TRAPPED IN TRANSLATION: THE LOCAL TRANSLATOR AND THE GLOBAL COMMUNITY

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

Abstract: In a minority language speaking country like Romania, also a member of the supranational organization of the European Union, clear language policies are a necessity. Translation and interpreting services addressing people who travel to, set up businesses in or take up residence here have become commonplace. Nevertheless, their promotion remains problematic, as does the perception on the translator/ interpreter. In the meantime, people are trapped in translation, with more or less serious consequences in matters of health care, law and legislation, community rights or educational prospects. The paper focuses on local public bodies, the particular case chosen being that of representative institutions in Galati, Romania (The University, The General Hospital, The Inspectorate of Police), and presents the findings of the survey carried out, based on the data from the questionnaire administered to accredited personnel in the respective institutions.

Keywords: language, policy, translation, public body, community.

1. Introduction

Membership in a supranational organization like the EU involves a complex process of cohabitation, one of whose essential aspects is language. Placing an emphasis on intercultural communication, the executive body of the European Union, the European Commission, promotes multilingualism, language learning and teaching, linguistic diversity, language equality. Nonetheless, what was prefigured in 2000, following the difficulties encountered in the implementation of legislation and in the large variety of ensuing international exchanges – all supported by translation efforts – has implications even today: "Future accessions to the EU might require something more than fictive equality. […] the massive learning of lingua francas might be more appropriate than the training of new armies of translators." (Pym 2000: 9) The reference, however, was made to translators working for the EC in Brussels, mainly envisaged translation into minority languages and touched on the sensitive issue of "the symbolic values of new official languages becom[ing] harder to defend." (Pym 2000: 10)

To be retained are the core notions brought to attention: language and translation, which have generated disputes and have raised problems in the multicultural society of today. "These include the fact that language is the medium in which most social interaction takes place, the fact that most people can speak only one or several languages, the fact that learning new languages is very difficult for most adults, and the fact that translation is expensive, inconvenient, and always imperfect." (Patten 2001: 691- 692) For language and translation not to be disregarded and classed second rate in the bigger social, economic and political picture due to the difficulties identified and to the myth whereby "we are all competent in language use" (Kennedy 2011: 5), all these issues need to be signalled and a set of coherent policies implemented.

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

Although thoroughly analysing the aspects of language matters in terms of practice, beliefs and management, the literature in the field is surprisingly limited with regard to the normative aspects of language and translation policies. In the meantime, people are trapped in translation, with more or less serious consequences on health care, law and legislation, community rights or educational prospects. The example provided by Bernard Spolsky is illustrative in this respect: "A fifty-six-year-old Turkish woman was refused a heart transplant by clinics in Hanover on the grounds that her lack of German […] made the recovery process dangerous. The clinic defended the decision: the patient might not understand the doctors' orders, might take the wrong medicine and might not be able to get help if there were complications." (2003: 1) As long as language continues to be considered of little importance and no coordinated measures are taken, such cases will remain frequent and impact not only on societal interrelationships, but on human rights also.

And indeed this is generally the case. As Chris Kennedy resumes, "that language is not regarded as important as, for example, health is shown by the fact that I know of no Ministry of Language though governments generally have a Ministry of Health." (2011: 6) Of course, this is not to say that the values of language "depend exclusively, or even necessarily, on any official or legal status conferred by a state through its executive, legislative or judicial branches" (Ricento 2006: 5), but that the centrality of language in the functioning of the smaller and larger community is acknowledged, and support for linguistic interaction is provided at all levels and in all domains.

2. Case study

In Romania, a minority language speaking country, also a member of the European Union, language policies are in the making. Enacted are norms related to the national language, Romanian. As regards foreign languages, the few existing frames are operative in the educational system (e.g.: Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment). Language services, including translation and interpreting, are neither clearly regulated nor consistently organised, despite the fact that they are frequently requested by and offered to people who travel to, set up businesses in or take up residence in Romania. The case study chosen is that of three local public bodies in Galati, Romania (The University, The General Hospital, The Inspectorate of Police). Based on a questionnaire devised to foreground the status of the local translator mediating for the global community, their representatives have participated in a survey whose findings are presented below.

