

Translation services in public institutions. The case of Galaţi

Alexandru PRAISLER¹

The establishment and further enlargement of the EU have brought about the adoption of a common legislative frame, and have facilitated the free circulation of its citizens across the continent. Following Romania's becoming a member state, public institutions have had to address the wider community and to readjust the existing procedures in accord with the emerging context. Although essential to the process of internationalization, translation has remained in the background, with little or no attention and credit, hence with no appropriate financing and no coherent development policy. As for interrogating the linguistic quality and cultural specificity of the translated text, it stays a distant goal outside the scholarly debate in translation studies. The paper presents a case study based on a questionnaire applied in eight public institutions from Galati, whose profiles are education, culture, health, administration, law and law enforcement. Its goal is, on the one hand, to identify good practices and current flaws, and, on the other hand, to advance solutions for dealing with the problems encountered in social communication.

Keywords: *translation, interpreting, social communication, language policy*

1. Introduction

Within the broader frame of the present-day globalisation / internationalisation, the battle of translating from minority languages into majority ones and vice versa involves a series of strategies which are not restricted to linguistic aspects. The cultural dimension, the economic and social components, as well as the political one, play essential roles in mediating between various spaces. This apparently empowers translators, but, as has been pointed out,

¹ "Dunărea de Jos" University of Galaţi, Romania, alexandru.praisler@ugal.ro

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)

Conversely, major languages are under the pressure exercised by frequent localisation efforts aimed at adaptation to specific locales, targeted in view of various kinds of 'colonisation', with the economic type holding first place – clearly, though not explicitly, justified in terms of profitability. Contributing to this slow process of (dis)integration are translators, once again.

Participating in the linguistic mediation between minorities and majorities, and having to “treat 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.” (Hatim and Mason 1990, 3), translators are also confronted with the challenge of opting for “translation-as-diversification” rather than that of “translation-as-assimilation” (Cronin 1998, 148). The task is difficult, especially in the case of social translation, whose supplementary requirements (the large size and narrow time constraints of the workload, the immediate impact of the translation on personal lives, the varying provisions of national / international legislations in force) come with associated burdens.

2. Case study

The bodies contacted in view of carrying out the present study were eight public institutions from Galați, whose profiles are education, culture, health, administration, law and law enforcement: “Dunărea de Jos” University; “Sf. Andrei” Hospital; The Inspectorate of Police; The Tribunal (The Court of Law; The Court of Appeal); The Town Hall; The Town Council; “V. A. Urechia” Library. The questionnaire applied in all these institutions includes twenty-five multiple choice entries and two requests for extra information, on: *languages used; types of translation / interpreting services; selection and contracting; perception and evaluation; communication channels, websites; language strategy.*

2.1. Findings

With reference to the *languages used*, the responses show that English and/or French are usually the languages for which translation / interpreting services are requested, but other languages are also involved in translating for hospital patients and for people dealing with the police, the tribunal or the municipality. Communication with the public is mainly achieved in Romanian, with three exceptions – the hospital, the library, the university – who also use English or more foreign languages. As for the institutions' websites, they are predominantly in Romanian, with the university declaring the use of more languages and the library saying that its site includes English also. It follows that Romanian stays the predominant language of communication in public institutions, and English emerges as the number one foreign language used, although the subsequent data show that it is sooner 'abused'.

In as far as *types of translation / interpreting services* are concerned, two of the eight institutions offer own translation services (university and town council), two have collaboration contracts in place (hospital, town council), and five do not offer any such services at all (police, court of law, court of appeal, town hall, library). Interpreting is only offered internally by the university, through contracts with external bodies by the hospital, while everyone else does not have interpreting services on offer. The translations provided are recognised by the university, court of law, town council, library, or authorised, legalised, stamped by the beneficiary (at the court of appeal). The translations requested are achieved by an authorised translator and legalised by a public notary (court of law) and by an authorised translator (university, town hall). The interpreting achieved is, more often than not, consecutive with the town hall and the library, both simultaneous and consecutive with the university and the town hall, while all the other institutions declare that it is not the case to talk about interpreting. The worrying ideas which emerge from this section are that the potential international public is overlooked, and the translator / interpreter is mostly deemed unnecessary.

The aspects regarding *selection and contracting* may be summed up as follows: the institutions' translation and interpreting services are provided by qualified personnel (university, town hall, town council) or by any employee who comes in contact with foreign citizens (town hall); the translation and interpreting services offered by collaborators are based on fixed-term contracts (hospital, court of law, town council), or simply occasional / based on agreements (university, town hall); the selection of translators / interpreters in view of collaboration is achieved

through contacting specialised agencies / translation companies (university, town hall, town council), through contacting authorised persons (hospital, court of law) or through recommendations from third parties (court of law, library). The downsides identified here are: there are still public institutions who prefer to externalise translation / interpreting services or, worse, leave interpreting to whoever might happen to interact with a foreign citizen; there are no stated permanent contracts with translators / interpreters (although the university does have specialised personnel); and no official interviews / exams are mentioned for the selection of trained translators / interpreters (although, once again, the university does have such 'gate-keeping' procedures).

