MARKETING TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION SERVICES. THE CASE OF LOCAL PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract: Within today's European context, research in the humanities with a view to supporting community life and facilitating intercultural communication in the public space has become a necessity. Of special interest to translation studies, for instance, is the game of situational linguistic interaction mediated by translators/ interpreters that visitors to a foreign country enter whenever in need of medical care, seeking justice in a court of law, applying for a university study programme or gathering travel data. Along these lines, the present paper looks into the marketing strategies adopted by local public institutions to inform on the procedures followed so as to allow efficient communication with and quality services for the English speaking foreign citizens they come in contact with. Under focus is the particular case of Galati.

Keywords: translation, interpretation, intercultural communication, public institution.

1. Framing context

Accepted or challenged, the notion of globalisation is central to contemporary narratives on the current state of affairs and the phenomenon impacts on the way in which we conduct our daily lives. "A complex, interconnected but partly autonomous set of processes affecting many dimensions of social life […], which constitute changes in the spatial organization of social activity and interaction, social relations and relations of power" (Fairclough 2006: 163), globalisation is also observable at the level of cross-cultural social communication and language use, where it enforces new standards and conventions.

Intercultural communication in European countries like Romania, which are "part of a supranational administration", has not only intensified, but "is becoming more pressing for practical reasons" (Katan 2004: 271) dictated by the emerging global society. At the heart of the social network and under the influence of its various needs, forces and pressures, the translator/ interpreter plays an important role in supporting community life, improving communication and building a cultural image which then spans frontiers of time and space. Unfortunately, however, the myth according to which translating and interpreting are unimportant or secondary is still very much operative, legitimated globally by official guidelines and documents, and reinforced locally by the misconception that interaction in a foreign language requires no expertise or professional training.

Eurostat's *Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community*, commonly referred to as NACE (acronym derived from its name in French: *Nomenclature statistique des activités économiques dans la Communauté européenne*), which regulates professions and occupations recognised throughout the European Union, and which is correlated to the United Nations' *International Standard Industrial Classification of All Economic Activities* (ISIC), includes a rubric on language services, but does not do justice to associated professions.

Initially without legal authority (when published as *General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities* in 1970), the document is now part of EU legislation (EEC Council Regulation No 3037/90 of 9 October 1990, amended by EEC Commission Regulation No 761/93 of 24 March 1993).

In its issue of 1993/ 1996, Nace Rev 1 (http://datalib.chass.utoronto.ca/other/E0032_en.pdf), one finds:

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74. Other business activities
74.8 Miscellaneous business activities
74.83 ***Secretarial and translation activities*** (my emphasis)
This class includes:

- stenographic and mailing activities:
  - typing
  - other secretarial activities such as transcribing from tapes or discs
  - copying, blue printing, multigraphing and similar activities
  - envelope addressing, stuffing, sealing and mailing, mailing list compilation, etc.,

including for advertising material

- ***translation and interpretation*** (my emphasis)
  This class also includes:
  -proofreading

In its latest version, Nace Rev 2, (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_OFFPUB/KS-RA-07-015/EN/KS-RA-07-015-EN.PDF), published in 2008, the entry is simplified to:

74 Other professional, scientific and technical activities
This division includes the provision of professional scientific and technical services […]
74.3 ***Translation and interpretation activities*** (my emphasis)
74.30 ***Translation and interpretation activities*** (my emphasis)

As may be observed, the modifications, although not explicit any longer, reflect a significant shift in attitude or perspective, with the general class (formerly associated with business) being promoted to professional, scientific and technical activities, and with translation being separated from secretarial tasks, mentioned in connection with interpretation and setting the norm both for the category and the subcategory of professions. This shows that steps have been taken in this respect, translators and interpreters gradually being recognised as occupying a forefront position on the contemporary stage, where standards cannot be lowered and where non-adaptation to growing requirements and demands is inconceivable (despite the fact that bad translations/ interpretations are still turned a blind eye to, and that the specific functions and tasks of translators/ interpreters still remain somewhat shadowy).

Nevertheless, people continue to perceive translators condescendingly, as individuals who engage in text-based copying, as secretaries at best. As for interpreters, not only are they not distinguished from translators, their services are often perceived as redundant.

In the particular case of Romania, where translation and interpretation from and into Romanian as a minority language has become a quotidian necessity in the context of the European Union (following the country's integration in 2007), inertia towards these activities paradoxically still governs popular belief. With English, specifically, the situation described is amplified and pushed out of proportion. English – which, after the historical landmark of 1989, is taught in the majority (if not all) of Romanian schools, colleges and universities, to which Romanians are exposed constantly through the numerous television channels, programs and films broadcasted in the country, and which is a requirement for occupying more and more positions in various fields – is theoretically spoken by almost everyone under the age of forty. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to persuade people

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that conversational ease is not enough and that specialised skills are needed in social interaction, just as they are a prerequisite for academic study and research.

