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Ensuring Quality through Individual Study, Peer Collaboration and Teacher Coordination

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Ensuring Quality through Individual Study, Peer Collaboration and Teacher Coordination

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Abstract: *The learning methodology experienced during the first year of study at the European Masters' in Translation Studies and Terminology of the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, member of the EMT network (European Masters' in Translation Network of the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission), focuses on the needs and requirements of a solid and thorough learning process aimed at the development of market-oriented skills and competences. This paper illustrates, from the students' perspective, the learning process structured on three main levels of action and interaction. The syllabus and teacher-guided individual study precedes teacher initial feedback which is due to shed new indications for peer collaboration. Finally, the teacher's coordination comes not as an intervention, but rather as a competent and experienced guidance.*

Keywords: *quality assurance, translator training, learning methodology, European Master's in Translation Studies and Terminology, student perspective*

Quality assessment in academic study programmes might prove difficult without a precise feedback from students. The two authors, students at the European Master's in Translation Studies and Terminology (Romanian acronym METT, i.e. Masteratul European de Traductologie-Terminologie), engage in a brief description of the learning methodology implemented in one of the core courses of the master's programme, Contemporary Translation Theories (Romanian acronym TCT, deriving from Teorii contemporane ale Traducerii). The aim of the present paper is to offer a generalised model to be implemented in other master's programmes which manifest the same features as the METT, mainly a high degree of internationalisation and a bivalent training curricula oriented to both market and academic research. In achieving this goal, the authors have extensively taken into account their experience as 1st year master students, the challenges and the requirements they had to answer as to fulfil the expectations deriving from the TCT course curriculum. The result is a three fold learning methodology whose main goal is to instil a new and fresh mentality with regards to translation through the optimal interweaving of practice and theory (Aldea and Greere, 2002:351). The three main steps; teacher-guided individual study, peer collaboration and teacher coordination were identified by the authors as a recurrent quality and competence assuring pattern in all the activities pertaining to the course and are the result of a process of abstractisation to securely eliminate the METT specific elements which could inflict an incomplete comprehension of the model. Along with the authors' personal remarks, the methodology of assessing the level of quality of the TCT course curriculum is comprised of two main frameworks: one which is deemed to offer support for the students' perspective and the second one whose role is to place the curriculum in the right academic context.

1. Academic Context

Before embarking on presenting the students' perspective on the learning methodology implemented in one of the core courses within the master's programme they are attending, a few remarks must be made on the design of the European Master's in Translation Studies and Terminology curricula, on the academic context in which the master's programme has been designed and, last but not least, on the course of Contemporary Translation Theories.

The main factors that shaped the actual configuration of METT curricula are issued from the high degree of internationalisation sought as to ensure full integration within the European market of translation and as to ensure full compatibility and transferability between various academic establishments. The last aim deals with the Bologna process and the changes this uniformity and exchangeability desiderata at a European scale have brought in the implementation of translator training curricula. Divided into two levels of training, the overall curricula of the Department of Applied Modern Languages (Romanian acronym LMA, *Limbi Moderne Aplicate*) focuses on delivering to the student the theoretical and practical elements which build up the competences and skills currently required on the translation market with its subsequent specialisations. For the purpose of this paper it is fair to indicate that at BA level the curricula has been designed to give a close look at the two careers covered by it (translation and interpreting) through a general approach to translation. Another focal point is the enrichment of language competences through courses of language for specific purposes specially designed for the A language, the mother tongue, for the B language and for the C language to which students at BA level can add a third foreign language taken up from scratch. At the end of the three years BA programme, students are also endowed with cultural and intercultural competences for the corresponding languages they have in their linguistic combination. It is only at a MA level that students are oriented towards acquiring specific professionalising skills for tackling highly specialised texts, as Greere (2008:84) puts it:

Although BA level training for translators and interpreters is practiced in some European cultures, an approach that places translator and interpreter training at an MA level as separate study programmes with distinct learning outcomes seems to be the solution preferred by Bologna systems of 3+2, approach strongly encouraged also by the European Commission through the EMT and EMCI initiatives. Under this perspective BA LMA training is to be more general, introductory in nature emphasizing language and cultural enhancement rather than specific specialized professional skills. An element of novelty has been added to the new 4-semester MA programmes. In keeping with French LEA developments, we also proposed a system of two-level master's (M1 and M2) with intermediate certification after one year of study, allowing for more flexibility.