Concerning *perception and evaluation*, what results is that there has been positive feedback on translation / interpreting services from beneficiaries at the university and library, and that the court of law, the town hall and the city hall have received no feedback at all. The positive / negative feedback mostly reflected linguistic form and content (university, library), spoken language fluency (university, library), meeting deadlines (university). A good translator / interpreter is recommended by a BA / MA / PhD diploma in Philology (from the standpoint of the university, hospital, town hall, town council), a certificate issued by the Ministry of Justice (in the view of the court of law, town hall), his / her performance in the field of translation / interpreting (according to the university, court of law, town hall, town council, library). Worth outlining are, therefore, the following: the appreciation received by institutions recognised as having specialised professionals, the awareness that linguistic form, content and fluency matter (as well as punctuality and performance), and the agreement from half of the institutions surveyed that Philology studies are a must.

In relation to *communication channels, websites*, communication with the public is mostly achieved through the institution's webpage (university, hospital, police, town hall, town council), through the institution's spokesperson – in the written press (police, town council, library), through the institution's spokesperson – on TV (police, library). The institutions' webpages do not mention or give details on the translation / interpreting services offered (university, hospital, court of law, town hall, town council). The respective sites include text only (university, hospital, police, court of appeal, town hall), rarely featuring subtitled video material (town council). Hence, direct communication is missing from the agenda of public institutions, and no advertising whatsoever of their translation / interpreting services (where available) is made.

The *language strategy* of the institution was formulated after joining the EU (hospital, library), or was not changed after joining the EU (police, court of appeal, town council). It is adopted from the regulations issued by the respective governing authority / ministry (police, court of law), or its formulation is under way (university, hospital). In connection with the status of foreign languages on employment in the institution, the answers indicate that no institution considers knowledge of a foreign language compulsory on employment. The status of foreign languages within the institution is supported by beginner / refresher courses offered (university, police, court of law, court of appeal), by training programmes organised (university), by existing mobilities and international exchange schemes (university, police, town hall, town council, library). The personnel use foreign languages to communicate and collaborate with their counterparts abroad (university, hospital, court of appeal, town hall, town council, library), to carry out joint projects / partnerships / research with similar institutions abroad (university, hospital, town hall, town council, library), to deliver papers / presentations at international conferences, symposiums, workshops (university, hospital, town council, library). In short, the institutions which admit to (the necessity of) having a language strategy tend to preserve it under construction. Moreover, the general practice seems to be that of training staff to be conversant in foreign languages rather than set the knowledge of foreign languages as an entrance criterion, which is all the more paradoxical as, with the exception of the court of law, all speak of exchanges, collaborations, projects, research and/or partnerships with the international community.

2.2. Summary

All in all, the findings reveal that, even if foreign languages – English in particular – are declared as facilitating the communication with a global audience, local public institutions remain tributary to outmoded language policies, just as they remain bound to obsolete management plans and marketing strategies. Romanian, as a minority language, is not translated in view of diversification. Actually, it is not translated at all most of the time. And if it is true that the portals of public institutions in countries where dominant languages are spoken show no interest in speakers of other languages, it is also true that portals in minority languages deny access for all. Unfortunately, this is a losing battle, whereby free circulation and intercultural communication purposes are not, and will never be, well served.

Furthermore, what prevents cross-cultural awareness and understanding is the questionable quality of the language(s) used which, in turn, is dependent on the marginalisation of qualified translators and interpreters (mostly for reasons betraying prejudice towards how important specialists in the humanities are for the actual workings of society) and on the absence of regulated recruitment procedures and workload requirements for translators and interpreters in public institutions.

The random replacement of language professionals with members of staff who supposedly know English (see the rubric on 'languages known' in most CVs handed in at job interviews or for promotion purposes), the odd training organised for developing English language skills with everyone (elementary – mostly oriented towards newcomers – and fractured – in keeping with available funding), and, worst of all, the machine translation which is frequently resorted to in institutions, be it in communicating with the public or in the research published and international projects developed (as indicated by the numerous selections of the answer 'other' in the multiple choice items of the questionnaire) are the major flaws which have been identified and which call for the common efforts of scholars, specialists and practitioners in the field so as to advance solutions for curing public institutions of the illness of inadequate translation and interpreting.

2.3. Recommendations

As long as there are foreign citizens visiting or temporarily residing in Galați, Romania, the local public institutions should take into account the possibility of employing translators and interpreters with a background in Philology (a prerequisite appearing in the survey carried out) and make sure that translation / interpreting services are overtly advertised (which at present does not happen). The aforementioned may be recipients of internationalised university study programmes, inform themselves on the cultural heritage of the area, need urgent or specialised health care, ask for administrative services (in relation to real-estate, succession rights, assets, etc.), deal with the law enforcement system (receive fines, complain about offences, etc.), or resort to law courts to adjudicate various legal disputes.