As a result, instead of employing specialists in the field, many private companies and public bodies manage translation and interpretation activities with limited or inadequate personnel, which might explain why they do little to market them.

2. Case studies

The examples chosen to support this thesis are restricted to the representative public institutions in Galati, Romania – The Town Hall, The Inspectorate of Police, The Tribunal, The Emergency Hospital, The University – and their strategies of advertising linguistic services. In the context of globalisation, primarily "driven by the internet-based infrastructure", which in turn changes "both the nature of communication that becomes subject to translation, and the mechanism by which given communication is transmitted, processed and stored" (O'Hagan and Ashworth 2002: 1), the emphasis is laid on the respective websites.

2.1. The Town Hall

The web portal of the Galati Town Hall (http://www.primaria.galati.ro/portal/index.php) is only in Romanian. Whether one might be interested in details about the town's history and geography, in obtaining a certificate or authorisation, in paying a series of taxes, in buying or leasing a property etc., one would have to deduce that "Relatii cu publicul" means "Public relations", then open the page in question, maybe understand the meaning of "Program audiente" ["Appointments schedule"], "Program cu publicul" ["Open to the public"], "Telefoane utile" ["Useful telephone numbers"] out of the twenty-two entries listed, go to the institution or make a phone call hoping that someone speaks English there. Moreover, there is no clear-cut reference to foreign citizens and the services provided for them on the institution's website.

2.2. The Inspectorate of Police

The local Inspectorate of Police also electronically disseminates all the related information in Romanian (http://gl.politiaromana.ro/). There are, however, specific entries dedicated to foreigners, under "Informatii utile" ["Useful information"]: "Formulare – Serviciul pentru Straini" ["Forms – Department for Foreign Citizens"], with two subsections – "Cetateni UE/SEE" ["EU/European Economic Area citizens"]; "Cetateni state terte" ["Citizens of tertiary states"] – and subsequent links to "Prezentare cadru legal" ["Presentation legal frame"], "Acte, documente si taxe" ["Certificates, documents and taxes"], "Informatii utile" ["Useful information"], "Legislatie" ["Legislation"] in connection with the former and, respectively, "Legislatie" ["Legislation"], "Acte si documente eliberate" [Certificates and documents issued"], "Indepartarea strainilor" ["Removal of foreign citizens"], "Informatii utile" ["Useful information"], "Tolerarea ramanerii pe teritoriul Romaniei" [Tolerating stay on Romanian territory"], "Anexa – Taxe" [Annex – Taxes"] in connection with the latter.

2.3. The Tribunal

Another example of a local public institution's site with information delivered one hundred per cent in Romanian is that of The Tribunal (http://portal.just.ro/233/SitePages/prezentare.aspx). Nevertheless, if one uses the search box and introduces the word "traducator" ["translator"], one finds, among numerous other documents related to the act of translation/ interpretation, "Decision No. 387 of 22 September 2005 on Law Court Regulations" (in Romanian: "Hotarare Nr. 387 din 22 septembrie 2005 pentru aprobarea Regulamentului de ordine interioara al instantelor judecatoresti") where Article 50 (3) refers to the fact that chief registrars should have an accurate inventory of authorised translators and interpreters, and Article 110 (1) mentions

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that translators and interpreters have access to council chambers together with lawyers, witnesses and experts.

If the reference to authorised translators and interpreters is retained, one can search the internet further: to find the actual list published by the Ministry of Justice, organised alphabetically by name, geographical location and language, together with authorisation series and telephone numbers (http://www.just.ro/MinisterulJusti%C8%9Biei/Listapersoanelorautorizate/Interpretisitraducatoriautorizati/tabid/129/Default.aspx); to access the official site of UNTAR (Uniunea Nationala a Traducatorilor Autorizati din Romania) [The National Union of Authorised Translators in Romania], http://www.untar.ro/, which connects to associated laws and regulations, includes a link of its own to the list mentioned, informs on how to obtain an authorisation, gives details about signing contracts for translation and interpretation services, even offers information on the fees due to these experts if payment is made by public institutions (Order 772/05.03.2009, signed by the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Finances).

Practically, the only authorisation for community translation and interpretation services which is valid in Romania is the one issued by the Ministry of Justice, allowing specialists to work for the following public bodies: The Superior Council of Magistracy, The Ministry of Justice, The Prosecutor's Office – The High Court of Cassation and Justice, The National Anticorruption Directorate, prosecution agencies, courts of law, public notaries' offices, lawyers and officers of the court. Nonetheless, for payment to be received, the authorisation in itself is not enough. Its owner has to register with the Ministry of Finance and obtain certification to function as an Authorised Physical Person (and have a Bachelor's Degree in Philology – for the particular modern language used in the act of translation/ interpretation).