The other factor as it derives from a more specific kind of uniformity and conformity is the curricula integration with specific European training programmes both at BA level and at MA level. At BA level the integration of the Department of Applied Modern Languages with the International Association of Applied Modern Languages Departments (with its French acronym AILEA, *Association Internationale des Langues Étrangères Appliquées*) has strengthened and confirmed the design of the present curricula. Along with courses specially designed to offer solid foundations when embarking upon translation of general texts and to offer a glimpse of specialised translations, general courses of law, accounting, marketing, economy, etc. provide the student with an overview on the interdisciplinarity of translation. Competences acquired during the BA level qualify the graduate as a specialist in multilingual communication. At the next level, the curricula respond to the critical needs of future translators by offering a general theoretical framework as to allow them to tackle various translation tasks in a highly professional manner. Mother tongue courses and cultural studies courses are the subsequent pillars of the curricula. In this respect, the accession of METT in the European Master's in Translation Network is a high quality seal which officially makes METT a European and a local label on the translation market with everything that such a market implies. In fact, the European Master's in Translation Network has been designed by the Directorate-General

for Translation of the European Union's Commission as a body of master's programmes which cultivates high standard translator training "to ensure that an increasing number of programmes are based on a valid skill-oriented framework of competences" (Directorate-General of Translation). Therefore, the 3 + 2 approach and the admission of METT in this European network of translator training establishments have been the decisive steps in officialising the high standard of teaching the body of trainers within the Department of Applied Modern Languages adhere to.

Moreover, the Department of Applied Modern Languages with its subsequent components both at BA level and MA level substantially differentiates itself in the field of translator training from the well known classic approach provided by the philology departments. Initiating courses are offered by this branch. Apart from grammar-in-use-oriented translation approaches, the traditional view steps further and offers courses of literary translation which are deemed to enlarge the student's horizon but they fail to give a full depiction of the dimension translation studies have gained without even considering a career in the translation market as a specialised translator. This is why Aldea and Greere (2002:349-350) advocate for a clear-cut distinction between the two approaches:

For a whole series of reasons, such traditional approaches are now deemed unacceptable for the purposes of the Applied Modern Languages Departments. With such departments, the main focus of training obviously shifts from the language/literature-based approach destined for the future teachers of English as a foreign language towards the training of professional intercultural experts.

It is of utmost importance to give this precise distinction credit in what quality assurance is concerned. It is only by focusing exclusively on matters which pertain to a full scale translator training that the demands of today's market can be fully fulfilled. The awareness of the opposing approaches of philology and of LMA can only result in an optimal curricula design as to favour a more linguistic and culture-oriented approach which shifts literature from the central place it has in philological training to a more liminal one. This helps the curricula designers not only to offer a fully equipped training but mostly to reassess the weight of traditional approaches in the overall training. This again would result in offering literary insights, i.e. literary translation, but only as means of specialisation in the field and not as a lens for evaluating the entire translation career. Another crystal clear delimitation of LMA and philology extends to the actual translator profession on the very translation market. Due to the present legislation becoming an authorised translator requires only the proof of mastering one or two foreign languages on the basis of which the applicants receive an authorisation from the Ministry of Justice. Although the paper received is supposed to cover only the legal field, numerous translators make use of it to present themselves as authorised translators even though acting in a different field such as technical or medical (for a more detailed description of the present situation on the translation market in Romania see Greere:2008). On the other side, many clients seek authorised translators without even questioning the meaning of the title itself. This difference of standard entails that the training framework offered at MA level is both a highly competitive and a quality-oriented training. Firstly, LMA graduates are endowed with general knowledge in various fields tackled with teachers activating in that very domain. This already constitutes a great advantage against their potential competitors coming from a philological background. Secondly, the design of the current curricula at MA level, apart from the strong methodological precepts, offers the student knowledge tools in the fields of current interest (legal, economic, technical etc.) as to allow for an optimal and smooth integration on the translation market, be it local or international.