Given this situation, the recommendations which can be made to the bodies surveyed – “Dunărea de Jos” University, “V. A. Urechia” Library, “Sf. Andrei” Hospital, The Town Hall, The Town Council, The Inspectorate of Police, The Tribunal

(The Court of Law, The Court of Appeal) – include implementable measures, practically dictated by the new world order already established.

The first is that of drawing up and disseminating a comprehensible language policy, starting from the existing national and EU legislation², which basically reinforces writing and editing standards in public places, relations and institutions in Romania, and mentions the official languages in use, together with the significance of multilingualism within the European Union.

The second is observing the documentation regulating the profession of translator and interpreter³, and the legislation on authorised translation and interpreting services⁴. Entry 2643 of COR (ISCO), *Traducători, interpreți și alți lingviști [Translators, interpreters and other linguists]*, defines this occupational class as being made up of people who “translate from a language into another and study the origin, evolution and structure of languages.” The subcategories of translators and interpreters, respectively, are presented in terms of general activities, work context, mandatory abilities, occupational interests, values and workplace demands, work style, and necessary background knowledge. Ranked 90% or more are values like interpreting the meaning of information for others, communication through contact with others, precision and accuracy, integrity, fulfilling obligations, attention to detail, detailed knowledge of mother tongue and foreign language (www.rubinian.com/cor6ocupatiadetalii.php?id=264306/264302). Clear rules on the authorisation and payment of translators and interpreters, as well as explicit stipulations for official document issuing in connection with translation and interpreting, are only provided for those working with law and law

² The two laws issued so far include norms regarding Romanian: Law 500/2004 – on using the Romanian language in public places, relations and institutions (<http://vetis.ro/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/11-L-500-Folosirea-limbii-rom%C3%A2ne.pdf>); and Law 183/2006 – on using the standardized codification of the set of characters in electronic documents (<http://www.legi-internet.ro/legislatie-itc/altele/lege-nr-183-din-16-mai-2006-privind-utilizarea-codificarii-standardizate-a-setului-de-caractere-in-documentele-in-forma-electronica.html>). Also, EU general language policies have already been formulated. (https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-commission/service-standards-and-principles/use-languages_en).

³ COR (Codul Ocupațiilor din România, 2018) (www.rubinian.com/cor_5_ocupatia.php?id=2643) is the equivalent of ISCO (International Standard Classification of Occupations, 2008), which organises the information on labour and jobs.

⁴ Law 178/1997 (http://www.dreptonline.ro/legislatie/legea_traducatori_min.php); Law 76/2016 (<https://lege5.ro/Gratuit/geydmnzqgu4q/legea-nr-76-2016-privind-modificarea-si-completarea-legii-nr-178-1997-pentru-autorizarea-si-plata-interpretilor-si-traducatorilor-folositi-de-consiliul-superior-al-magistraturii-de-ministerul-justitiei>); Order of the Minister of Justice no. 2333/2013 on approving the Regulations for applying Law 36/1995 on public notaries and notary activities (<http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliiDocument/157700>)

enforcement agencies, and with notary offices, under the control of the Ministry of Justice.

The third is the collaboration with specialised, national associations of translators and interpreters⁵. The UNTAR website displays all the information related to the nationally regulated translation and interpreting process (from applicable laws and orders, the list of authorised translators and interpreters, rights and obligations, procedures for obtaining authorisation, etc.) and invites participation to meet its strategic goals (see Article 3 of the UNTAR statute).

Last, but not least, is the signing of agreements and partnerships with universities which offer undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes like Language and Literature, Applied Modern Languages, Translation Studies, etc., with the possibility for public institutions to grant scholarships or ensure employment on graduation.

3. Conclusions

In today's world, the translation market has grown exponentially and, at its top end, "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). These very fashionable labels, though seemingly targeted at rebranding a 'humble' profession, do nothing to actually promote qualitative translation.

In theory, its status is extremely important and challenging, with scholars constantly scrutinising its content value and interrogating its overall effects, simultaneously searching for the appropriate methods and techniques to be employed and for the necessary training to be enacted.

In practice, translation services are still regarded as a second rate, secretarial activity which is therefore incoherently legislated and inappropriately financed. On the social stage, it seems that the focus is no longer on the key actors of the mediation (the translator, the translation and the audience), having shifted to third party agents (employers, decision-makers, actual beneficiaries). Under the

⁵ UNTAR (Uniunea Națională a Traducătorilor Autorizați din România [Romanian National Union of Authorised Translators]) is the only such association functioning in Romania; its status is that of an NGO. It only promotes and supports the activity of translators/interpreters authorised by the Ministry of Justice. (<http://www.traduceri-notariale.ro/>)

circumstances, professional translators are not considered, the translation services required are few and far between, while the translation services received frequently lack in linguistic quality and cultural specificity – a half measure that audiences have come to accept.

Subsequently, if there is no real cooperation between researchers and politicians, and if planning is not followed by implementation (Kaplan and Baldauf 2007; Kennedy 2011), the solutions for dealing with the problems encountered in social communication via translation, advanced based on the case study presented above, will stay a distant goal outside the scholarly debate in translation studies.

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