2.4. The Emergency Hospital

"St. Andrew's" Emergency Hospital in Galati has a quite complex website (http://www.spitalulurgentagalati.ro/), with details on the various types of health services provided and activities carried out. Once again, though, they are all in Romanian, with no possibility of translation for the benefit of the wider, international public. If the information on "Legislatie" ["Legislation"], "Cercetare" ["Research"], "Organigrama" ["Organigram"], "Buget venituri si cheltuieli" ["Revenue and expenditure budget"] etc. is not vital to a patient, that on "Sectii" ["Departments"], "Ambulatoriu" ["Ambulatory"], "Personal medical" ["Medical staff"], "Servicii medicale" ["Medical services"] is. The highlighted logo on the first page (with emergency phone numbers attached) and the "Contact" button are the only links to immediate health care assistance.

2.5. The University

The website of "Dunarea de Jos" University of Galati (http://www.ugal.ro/) is currently undergoing change. For the time being, only some sections, visible on the site map, have corresponding full English versions: "Prezentare" ["Presentation"], "Admitere" ["Admission"], International" ["International"], "Educatie" ["Education"], "Studenti" ["Students"], "Erasmus" ["Erasmus"]. Under "Organigrama" ["Organigram"], there is "Serviciul relatii international si comunicare" [International Relations and Communication Department"], whose "Biroul de Relatii Internationale" ["International Relations Office"] shows that the institution of higher education has specialised personnel in charge of liaising with foreign academics, students and research partners. Furthermore, information is given in English by individual faculties and departments on particular topics like international study programmes, research projects, mobilities, conferences, workshops or colloquia.

The findings reflect that the only actual policies regarding translation and interpretation services offered by public institutions may be found with the Tribunal and the

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Inspectorate of Police, the former being marketed as such, although indirectly, while the latter implements them mostly in connection with activities related to the Ministry of Justice. The University provides most of the information useful to non-natives in English, taking steps to construct a complex bilingual internet portal to replace the rather out-dated existing one, internationalising both its activities and its public image, with the help of competent translators, interpreters and academics specialising in the field. The Town Hall and the Emergency Hospital lag behind in as far as linguistic assistance is concerned, its marketing being absent presumably because translation and/ or interpretation is not officially provided.

As for the translators/ interpreters training and job prerequisites, with the exception of the Tribunal (and possibly the Inspectorate of Police), there are no norms set or demands made relating to study degrees, diplomas, certificates or authorisations. For the most part, university graduates having specialised in modern languages are employed to perform these tasks, but there are also situations in which he/ she whom people perceive as a relatively fluent speaker of a language may very well be asked to mediate interculturally, with unseen risks assumed.

The five websites considered, like all globalising media products, may easily "influence our opinions and our social knowledge" (Bonvillain 2003: 398). By denying, to varying degrees, the public space its intercultural dimension and by not rendering translators and interpreters visible, they have the potential of reinforcing the myth of the secondariness of translator/ interpreter status and of lowering the latter's occupational prestige.

3. Concluding remarks

To open up the European space to everyone and use translation/ interpretation as an efficient tool in situational linguistic interaction, the first reasonable thing to do is firstly to make such services available and secondly to market them appropriately, especially through the internet. The institutions most likely to be contacted by visitors to another country are public bodies like the ones referred to above. The flaws in their communicative endeavours make travel and living abroad cumbersome, even unsafe, which is why improvement is necessary.

Possible remedial actions might be, on the one hand, to acknowledge the importance of highly trained professionals in providing quality services for the community and to create specialised departments dealing with international visitors. Besides, "we shall have to educate societies and their decision makers, we shall have to convince them that in case they want to take part in the mainstream they will need flexible concepts. Language is not an exception. It is simply part of our world." (Lambert, in Gambier 1998: 30)

On the other hand, it might be mutually beneficent to adopt policies of good internet marketing practice specific to similar institutions elsewhere: to include a link or category exclusively for foreign citizens; to insert notices along the lines of 'If you need an authorised translation/ If you require an interpreter, please contact…'; to produce and post electronic leaflets, brochures describing the procedures to be followed if linguistic and cultural services are solicited.

Until that happens, however, feasible remains raising awareness as to the fact that we live in "an age of migrations, public service translators, public service interpreters" (Peter Newmark, in Anderman and Rogers 2003: 15), where social translation and interpretation are "centred on real people" and, as such, should take prevalence over any other type.

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