The questionnaire includes twenty-four multiple choice entries and two extra requests for information. The respondents, whose identity is confidential, were selected following accreditation from DJUG, the official request formulated to the top administration of the respective institutions and the declaration regarding the protection of personal data presented in view of carrying out the research on the premises mentioned.

Structurally, the questionnaire starts from the obvious question of whether the institution provides/ requests translation/ interpreting services or not, and moves on to the more detailed aspects of each particular case. At the level of content, however, it groups topics under six main categories: languages used; types of services; selection and contracting; perception and evaluation; communication channels, websites; language strategy.

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

2.1. Language

Out of the three institutions surveyed only one (the University) seems to engage in intercultural communication via foreign languages, English and French being mentioned as the most frequently used, which is characteristic of the Romanian present day context. An additional comment is that these foreign languages are also used on various web pages created by smaller constitutive units like departments or research centres. The Police and the Hospital only make use of the mother tongue (Romanian) in workplace conversation and written documents. Where they are not already part of the overall situation, translation and interpreting are not excluded as a possibility, but remain a distant future requirement.

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
Translation/ Interpreting services are most frequently requested for	English;			
	French;			
	English and French;	√		
	other; please specify.		√	√
Communication with the public is achieved	in Romanian only;			√
	in Romanian and in English;		√	
	in more foreign languages besides Romanian;	√		
	other; please specify.			
The institution's webpage	includes information in Romanian and in several foreign languages;			
	includes information in Romanian and in English;			
	does not include information in foreign languages;		√	√
	other; please specify.	√		

2.2. Types of translation/ interpreting services

As results from the data collected, the University is the only one to offer its own translation and interpreting services. On the other hand, the Hospital is open to collaborating with external specialists in the field, but it mentions the fact that it has never received any requests in this respect. As for the Police, they do not offer such services, yet say that, if needed, in-house translation (probably from foreign languages into Romanian) is done by qualified personnel whose job description does not include translation. In sum, the answers indicate inertia with regard to the development and diversification of human resources, and limited preoccupation for addressing a wider, international public.

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
Does the institution offer translation services?	Yes. Its own services.	√		
	Yes. Through collaboration.		√	
	No.			√
	other; please specify.			
Does the institution offer interpreting	Yes. Its own services.	√		

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

services?	Yes. Through collaboration.		√	
	No.			√
	other; please specify.			
The translations offered are	recognised by the institution;	√		
	authorised, legalised, stamped through institution services;			
	authorised, legalised, stamped by the beneficiary;			
	other; please specify.		√	√
The translations requested are	achieved by an authorised translator, legalised by a public notary and super legalised with stamp by the competent court of law;			
	achieved by an authorised translator and legalised by a public notary;			
	achieved by an authorised translator;	√		
	other; please specify.		√	√
The interpreting achieved is, more often than not,	simultaneous;			
	consecutive;			
	simultaneous and consecutive;	√		
	other; please specify.		√	√

2.3. Selection and contracting

In the case of the University, the translators are qualified, authorised and part of the staff, their services being recognised without further authentication and/ or legalisation, guaranteed by the internal authorised translators' stamp. They are the specialists who also provide simultaneous and consecutive interpreting – not requested from the Hospital, not offered by the Police. For various research projects developed at faculty level, the University states that it may occasionally ask that translation and interpreting services, based on agreements, are offered by external collaborators selected through contacting specialised agencies/ translation companies. The Hospital, too, can draw up fixed-term contracts with authorised external specialists, if need be. Emerging however is the manifest awareness that translation and interpreting enterprises should be carried out by highly qualified personnel, and that official papers have to be signed in view of assuming responsibility for quality services and faithfulness to the original.

