The interpretation achieved is, more often than not,**

- a. simultaneous
- b. consecutive

- c. simultaneous and consecutive
- d. other; please specify

An additional set of five items target the selection and contracting of translators/ interpreters, being in close connection with the ones covering the latter's perception and evaluation. The purpose here is twofold: 1) in the case of public institutions offering translation/ interpretation services, to know if qualification/ specialisation in the domain is compulsory, or if it is considered a plus or deemed irrelevant – standpoints which determine the organisational chart of the institution and influence its policy on the development and management of human resources; 2) in the case of public bodies appealing to services provided by external collaborators, to see the selection criteria and the ensuing procedures, as well as the documents presupposed by the venture, thus questioning the efficiency and efficacy of the service offered.

**The institution's translation services are provided by**

- a. qualified personnel
- b. unqualified personnel, whose job description includes translation
- c. any employee who comes in contact with foreign citizens
- d. other; please specify

**The institution's interpretation services are provided by**

- a. qualified personnel
- b. unqualified personnel, whose job description includes translation
- c. any employee who comes in contact with foreign citizens
- d. other; please specify

**The selection of translators/ interpreters in view of collaboration is achieved**

- a. through contacting specialised agencies/ translation companies
- b. through contacting authorised persons
- c. through recommendations from third parties
- d. other; please specify

**The translation services offered by external collaborators**

- a. are based on permanent contracts
- b. are based on fixed-term contracts
- c. are occasional; based on agreements
- d. other; please specify

**The interpretation services offered by external collaborators**

- a. are based on permanent contracts
- b. are based on fixed-term contracts
- c. are occasional; based on agreements
- d. other; please specify

Three of the entries in the proposed questionnaire are dedicated to perception and evaluation. The first two interrogate the quality of the services offered, interrelated as it is with the professional background of the person mediating between languages and cultures. Feedback on activities is regarded as the best way to reconsider earlier practices and to restructure future ones so as to meet expectations, gain in credibility and, in short, build a positive image inside and outside the local community. The third foregrounds the previous education and training of specialists in the field – which is one of the problems signalled by scholars in translation studies, who propose that systemic changes should be operated.

Recently, there has been serious decline in interest among European students in the study of modern languages, English included. As already mentioned, it tends to become a second language rather than a foreign one. Nevertheless, employment is sooner available to those with knowledge of at least two foreign languages (European Commission, 2014). As regards teaching, if the development of listening and speaking skills was the educational goal previously, with the emergence of a European lingua franca, a shift to the reading and translation skills has become imperative. In this area of interest, the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) forwarded by David Katan (2004: 329-341) is worth being mentioned as strategically placing the emphasis on translator training in view of developing intercultural sensitivity, thus carrying out a supra-cultural mission.

**Feedback on translation/ interpretation services**

- a. There has been positive feedback from beneficiaries.
- b. There has been negative feedback from beneficiaries.
- c. There has been no feedback.
- d. other; please specify

**The positive/ negative feedback mostly reflected**

- a. linguistic form and content

- b. spoken language fluency
- c. meeting deadlines
- d. other; please specify

**A good translator/ interpreter is recommended by**

- a. a BA/ MA/ PhD diploma in Philology
- b. a certificate issued by the Ministry of Justice
- c. his/ her performance in the field of translation/ interpretation
- d. other; please specify

Another group of three items concentrates on the communication channels used by public bodies, with specific emphasis on websites, which seem to be the most popular and the most commonly employed to transmit information to the public at large. Extra information is sought with reference to their content, in terms of conferring visibility to translation, subtitling, dubbing and voice-over (as and if the case may be). This would allow in depth analysis of the intercultural dialogue facilitated by and of the localisation policies at work in website design.

**Communication with the public is mostly achieved**

- a. through the institution's webpage
- b. through the institution's spokesperson - in the written press
- c. through the institution's spokesperson - on TV
- d. other; please specify

**The institution's webpage**

- a. mentions the translation/ interpretation services offered
- b. gives details on the translation/ interpretation services offered
- c. does not mention the translation/ interpretation services offered
- d. other; please specify

**The institution's webpage**

- a. includes text only
- b. also includes subtitled video material
- c. also includes audio-video material with subtitles/ dubbing/ voice-over provided)
- d. other; please specify

Last but not least, the linguistic strategy of the institution is placed under the lens. Of particular interest in this section of the questionnaire are: the documents, areas or situations in which foreign languages are

used within the institution; the acquiesced role of certified proficiency and of sustained, recurrent practice in foreign languages; the actual formulation and implementation of a strategy involving the correct use of languages in official documents and formal interactions. For Romanian, two laws have already been issued and should be observed (not always the case, unfortunately): Law 500/ 2004 - on using the Romanian language in public places, relations and institutions (Romanian Parliament, 2014); and Law 183/ 2006 - on using the standardised codification of the set of characters in electronic documents (Romanian Parliament, 2014). Regulations for foreign languages are still to be implemented in Romanian public institutions, although EU language policies are in place (European Commission, 2014).