This strive for differentiation in view of offering the required competences and skills for the future translator naturally leads to the huge and still open debate on curricula design as to better suit the needs of the market. Although it is not within the purpose of this paper to continue this debate, we think it is of great importance to present the main paradigms which influence curricula design as grasped from academic trainers in the field of translation. One fundamental question seems to be the extent to which theory should be present in translator training. In fact, this question could be interpreted as a variation of Adorno's educational dichotomy (Adorno:1998 in Goff-Kfour, 2002:370). On one hand, driven by the strong capitalistic forces and economic necessities, the „half-education” encourages

hyperspecialisation and the „over-emphasis on working life so much that liberal goals are no longer important” (Goff-Kfourri, 2002:370). On the other hand, „comprehensive education” is seen as a wide array of orientations and approaches whose main goal is the „development of skills required in critical thinking” (Goff-Kfourri, 2002:370). Voluntarily skipping the philosophical remarks that could be made on the distinction between education and training, the debate is still open on whether the curricula should shed a vocational or an academic aura on the master’s programme. Given the strong market orientation of translator training, rather than adopting an exclusive stance and favouring one or the other, the issue in question is to identify the perfect balance between the two by integrating theory into translation practice. (Dimitriu:2002).

For Greere, the curricula designed for the TCT course is an interweaving of introductory theoretical courses and practical courses whose main goal is to instil a new mentality in the students starting with the very shift from the classic representation of translation, as being grammar-oriented and language-oriented, to a more comprehensive framework. The training methodology seeks to introduce the main concepts as deriving from the evolution of translation studies on the basis of an interactive model of practical courses: „A preferable working method would rely essentially on an interactive model, closer by its very nature to practical activities proper” (Aldea and Greere, 2002:353). The shift of mentality should cast out the rooted perception according to which the source text is a sacred component of the translation process. Another aim of the proposed training methodology is to give the students a sense of professional identity mainly through real life situations used as didactic material. Group work and question-answer interactions are only a few examples of changes resulting from the modern shift in the curricula design. The trainer is „no longer the sage-on-the-stage but a guide-by-the-side” (Stimson and Mitter, 1996 in Goff-Kfourri, 2002:375). This recent shift is one of the best means to offer the student that degree of autonomy which would dissociate him from learning ready-made solutions and strategies for the potential translation tasks after their integration on the translation market. On the other hand, the happy interweaving of theory with practical courses has the great advantage of offering the degree of translation expertise needed for a quick integration on the market since the theoretical/deductive approaches heavily shorten the time needed to assimilate and give the best translation response (Dimitriu, 2002:331). The final component of the training methodology implies a practical examination which consists of analysis of the source text, presentation of examples for the four categories of translation problems, presentation of tools and strategies used, of solutions implemented and of a translation brief. Which is to say that the students must make proof of their capacity to work with the theoretical framework by applying key concepts in the translation process which is also the basis for the final assessment (Aldea and Greere, 2002:356).

The learning methodology as it shall be discussed in what follows is obviously highly dependent on the academic circumstances in which it is deemed to function. These academic circumstances for the MA level in translator training at the Department of Applied Modern Languages of the Faculty of Letters, Babe’-Bolyai University consist of the challenges that the Bologna Process implied, of the METT’s admission in the EMT network as a confirmation of the quality label the Department has built and last but not least of the market-oriented curricula design. It is normal to estimate that if the academic circumstances create the proper context for high standard and high quality training, the final aims set forth are fully reached.

2. Students’ Perspective

In what follows the authors shall present in detail the most significant activities that they took part in as first year students at the European Master’s in Translation Studies and Terminology from the three perspectives established at the beginning of this article (individual study, peer collaboration, teacher coordination). Thus, they shall try to illustrate through concrete examples, but also using relevant theoretical elements, how quality can be achieved in higher education courses. In order to give more structure to the argumentation the aforementioned activities were divided according to the

classic dichotomy curricular vs. extracurricular. Among the curricular activities the authors shall discuss weekly theoretical and practical course tasks and the Tradutech translation project while the extracurricular activities presented shall be their experiences from several national and international conferences that they attended this year, the visits at several translation agencies and the internships carried out in such institutions.