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
The institution's translation services are provided by	qualified personnel;	√		
	unqualified personnel, whose job description includes translation;			
	any employee who comes in contact with foreign citizens;			
	other; please specify.		√	√
The institution's interpreting services are provided by	qualified personnel;	√		
	unqualified personnel, whose job description includes interpreting;			
	any employee who comes in contact with foreign citizens;			
	other; please specify.		√	√
The translation services offered by external collaborators	are based on permanent contracts;			
	are based on fixed-term contracts;		√	
	are occasional; based on agreements;	√		
	other; please specify.			√
The interpreting services offered by external collaborators	are based on permanent contracts;			
	are based on fixed-term contracts;		√	
	are occasional; based on agreements;	√		
	other; please specify.			√
The selection of translators/ interpreters in view of collaboration is achieved	through contacting specialised agencies/ translation companies;	√		
	through contacting authorised persons;		√	
	through recommendations from third parties;			
	other; please specify.			√

2.4. Perception and evaluation

The University acknowledges the fact that a good translator/ interpreter is recommended both by a BA/ MA/ PhD diploma in Philology and by his/ her performance in the field. Its specialists have been evaluated and there has been positive feedback from beneficiaries with regard to linguistic form and content, to spoken language fluency and to

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

meeting deadlines. The only other institution responding to perception and evaluation is the Hospital, for whom a higher education degree in Philology is recommendation enough.

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
A good translator/ interpreter is recommended by	a BA/ MA/ PhD diploma in Philology;	√	√	
	a certificate issued by the Ministry of Justice;			
	his/ her performance in the field of translation/ interpreting;	√		
	other; please specify.			√
Has there been feedback on translation/ interpreting services?	There has been positive feedback from beneficiaries.	√		
	There has been negative feedback from beneficiaries.			
	There has been no feedback.			
	other; please specify.		√	√
The positive/ negative feedback mostly reflected	linguistic form and content;	√		
	spoken language fluency;	√		
	meeting deadlines;	√		
	other; please specify.		√	√

2.5. Communication channels. Websites

Communication in all three institutions is mainly achieved through the respective web pages. The Police also carry information across through a spokesperson, in the written press and on television. The University indicates the fact that informative reports are occasionally released in the media, without special authorization to this end, by people who represent the interests of the institution, like members of the rector's office or of the larger administrative board, research project managers etc. With regard to the content and design of the main web pages in question, what comes out is that: no references whatsoever to translation and interpreting services are made by any of the public bodies interrogated, not even by the University, which actually provides them; they only display informative/ promotion texts, the majority of which are in Romanian, with no translation offered. Consequently, the question on whether subtitling, dubbing or voice-over is used to facilitate intercultural communication is redundant.

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
Communication with the public is mostly achieved	through the institution's webpage;	√	√	√
	through the institution's spokesperson – in the written press;			√

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

	through the institution's spokesperson – on TV;			√
	other; please specify.	√		
The institution's webpage	mentions the translation/ interpreting services offered;			
	gives details on the translation/ interpreting services offered;			
	does not mention the translation/ interpreting services offered;	√	√	
	other; please specify.			√
The institution's webpage	includes text only;	√	√	√
	also includes subtitled video material;			
	also includes audio-video material with subtitles/ dubbing/ voice-over provided);			
	other; please specify.			

2.6. Language strategy

The entries on the language strategy of the three institutions reveal the most interesting aspects of the discussion. The Hospital and the Police seem to agree that they have a language strategy. That of the former was implemented after Romania's joining the EU and is still being reformulated. That of the latter is adopted from the regulations issued by the respective governing authority/ ministry and has remained unchanged for decades. The University recognises the importance of a language strategy, declaring that one has been in place and observed consistently at institutional level ever since 2007. Nevertheless, it is believed to lack clear formulation as indeed does Romania's language strategy[1], which at the moment is considered to be indistinct and disregarded by national authorities.

Knowledge of a foreign language is either not compulsory for members of staff or not necessarily a selection criterion. However, with the exception of the Police (where specialised structures are in charge of international communication), foreign languages are frequently used in communicating with patients (the medical corps), in the collaboration with similar institutions abroad and in activities of disseminating research findings.

Moreover, two of the institutions – the Police and the University – offer beginner/ refresher courses and fund mobilities or international exchange schemes. The University also periodically organises training programmes with a focus on language use and communication skills for its entire teaching and administrative staff.

[1] Only two laws have been issued, both on Romanian: Law 500/ 2004 – on using the Romanian language in public places, relations and institutions (Romanian Parliament, 2014); and Law 183/ 2006 – on using the standardized 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).

