TRANSLATING FOR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY. CHALLENGES AND DEMANDS

Alexandru Praisler, Postdoc Researcher, PhD, "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galați

Abstract: The free circulation of individuals within the European space and beyond has opened up new possibilities, but it has also made new demands on all those involved, regarding everything from legislation to linguistic policies and translation services. The case under focus here is that of young people applying for university study programmes abroad or taking part in international academic student exchange schemes and the translators mediating the respective/ prospective intercultural encounters. Brought forth are the challenges in accessing the appropriate translation services and in finding the best linguistic and cultural equivalent for the ensuing official translated text.

Keywords: education, translation service, international community, intercultural encounter

1. The translator and the international community

Social interaction at the level of the international community is mainly facilitated by knowledge of a bridge language or lingua franca, despite the fact that cross-cultural communication through language is only partly efficient, with consensual referentiality remaining on slippery ground and people's perception of/ interaction with the world around being intertwined with the possibilities of having it expressed.

"Because of the international spread of English that has been growing apace since the latter part of the 20th century (a situation recognised as unprecedented for any other language hitherto), English is frequently the mutual language of choice settings such as conferences, business meetings, and political gatherings." (Jenkins 2007: 1-2) English as lingua franca is also the chosen (foreign) language of communication in the documents resulting from the free flow of individuals around the globe, which has led to huge amounts of translation in and out of English, incurring costs related to the blurring of minority language and culture specificities (usually preserved through foreignisation strategies) due to excessively applying domesticating matrices, in support of majority languages and cultures.

As has been pointed out, "minority languages are under pressure from powerful major languages and can succumb at lexical and syntactic levels so that over time they become mirror images of the dominant language. Through imitation, they lack the specificity that invites imitation. As a result of continuous translation, they can no longer be translated. There is nothing left to translate." (Cronin 2003: 141) On the other hand, majority languages too (English in particular) are undergoing change; they are rapidly colonising parts of the world and, in so doing, placing themselves under the threat of death by localisation, like the languages of the great empires of antiquity.

Involved in the mediation between minorities and majorities, the translator is faced with the challenges and demands of adopting the method of "translation-as-diversification" rather than that of "translation-as-assimilation" (Cronin 1998: 148), while simultaneously "treat[ing] the text [not] merely as a self-contained and self-generating entity", but as "a decision-making procedure and an instance of communication between language users."

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(Hatim and Mason 1990: 3) Added to the difficulty of the task in the case of social translation are the load and urgency of the work required, the direct impact the translated text has on individual lives, and the varying provisions of the local/ regional/ global legislation in force.

In Romania – a country whose language is only spoken by approximately twenty-four million people around the world (as a mother tongue) and by an additional four million (as a second language) – translation has always been a necessity, even during the communist phase when, like all other cultural texts crossing the state frontiers, translations were under close observation and censorship. Since 2007, when the country became a member of the European Union, the need for and output of translation services has grown exponentially.

Today, although it is still true that generally "recontextualization and re-scaling do not […] result in any simple process of harmonization and integration of Romania at the European or global scales, but [remain] complex, contradictory and unpredictable mixtures of old and new" (Fairclough 2006: 70), it is also true that in certain areas (higher education, for example), things have moved forward at tremendous speed, sometimes destabilisingly so, but with positive results for harmonization and integration in view of supporting a knowledge based economy.

With the adoption of the resolutions of the Lisbon Convention (1997) and of the Bologna Declaration (1999), the Romanian higher education system complies with the international legislation on standardization of study cycles (undergraduate or bachelor, and postgraduate: master's and doctoral) and on cross-national recognition of qualifications and degrees detailed in and certified by study agreements, transcripts and diploma supplements to be translated.