If the activities proposed by the Contemporary Translation Theories course are to be discussed, another classic dichotomy strikes out; one which has plagued students, teachers and authorities in the field of education alike: theory vs. practice. The trend into today's educational and academic environment, a trend that the authors as students have experienced, is to shift the focus from a theoretical approach to teaching to a more practical or vocational one. In fact, even the director of the European Master's in Translation Studies and Terminology admits in one of her articles that given the established purposes of the master's programme to change the students' mentality in what concerns translation and to train market-ready professionals "the main difficulty in achieving this regards the introduction of theoretical elements during practical courses". (Aldea si Greere, 2002:353). However Greere also states that the theoretical elements provide students with a more accurate understanding of translation and point to the methodological strategies that shall later become professional habits. The curriculum of the European Master's in Translation Studies and Terminology and the activities proposed within this framework can also be analysed using the distinction proposed by Rodica Dimitriu (2002:328), i.e. the distinction between translator training and teaching translation. In this approach, translator training is comprised of the activities that help students get in contact with the market and experience translation as an activity while teaching translation focuses on the translation theories and theoretical notions necessary to provide students with a complete picture of translation as a process.

From the authors' experience, the Contemporary Translation Theories course represents an example of how theory and practice in a given field are interdependent and how these two sides of any professional activity are better employed to develop student competences when seen as part of a harmonious relationship not an antithetic one. At the beginning of the semester, students receive a syllabus containing a list of the topics to be covered each week together with the corresponding bibliography, some guidelines and the individual/group assignments. Each topic is approached following the three-stage progression the authors have identified and already talked about. In the first session, the teacher uses a question-answer routine (Aldea si Greere, 2002:353) to present students with some real-life translation situations, some of which deriving from her own experience as a translator. The students explore each situation from a multi-angle perspective while the teacher encourages them to come up with problem-solving techniques thus setting the stage and introducing key theoretical elements but also gaining the students' interest and motivating them to dig deeper into the matter in the stages to follow. As Bernd Stefanink and Ioana Bălăcescu (2009:83) admit, if teachers want to motivate students they have to adapt courses to their needs. Carol Ann Goff-Kfourri (2002:373) debates the issue indicated by Johnson (1999) of whether it is better to employ intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. Any tangible reward for good work is considered an extrinsic motivation while intrinsic motivation is "the feeling of having learned something" and the desire to continue the study and research in that field. In an academic environment, the grades and maybe the scholarships received are extrinsic motivations while the personal and professional reward experienced by students are intrinsic motivations. For an intrinsic approach to be successful, the students must have the knowledge to assume the tasks proposed and to see their relevance for their professional future. The first part of the equation is accounted for by the requirements of the admission exam but mostly by the teacher-student preliminary discussions which we have already presented. The second part of the equation is experienced by students as early as the first year of master studies through the numerous extracurricular activities which shall be tackled in this article.

Individual study is the stage that follows after the first course and requires students to read the recommended bibliography and to extract the main ideas but also the elements that pose problems. Peer interaction, the third stage, can come in many forms: a more complex group assignment which

involves a practical exercise which needs to be solved based on the acquired theoretical knowledge or a twenty-minute group brainstorming session which requires the students to solve real-life translation situations or provide a concise presentation of theory together with relevant examples. The teacher's coordination is felt throughout the entire learning process from the initial questions that indicate the direction of the debate to the assignment guidelines or the extraction of final conclusions. Moreover, apart from this standard course structure, the learning experience is even more enriched by the integration of national and international visiting professors or translators (Visiting Translator Scheme created by the Directorate General for Translation of the European Commission).