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

Question/ Item	Answer	U	H	P
The language strategy of the institution	was formulated after joining the EU;		√	
	was changed after joining the EU;			
	was not changed after joining the EU;			√
	other; please specify.	√		
The language strategy of the institution	is adopted from the regulations issued by the respective governing authority/ ministry;			√
	is mentioned in the institution's own regulations;			
	its formulation is under way;	√	√	
	other; please specify.			
What is the status of foreign languages on employment in the institution?	Knowledge of a foreign language is compulsory.			
	Knowledge of a foreign language is not compulsory.		√	√
	Knowledge of a foreign language is not a selection criterion.	√		
	other; please specify.			
What is the status of foreign languages within the institution?	Beginner/ Refresher courses are offered.	√		√
	Training programmes are organised.	√		
	There are mobilities, international exchange schemes.	√		√
	other; please specify.		√	
The personnel use foreign languages to	communicate and collaborate with similar institutions abroad;	√	√	
	carry out joint projects/ partnerships/ research with similar institutions abroad;	√	√	
	deliver papers/ presentations at international conferences, symposiums, workshops;	√	√	
	other; please specify.		√	√

2.7. Supplementary information

The respondents contacted were asked to provide supplementary information, under the form of examples or of samples, with reference to documents frequently translated and to situations in which translation/ interpreting from/ into English are necessary. The Hospital simply put down "not the case". The Police only mentioned petitions (rarely). The examples from the University included: projects, contracts, collaboration on scientific articles, financial

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

guides; international visits, conferences, workshops, institutional evaluations. No samples were given.

3. Conclusion

The findings of the survey carried out, based on the data from the questionnaire administered to accredited personnel in the three representative local public institutions from Galati, Romania – The University, The General Hospital, The Inspectorate of Police – show that: in practice, public bodies mostly (sometimes only) communicate locally, via the minority language, although in theory they are at the service of an international public; their language strategies are either inexistent or in the making; the translator/ interpreter's status is sooner associated with secretarial work than with training and expertise in the field of intercultural mediation.

For local inertia to be overcome and the interests of the global community to be served, the solution seems to be that of cooperation between researchers and political practitioners (Kennedy 2011), between the academia and the public sector, so that all learn from what is happening "at the top end of the […] translation market, where the very term 'translation' is being challenged by more generalized figures of the 'intercultural management assistant', the 'language service provider', the 'localizer', or more benignly, the 'multi-tasking translator'." (Pym 2000: 11) Although admittedly a political process (Kaplan and Baldauf 2007), and therefore perceived as an imposed structure of authority, the formulation of macro and micro language policies imposes itself in this context and under these circumstances as a necessity of social and development planning for the long term.

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 [25 November 2014]

European Commission (2014) *Supporting Language Diversity in Europe* available from http://ec.europa.eu/languages/index_en.htm [25 November 2014]

Kaplan, R.; Baldauf, R. (2007) 'Language policy spread: Learning from Health and Social Policy Models'. *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 31(2), 107-129

Kennedy, C. (2011) 'Challenges for language policy, language and development', in Coleman, H. (ed) *Dreams and Realities: Developing Countries and the English Language. Policy Planning and Implementation*, London: British Council, 2-15(15)

Parlamentul României (2004) *Legea 500/ 2004 – privind folosirea limbii române în locuri şi relaţii publice* available from http://lege5.ro/en/Gratuit/gu3dsnbt/legea-nr-500-2004-privind-folosirea-limbii-romane-in-locuri-relatii-si-institutii-publice [25 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-

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)

standardizate-a-setului-de-caractere-in-documentele-in-forma-electronica [25 November 2014]
Patten, A. (2001) 'Political Theory and Language Policy'. *Political Theory*, 29(5), New York: Sage Publications, 691-715
Pym, A., (2000) 'The European Union and its Future Languages. Questions for Language Policies and Translation Theories'. *Across Languages and Cultures*, 1(1), Budapest: Academiai Kiado, 1-17(17)
Ricento, T. (ed) (2006) *An Introduction to Language Policy: Theory and Method*, Oxford: Blackwell
Spolsky, B. (2003) *Language Policy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

BDD-V649 © 2014 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.108 (2026-11-18 00:49:27 UTC)