2. Academic internationalisation

The major focus in the development policies of higher education institutions is represented by internationalisation. It is aimed at allowing inter-university circulation of students and academic staff, access to diverse study opportunities and research possibilities, forming a wider community whereby expertise is accumulated and shared. As a consequence, two main directions are observable at present, and Romania is no exception: firstly, a widespread phenomenon is that universities are increasingly setting up consortia, signing exchange and partnership agreements, engaging in joint study programmes and collaborative scientific projects; secondly, international associations have emerged to support this whole process, a case in point being the International Association of Universities (IAU), to which an impressive number of higher education institutions have adhered, and whose explicit goals are to:

contribute to the development of knowledge, higher education and research in the public interest; strengthen academic solidarity among HEIs and promote cooperation rather than competition; uphold the fundamental principles for which every university should stand: (i) the right to pursue knowledge for its own sake; (ii) to promote and uphold the tolerance of divergent opinion and freedom from political inference; promote equitable access, success and equal opportunities for students, researchers, faculty and staff; encourage the pursuit of diversity and quality while respecting cultural differences.

(www.iau-aiu.net/sites/all/files/depliant%20(single%20pages)%20EN.pdf)

In short, the overall system is being implemented, yet the aspect which still needs addressing is that of the international language(s) used in the context of the recently created global university network. Specialists from departments of communication and international

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relations in universities are faced with the challenges and demands of work place translation, involving documentation for research and development projects, in-coming and out-going students, visiting professors, in addition to website maintenance and updating, presentation leaflets and brochures, scientific publications at local university presses (articles in university annals, books of abstracts, volumes of conference proceedings, textbooks supporting the courses taught in English etc).

The information now 'exported' via translation is much greater than the one which is 'imported'. This means that, commonly and unadvisedly, in practice most of the work presupposes "translating out of [one's] first language"; nevertheless, this is no longer "a matter of what ought to be, but of what must be, owing to the shortage in most countries of 'native' speakers required in the TL." (Newmark 2003: 60) Under the circumstances, the best recipe for the time being remains for translators to show "intelligence and common sense", […] always likely to be a greater value than naturalness of language." (61) Translation into one's first language, on the other hand, is also represented at the opposite end of the communication chain, but is dependent on non-native speakers' previous translating efforts which, unless professional, may generate double jeopardy.

In concordance with the general rule, there is a clear tendency in universities to use English for intercultural communication and inter-institutional relations. English, however, accommodates only part of the realities of the local academic environments. As a result, translators working in the domain resort to the conventions decided upon by the international legislation, while, at the same time, they strive to find the nearest linguistically and culturally appropriate equivalents to draw up the documents necessary for the actual collaborations and mobilities in place. That is why, as personnel who aid the internationalisation process, translators should not only be required to have language skills. More often than not, they are decision makers and, as such, need to have the training and credentials which qualify them as cultural mediators also.

3. Case study

Translating study agreements, transcripts and diploma supplements is a frequent activity carried out in universities promoting internationalisation. While their academic content (overall programmes and individual disciplines) is accessible translation-wise, the systemic terminology employed and the equivalence in grading pose real problems.

The terminology seems to vary not only from country to country, but also from one institution of higher education to another. Moreover, it varies depending on the translations issued by and the translators working in students' home universities. Sometimes, students arrive at their host universities with British English versions of their transcripts; at other times, they are in the possession of texts translated in American English. Some translations are well done, while others leave a lot to be desired.

The standardised equivalence grid of grades and credits (ECTS for European Union member states, i.e. European Credit Transfer System) to be observed by translators facilitating the mobilities includes descriptor bands for 27 countries at international level (from Europe, Asia and America), but it does not always fit all academic record systems.

To exemplify, the particular case of an undergraduate Turkish student applying for a study programme in Romania has been chosen, but the related document under focus shall be dealt with anonymously, in keeping with the norms of personal data protection.

The disciplines studied are translatable into Romanian; for instance: Algorithms and programming [Algoritmi şi programare]; Introduction to computer engineering [Introducere în ingineria calculatoarelor]; Turkish language I [Limbă turcă I]; Ataturk's principles and history

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of Turkish Revolution [Principiile lui Ataturk şi istoria Revoluţiei turce]; General calculus I [Calcul matematic general I]; General physics I [Fizică generală I]; Elective [Opţional].

The "Transcript of Records", however, is a "Student's Grade Chart", according to which the holder was enrolled in 2010, has attended 5 semesters of academic studies (1, 2, 3, 4 and 6) and has "successfully completed a preparatory course" with no counterpart in the Romanian system. Furthermore, throughout the document in question "semesters" appear as "midterms", but also as "semesters", categorised into "Spring" and "Fall" (with equivocal temporal references in both cases). As for the grades obtained, they are classified and explained in an endnote, showing evolution, transformation, and according to which:

CURRENT GRADES (from 2009 Fall to now)
GRADES TO PASS: Al (90+), A2 (80-89), B1 (75-79), B2 (70-74), C1 (65-69), C2 (60-64)
CONDITIONED GRADES TO PASS: Dl (55-59), D2 (50-54)
GRADES TO FAIL: E (40-49), F1 (0-39), F2 (Not attended to course)
UNCREDITED GRADES: G (60+): Pass, K (0-59): Fail

PREVIOUS GRADES (from 2005 to 2008)
GRADES TO PASS: Al (90-100), A2 (85-89), B1 (75-84), B2 (70-74), C (60-69)
GRADES TO FAIL: F1: Not attended to course, F2: Not attended to final exam, F3: Failed
UNCREDITED GRADES: G: Pass, K: Fail
EXEMPTED GRADES: M1 (90-100), M2 (85-89), M3 (75-84), M4 (70-74), M5 (60-69)

The "previous grades" do not actually apply to this student, and the "current grades" have to be readjusted to the internationally convened descriptor bands, an excerpt of which is presented below (www.legenet.indaco.ro).

Romania							
Grade scale	1-4	5	6	7	8	9	10
ECTS scale	FX, F Fail	E Sufficient	D Satisfactory	C Good	C Good	B Very good	A Excellent
Turkey							
Grade scale	1-4	4.50-4.99	5.00-6.49	6.50-6.99	7.00-7.99	8.00-8.99	9.00-10.00
ECTS scale	Noksan/ Pek Noksan		Orta	Orta	Lyi	Lyi	Pek lyi

The "grades to pass" and the "grades to fail" may be found an equivalent for by multiplying the grade scale by 10. Nonetheless, with E outside the pass range as compared to the standard, confusion is created, and with very thin lines between classes, there are random choices to make by the translator – for example, both A2 (80-89) and B1 (75-79) could very well be 8.00 in Romania, where all grades from 7.50 to 8.40 become 8.00. The "conditioned grades to pass" can only be matched to bands D (6) – Satisfactory and E (5) – Sufficient respectively, the condition not being mentioned. Lastly, the "uncredited grades" are absent from the transcript; consequently, they may be simply left out.

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To resume, the transcript is symptomatic for most routine intercultural communication in English between non-native speakers. In the translation from Turkish into English, foreignisation and domestication overlap, resulting in the distortion of source and target culture(s) alike, as well as in ambiguity of expression, loss of information and mistranslation. Its further translation into Romanian is thus affected and in turn affects the student.

4. Conclusions

The challenges and demands of translating for the international community from the position of a minority language speaker are constantly reinvented by the contemporary situation. The accelerated process of globalisation (highly debated, but poignantly real) has brought about modifications at the level of society, where new roles, contexts and circumstances have emerged. In the newly built network of the knowledge based society supported by the higher education environment, translation plays a crucial part. For appropriate communicative results to be obtained and for students to have open access to the international study programmes of their own choice, universities should adapt their linguistic, administrative and human resource strategies to these changes, offering in-house specialised translation services by professionals with linguistic expertise, who are also closely familiar with the mechanisms of the academia.

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