An occasion when the theoretical knowledge acquired during each semester is both tested and put to use is during the week-long Tradutech translation project which is actually a simulation of a full-size translation project. The initiative belongs to the University Rennes 2 and is carried out simultaneously across Europe in all participating universities. Students are organised in teams and at the beginning of the week they receive a technical text proposed to the University of Rennes 2 by a French translation agency. During the week that follows, the team functions as a real-life translation agency and has the task to go through all the steps of the translation project (terminology, translation, revision), to manage itself with the help of a coordinator and by means of activity and evaluation reports and to provide the translation by the end of the week. As a result of the two-year master programme structure in place after Bologna, at METT, the second year students recruit collaborators for the first year master students and revise the translations they produce. It is the first year students who have to function in teams and manage themselves as any translation agency on the market. During this week of simulation, the component that is dominant is that of peer interaction as in many cases the success of the project depends less on good translation skills and more on organisational and communicative competences. The team dynamics, the ability of the coordinator to organise and guide its team, the social and interpersonal skills and the motivation of each team member are of key importance and are moulded in such occasions. The individual study carried out up until that moment equips students with the necessary knowledge to tackle the project whereas teacher coordination intervenes only in the form of client - translator negotiation, if necessary, with the teacher playing the role of the client. Such a simulation duplicates real-life working conditions and determines by means of a natural process the creation of a behavioural pattern that each student can adopt in his/her future career.

As METT students the authors have also taken part in several national and international conferences: the conferences organized by Romanian Translators Association on technology in translation held in Baia Mare, the Forum on legal translation and interpreting held in Bucharest and Tralogy - Translation Careers and Technologies: Convergence Point for the Future held in Paris. The teacher of the course, Anca GREERE openly encouraged students take part in such conferences as they debated in detail topics which they had touched upon in classes and thus offered a unique opportunity to interact with the scholars that wrote on or were researching subjects the students had read about. Moreover, this kind of involvement gave the authors a glance at the international research scene, at its perspectives for the future and awakened the interest in the activity of research. The METT students also visited several top translation agencies like ASCO International in Bra'ov and took up internships in others such as Voin Technical Translations in Bucharest. The field trips at translation agencies allowed students to interact with translators already working on the national market, inquire after their experiences and actually see them working. Moreover, the collaboration with them in the form of internships gave students the unique possibility to work on the market, to get to know the ropes of this profession without feeling all the pressure that normal employees feel in a working environment. All this practical experience and interaction with field and market personalities was translated into peer interaction by means of presentations that the participating students carried out in front of their colleagues with the purpose of sharing all that information. The teacher's coordination was again present from the initiation of these activities to the actual presentations and the indication of conclusions but also future topics of debate.

The authors believe that such a complex approach to teaching every subject is an indicative of the high-quality knowledge provided and a guarantee in what concerns student competences. On a particular level, in translation study, a year-long course, with its curricular and extracurricular activities, shapes all the necessary competences that a translator needs to function on the market as identified by the European Master's in Translation Network, be it linguistic, cultural, domain-specific or technological competences. (2009:3-7) On a more general level, we believe that such a learning model is an example of the professionalisation that is needed in higher education programmes be it a professionalisation of the teaching environment, of the syllabus, of the teachers or of teaching method as Daniel Gouadec defines it (2002:303).

3. Conclusions

The degree of internationalisation conferred by the membership in the selective EMT network and by the membership in the International Association AILEA represents the utmost threshold in which curricula design and subsequently quality assurance are concerned. The authors highly appreciate that the TCT course curriculum represents the perfect balance between practice and theory. It is in this way that half-education and the comprehensive-education find the midway and confirm that far from being antithetic, the dichotomy these two approaches create is a necessary distinction when designing academic curricula. In what curriculum quality assessment is concerned, students which undergo this internationalised master's programme fully confirm the high standard learning methodology and recommend the implementation of such curricula model for similar master's programmes. Furthermore, the three-step learning approach provides the student with solid theoretical knowledge and allows for optimal testing of the main concepts by engaging in real-life activities specific to the translation market. Curricular and extracurricular activities have confirmed not only the validity but moreover the high standard of the learning approach proposed by the current curricula at METT. Quality can only be ensured through constant dialog with the market both at trainer/teacher level and at student level. On the basis of the experience gathered so far from the interaction with the market, the authors firmly believe that a course structure that allows students to test their knowledge on the market and in projects simulating real-life situations represents both a great capitalisation of the students' academic experience but also a force that drives them to perform into their careers.

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