**The personnel use foreign languages to**

- a. communicate and collaborate with similar institutions abroad
- b. carry out joint projects/ partnerships/ research with similar institutions abroad
- c. deliver papers/ presentations at international conferences, symposiums, workshops
- d. other; please specify

**The status of foreign languages on employment in the institution**

- a. Knowledge of a foreign language is compulsory.
- b. Knowledge of a foreign language is not compulsory.
- c. Knowledge of a foreign language is not a selection criterion.
- d. other; please specify

**The status of foreign languages within the institution**

- a. Beginner/ Refresher courses are offered.
- b. Training programmes are organised.
- c. There are mobilities, international exchange schemes.
- d. other; please specify

**The linguistic strategy of the institution**

- a. was formulated after joining the EU
- b. was changed after joining the EU
- c. was not changed after joining the EU
- d. other; please specify

**The linguistic strategy of the institution**

- a. is adopted from the regulations issued by the respective governing authority/ ministry

- b. is mentioned in the institution's own regulations
- c. its formulation is under way
- d. other; please specify

The supplementary information requested asks of the personnel participating in the survey to provide examples and, if possible, samples of documents frequently translated into English, and of situations in which translation/ interpretation from/ into English is necessary. The respondents, authorised spokespersons, will be nominated by the top administration of each institution, following the researcher's official accreditation by the alma mater and the written request formulated to this end. Their identity will remain confidential, in keeping with the declaration regarding the protection of personal data presented in view of carrying out the research on the premises of the public bodies in question.

### 3. Conclusion

Broadly speaking, in Europe, translation is now performed for the European Union or in the European Union. Translating for the EU has a markedly political dimension, whereas translating in the European Union is very much a commercial activity, a commissioned service. In both cases, the translator functions as an additional filter between the sender and the receiver of the message, functioning under the constraints imposed by the 'client', the goals envisaged by the 'product' and the ready expectations of the targeted 'buyer'. Despite this strategic position, the translator is still perceived as someone involved in secretarial work. As for translation, it has not gained a higher status anywhere else except in specialised institutions of research, education and training. All the while, though, the need to market social, cultural and intellectual 'goods' has become more stringent.

The questionnaire to be applied to public institutions in Galati is directed at this paradox and will hopefully reveal the neuralgic areas to be addressed by decision makers in the future, so as to promote advanced translator training, avoid unprofessional intrusions and low-quality translation enterprises, actually place the respective institutions in the service of the community.

### Acknowledgement

The present paper is part of on-going postdoctoral research within the 159/ 1.5/ S/ 138963 SOPHRD Project "Sustainable Performance in Doctoral and Postdoctoral Research" (PERFORM).

**References**

- European Commission (2014) *Multilingualism in the European Union* available from [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/translating/multilingualism/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/translating/multilingualism/index_en.htm) [20 November 2014]
- European Commission (2014) *Supporting Language Diversity in Europe* available from [http://ec.europa.eu/languages/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/languages/index_en.htm) [20 November 2014]
- Jenkins, J. (2012) *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and Identity*. Oxford: OUP
- Katan, D. (2004) *Translating Cultures. An Introduction for Translators and Interpreters*. Manchester: St. Jerome
- Parlamentul României (2004) *Legea 500/ 2004 – privind folosirea limbii române în locuri și relații publice* available from <http://lege5.ro/en/Gratuit/gu3dsnbt/legea-nr-500-2004-privind-folosirea-limbii-romane-in-locuri-relatii-si-institutii-publice> [20 November 2014]
- Parlamentul României (2006) *Legea 183/ 2006 – privind utilizarea codificării standardizate a setului de caractere în documentele în formă electronică* available from <http://lege5.ro/Gratuit/ha3dgnzq/legea-nr-183-2006-privind-utilizarea-codificarii-standardizate-a-setului-de-caractere-in-documentele-in-forma-electronica> [20 November 2014]
- Wagner, E.; S. Bech, J. M. Martinez (2002) *Translating for the European Union Institutions*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing