TRANSLATING AND INTERPRETING FOR THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

At the beginning of this year, a group of eight students and two senior lecturers from "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş, Romania were given the opportunity to pay a working visit to the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament in Brussels, in order to present the selected students with the advantages/opportunities offered by the job of a translator and/or an interpreter, as well as with the challenges the translators and interpreters have to deal with at such a professional level. The present paper is to be regarded as a follow-up to this event.

Keywords: the European Parliament, translation, interpreting, CAT tools

A brief insight into the institutions and role of the European Union

The European Parliament represents the voice of the citizens that form the European Union and it is the supporter of solid inter-human communication and healthy relationships among nations. These healthy relations are only achievable with the help and support of open-minded people, who are aware of the necessity of circulation of information and knowledge.

In order to be well-informed and, thus, have the opportunity to act accordingly, one should become acquainted with the institutions and bodies within the European Union and the powers conferred upon them; therefore, they "derive from the founding Treaties: The Treaty on European Union refers to seven EU institutions in the strict sense of the term: four of these are responsible for drafting policies and taking decisions, namely the European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament. The Court of Justice ensures that Community law is observed, the European Central Bank's main task is to maintain price stability in the euro area, and the Court of Auditors examines the legality and regularity of Union revenue and expenditure. The Union's powers have evolved considerably over the years through the successive Treaties, as have its decision-making procedures."[3]

We consider that every citizen of the EU has both the right and the responsibility to be aware of the managing and organisational structures leading the European Union, and that everyone should benefit from the prerogatives derived from this. As Martin Schulz, the President of the European Parliament stated[4]: "The European Union is based on a fascinating idea of peace, freedom, stability and prosperity." (…) It implies "resolving disputes through dialogue and consensus, basing decisions on the principles of solidarity and democracy, and not simply deferring to the more powerful; reconciling the

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[3] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/atyourservice/en/displayFtu.html?ftuId=theme1.html
[4] http://www.europarl.europa.eu/pdf/divers/EN_EP%20brochure.pdf

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interests of the smaller and larger Member States, of northern and southern Europe, and of eastern and western Europe; and placing the common good above individual interests."

At the beginning of this year, a group of eight students and two senior lecturers from "Petru Maior" University of Tîrgu Mureş were given the opportunity to pay a working visit to the Committee on Culture and Education of the European Parliament in Brussels, in order to present the selected students majoring in linguistic studies with the advantages and opportunities offered by the job of a translator and/or an interpreter, as well as with the challenges the translators and interpreters have to deal with at such a professional level. The students were specializing in AML (Applied Modern Languages - undergraduate programme) and AAS (Anglo-American Studies - master's programme) and we find it important to mention their names, as well as of the persons from the CULT Committee of the European Parliament, Brussels who welcomed our initiative and organised the activities in minute detail. Students: Băldean Oana, Berţa Ioana, Buzea Diana, Chirteş Sînziana, Covrig Diana, Gligor Cynthia, Horvath Annamaria, Pop Claudia; officials in Brussels: Mircea Diaconu (Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education), Radu Vulcan (accredited assistant), Ondina Tăut (accredited assistant), Roxana Rădulescu (translator) and Ana Andronache (conference interpreter and translator).

Keeping in mind that AML study programme focuses on translation and interpreting, we considered this working visit as being extremely useful for the students, giving them the opportunity to see how the work of a translator and/or an interpreter is carried on in a professional environment, with requirements met at a different level than the one the students were familiar with. The visit paid an important role in clarifying another aspect, as well, namely the translator/interpreter status at present since many argue that the emergence of translation software tools like CAT (Computer Aided Translation) seem to diminish and even threaten his/her contribution to the process of translation as an act of intercultural communication.

At the same time, this visit aimed to highlight the added value provided by the intervention of the translator as an entitled professional, in the context in which a translation performed by means of certain software programmes might be perceived as being deprived of the ability to identify some specific nuances of the culture which the source text or target text belongs to.

Furthermore, we consider it essential not to lose sight of the relevance and usefulness of such software, since it is important for the contemporary translator to be able to adapt to the requirements of a market closely related to technological developments.

The group also intended to learn new and challenging ways of coping with the difficulties of the process of translating/interpreting, strategies on how to provide translation and interpretation at a high level in the current economic and cultural context. Needless to mention that the participation in the process of translation/interpreting (as it

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unfolds in the Committee on Culture and Education of the Parliament of Europe, Brussels) proved a real benefit for our group.

Our host was the Vice-Chair of the Committee on Culture and Education, Mr. Mircea Diaconu[5], who kindly agreed to welcome our group of students interested in the translation/interpreting process as performed within the committee he chairs. His accredited assistants, Mrs. Ondina Tăut and Mr. Radu Vulcan[6], did their best to provide our group with all the support needed, especially in the unfortunate circumstances of March 22, 2016 in Brussels (i.e. the terrorist attacks). Besides the fact that this team prepared a very tight and appealing visiting programme, they proved very flexible, inventive and innovative, adapting themselves and their schedules according to the unexpectedness of the situation: even though there was a rather tense atmosphere, due to the events mentioned, they still managed to arrange for our group to meet one of the translators working for the European Commission, Roxana Rădulescu, and an interpreter they collaborate with, Ana Andronache.

In preparing for the visit, the students involved in this project have formulated a number of questions they intended to ask the hosts from the European Commission. Consequently, our sessions with the translators and the interpreter turned into a very dynamic activity, the students getting really involved in the discussions and in the subsequent practical demonstrations/activities. Below we have included a selection of these questions:

1. Why have you chosen this job?
2. Which are the requirements for such a job in Brussels? Which are the professional steps one needs to take in order to follow this path, i.e. becoming a translator/interpreter for the European Parliament?
3. What do you like most about your job? What do you like the least about it?
4. What does your job imply in terms of responsibilities, advantages, risks?
5. What does a typical work day look like for a translator/an interpreter at the European Parliament?
6. Which would be the suggestions you would make and the advice you would give to future translators/interpreters?
7. Is your job a stressful one?
8. What does a training period imply when it comes to the European Commission?
9. Which is the workflow? What about the deadline?
10. Which of the two types of interpreting – simultaneous or consecutive – is used more at the European Parliament?
11. What impact has technology had on your work as a translator/interpreter? Can you do without CAT tools?

[5]http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124805/MIRCEA_DIACONU_home.html
[6]http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/124805/MIRCEA_DIACONU_assistants.html

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12. Which are the technologies you use and find most helpful in rendering an accurate translation?
13. Do you consider that the translation phenomenon has changed throughout time? Can you mention a few of the losses and gains?
14. From your point of view, which would be the defining characteristics of a good translation?
15. How would you describe the translator status in Romania as compared to the one in Belgium?
16. Should a professional translate every material he is offered or should he choose? If he/she is selective, which would be the criteria he/she needs to take into account?
17. Which is the methodology used in the process of translating and interpreting in general and/or in your case?

As already mentioned, due to the unfortunate circumstances occurring at the time of our visit in Brussels, the carefully planned schedule had to be changed, hence instead of having the opportunity of meeting the team of translators at the European Parliament and seeing them at work, the students got in touch with Roxana Rădulescu, a translator working for the European Parliament. Together with her husband, a free-lancer fascinated with words and culture, she welcomed us in her home and presented her material to us. This was a very useful and thorough 5-hour session during which she talked about the stages of the translation process within the European Parliament, the teamwork they conduct, the persons involved and their responsibilities (the project manager, two translators per document, a reviewer, the terminologists – the translators' "life vest", quality control), all working hand in hand to provide highly professional translation. Other aspects that she covered were the copyright rules and issues, professional ethics, internship and traineeship, the translator's 'added value' that would offer them some advantages when it comes to the market requirements and the competition. She then got the students involved in a practical activity, showing them the way she translates by using CAT tools, IATE database, Eur-Lex, Quest Metasearch, SDL Trados and the kind. The activity ended with a question and answer session.

On the second day of our stay in Brussels, we met Ana Andronache, conference interpreter and translator. Our session with her focused on interpreting alone as we had already covered the translation part the previous day. The discussion proved productive as well, the students getting the opportunity to learn new strategies of coping with the difficulties that are inherent in interpreting, be it consecutive or simultaneous. She too insisted on the importance of 'added value' that would help the students as future translators and/or interpreters in getting the job they want and emphasised the fact that a good translator/interpreter never ceases to learn, to improve.

What is more, in order to compensate for the missed opportunity of being part of the translation process as it unfolds in the European Parliament, our hosts in Brussels sent us the material they had prepared for us and also suggested another activity that

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would take place on our arrival back home. Hence, our group and all the students interested in the topic were invited to attend a Skype session, moderated by one of the translators from the General Secretary of the Council of the European Union, Translation Unit in Romanian, Mrs. Dona Ursu. Her presentation focused on interpreting for the European Parliament, detailing the activities and challenges they deal with.

The material prepared by our hosts included aspects related to the main translation services performed within the European Institutions, the evolution of the linguistic service of the 24 linguistic units from 1957 till 2013, the documents that are translated from any necessary language into Romanian: legislation documents (regulations, directives, decisions), conclusions of the European Council (summit), web documents (EU Council website), reports, speeches, official statements, agendas, minutes, official correspondence, informative materials (brochures, posters). Another important subject referred to quality control, the students being given information on the following steps:

- coordination of quality assurance activities
- monitoring the individual quality
- coordination of the terminology team which consists of: translators, terminologists and assistants, each of them having a pre-established role.

The translators are in charge of the translation, validation and revision of a text that implies terminological research as well. The team of terminologists[7] was also a subject of the presentation, as it plays an important role in the entire process of translation and interpretation (we found out about the ROTA terminologists, project terminologists). Last, but not least, the assistants are the ones who prepare the documents that need translation and manage the completion and recording of the files.

An important issue that was brought to our attention regarded the specificity of the translation activity as performed within the Romanian Translation Unit from the General Secretary of the Council of the European Union: the translation activity benefits from terminological and stylistic uniformity, since the texts translated must be in accordance with the EU documents and follow the interinstitutional regulations. Quality of the translation activity is another important prerogative that needs to be met, together with promptness, flexibility, availability and confidentiality of the documents handled.

One of the most attention-grabbing aspects discussed was the one regarding the workflow within the translation process. According to the information presented to us, this process follows a definite and carefully-set batch of sequences, starting with the central coordination, individual flow, preparation of the tools, translation memories and databases, translation A and B, validation A, final version, and recording; in the case of legislative documents, the final version is also checked by the experts in the field.

Last, but surely not least, the working tools used by the translators and interpreters within the Translation Unit arouse great interest. The working tools comprise the SDL

[7]Since "Terminology is an integral, essential part of the translation product", http://eaft-aet.net/fileadmin/files/SOMMET_2006/Katelijn_Serlet_.pdf

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Trados Studio 2014[8], machine translation and internal translation memories, as well as public database (some of which Roxana Rădulescu also mentioned in her presentation): Eur-Lex ( ), IATE (http://iate.europa.eu), internal database (Euramis, CARS, ELISE), search engines (Quest, DocFinder), patterns of documents, the interinstitutional guide, Romanian legislation consulting programme (LexNet).

All in all, this horizon-broadening experience of being invited to the European Parliament helped the students in understanding better the translator status, the challenges that are inherent in the process of translation and interpreting, at the same time learning new methods and strategies of dealing with these challenges.

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"Each experience is different, and each experience has something that makes it unforgettable. Our visit to Brussels makes no exception. What began as a visit to the European Parliament, turned into an unforgettable experience without even visiting the European Parliament. Still, despite this, we had a fantastic time in Brussels. I learned a lot of things about the job of a translator, and about what he or she is supposed to do for the European Parliament and for The European Council. We had the chance to see how they work in different computer programs, specialized in translations, and to learn about the requirements and conditions necessary to conduct activities as a translator inside the European Institutions. All in all, it was an amazing opportunity and experience, simply because being in the heart of the 'capital of Europe', visiting international organizations and communicating with people working there, shows us that Romanian students can start a career as translators and interpreters for The European Union Institutions." (Claudia POP, AAS I)

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"Our experience in Brussels started from an idea and ended up in an experience that will remain, for sure, in our memory for the rest of our lives! A thing that impressed me was the fact that we were selected to go based on the grades obtained at a contest, without knowing the goal, meaning that the ones that had this opportunity really deserved it. This simple selection gave us an important lesson for life, I believe, that everything we do can have positive consequences and that we have to give the best at every contest that we attend. [...] Certainly, because of the events from Brussels in that period of time, we did not see the Parliament from the inside, but we talked directly with a translator and this gave us the opportunity to find everything we wanted related to the life that we can have, as future translators. Roxana Rădulescu was there to answer all of our questions and she explained to us things that we couldn't have known otherwise.

This experience was, for us, a 'once-in-a-lifetime' opportunity and, regardless the terrorist attacks, we fulfilled our goal there: finding out more about what a translator's job means. Our university may not be as well-known as the one in Cluj-Napoca, for instance, but it surely gave us the same or even more opportunities and information that we need in our life as translators." (Ioana BERȚA, LMA III)

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"The visit to Brussels was one of the best trips of my life, shortly said. It had a big problem, though. It was waaay too short ☹. We started having fun from day one and the "business meetings" were definitely a part of it. The best meeting was the one where we met Mr. Mircea Diaconu and we learned a lot about his life and career that otherwise we never would have guessed. His assistants were also great with us and tried to make the most out of this, I repeat, very short trip. In spite of the circumstances which, by the way, contributed a lot to our level of adrenalin, the trip reached its target and the other meetings with translators and an interpreter were of great help. I believe that if things turned out the way they were supposed to according to

[8] http://www.sdl.com/cxc/language/translation-productivity/trados-studio/

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the plans from home, the trip would still not have been as amazing and story-like as it is. I thank everyone that took a part in the planning of this trip!" (Cynthia Gligor, LMA III)

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"Our visit to Brussels was amazing. [...] As for the business part, even if our initial plans had to be changed, we still had the chance to talk with a translator and an interpreter who presented us some tips in becoming a good translator/interpreter and from which I have learnt a lot of things. Also, we were very lucky to meet a great personality, Mr. Mircea Diaconu and two of his great assistants.
All in all, I think that it was an unforgettable visit with many accomplishments. And now I can say that I would repeat this experience anytime, but in the same formula because I really think that this trip brought us closer and helped us know each other better. In the end, I don't have enough words to thank our teachers for this great opportunity, but I want them to know that they succeeded in making some students very happy." (Diana Buzea, LMAIII)

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