THE TRIPLE ASSIGNMENT OF COLLEGES FOR TRANSLATORS AND INTERPRETERS IN FLANDERS

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0. INTRODUCTION

The chairman of these *Fifth Encuentros Complutenses en torno a la traducción*, Dr Miguel Ángel Vega Cernuda, has asked me to deal with programmes for translator and interpreter training in Belgium. I believe his request must be seen in the context of the plans or intentions of several Spanish universities to set up a training programme for translators and interpreters. And indeed, those who foster such plans, do well to avail themselves of the experience of others. In this way we find a big country like Spain looking at a small country like Belgium, and this should not surprise us since Belgium is a mecca for translators and interpreters .

Belgium is a country in which three language communities peacefully coexist, notably six million Dutch-speaking Flemings in the northern half of the country, four million Frenchspeaking Walloons in the south, and close to the German border in the east a small minority of some sixty thousand German speakers. With its three official languages, this small country needs a large number of competent translators and interpreters to provide smooth communication between the communities.

On top of this, the Belgian economy is mainly dependent on exports. These exports mainly concentrate on the neighbouring countries France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, four countries which all have a different language of their own. Again, this context explains the need for qualified translators and interpreters.

Finally, the demand for competent translators and interpreters has increased enormously over the past twenty years or so, for yet another reason. Brussels has become, little by little, the *de facto* capital of the European Union; in no other city anywhere else in the world is there such a large concentration of translators and interpreters as in Brussels.

As a result, you will appreciate that Belgium is an ideal breeding ground for training colleges for translators and interpreters. These colleges mushroomed in the sixties: after all, in the Golden Sixties the economy was booming, and one of the consequences was that the system of higher education in Belgium was expanding rapidly.

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author of the package insert can attain the required level of comprehensibility. At the request of the Ministry of Health, and in cooperation with the University of Ghent and the University of Liege, the Ghent College for Translators and Interpreters has developed two instruments which should make it possible to implement the law correctly.

The first instrument is a Dutch and a French brochure containing stylistic advice for the authors of package inserts for patients. The stylistic advice deals with the way in which these texts must be written, and discusses the choice of words, sentence structure and text structure.

The second instrument is a lexicon in three languages (Dutch-French-German) of scientific and popular medical terms. The lexicon contains about 1.400 medical concepts for which the scientific term is given as well as the most appropriate popular term. Indeed, previous research had shown that the comprehensibility of package inserts mainly depends on the degree of difficulty of the medical terms used in the text.

When a law comes into effect, one has to make sure that it is also complied with. To this end an automatized readability formula has been developed. This formula allows one to check quickly, objectively and with a high degree of probability whether package inserts are written in a language that the target reader can understand readily.

The Belgian law on package inserts serves as a pattern for the European Directives on this issue which will soon be introduced in all member-states of the European Union. At the request of the European Union and in cooperation with the Pharmacological Institute of the University of Ghent, the Ghent College for Translators and Interpreters is currently preparing nine lexicons, one for each official language of the Union. These lexicons contain the scientific terms that can be used in the medical information leaflets, and the popular equivalents of these terms to be used in the inserts for the patients.

This terminological research is helped by the Centre for Terminology of the Ghent College for Translators and Interpreters. Students take part in the research project by means of their end-of-study dissertation, and they can use the terminological form which has been developed at the Centre. The students complete this form with all useful information concerning a given term: synonyms, translations, illustrations, definitions, contexts, etc. The information thus compiled is checked and afterwards added to the computer files of GenTerm, which is the terminological database of our Centre for Terminology.

Those who take part in this terminological research, including the students, can use the Centre's computer facilities. This includes optical data processing, which allows automatic input of texts as well as illustrations. Another example is the use of modems through which the Centre has access to Eurodicautom, the terminological database of the European Union in Luxembourg. Another important tool is the specialized software which the Centre is developing in order to carry out terminological research on a CD-Rom.

The other four Flemish colleges for translators and interpreters are involved in similar terminological research. To this end, some colleges have set up their own terminological centres.

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Next I would like to turn to the second task that higher education in Flanders has, namely rendering services to the community at large. There are undoubtedly many different ways to provide services to society. Again I will use an example to illustrate how the Ghent College for Translators and Interpreters deals with this task.

One of the optional courses on the programme of the Ghent College is film subtitling. Students who follow this course take part in the project of subtitling a number of films for the International Film Festival of Flanders in Ghent, which takes place in october every year. They usually translate new, foreign films which only exist in the original version and which are not expected to make it to the network of commercial cinema. That is the reason why film distributors do not want to spend any money on subtitling, since they realize that such films can only be shown during the Festival.

The Ghent College has developed an electronic system which allows a simultaneous projection of the subtitles under the big screen in the cinema. As a result it is not necessary to make a special copy of the picture with subtitles on the film itself.

This cooperation with the International Film Festival has been going on for four years now and our students have so far translated some fifty films. This project has enabled a considerable number of students to get in real touch with the world of subtitling.

The package-insert project and the subtitling project are two examples which illustrate how the Flemish institutes for translators and interpreters perform their task as far as research projects and service to the community are concerned. I would now like to turn to what is obviously the most important task of these Colleges, and also the most important part of my presentation, namely the educational task.

If you will allow me, I would first like to have a brief look at the training of translators and interpreters in other European countries. We find that, in Europe, these training programmes belong to one of three types.

The first type is a post-graduate training programme. It is meant for people who already have a university degree and who also have a good command of one or two foreign languages. The training programme can thus focus on the acquisition of the skills required for translating and interpreting. This type of training exists in Switzerland (Geneva), France (Paris, at the ISIT and ESIT Schools), Canada (Ottawa, Montreal), and in the United States (at the Monterey Institute).

The second type is a combination of programmes for translators and for interpreters, such as the five-year programme in the University of St. Petersburg.

The third type provides basic training as a translator, after which the student decides whether he or she will continue as a translator or tackle a training programme as an interpreter. This type of training is organized in German universities (for example in Heidelberg and in Saarbrücken).

The Belgian colleges for translators and interpreters belong to this third type. The training takes four years of study, subdivided into twice two years. The first two years are called «candidatures», the third and the fourth years are called «licentiates».

There is little essential difference between the first two years (or the first cycle) and the last two years (the second cycle). The differences are only differences of

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gradation, since the student chooses two foreign languages at the very beginning of the training and does not change them in the course of the four-year programme.

Typical of the programme in the first two years is the share of general subjects. These general subjects include law courses, economics, sociology, psychology, history and philosophy. In this way they cover the main areas of social life and make sure that the degree is polyvalent. In other words, those who start a career as a professional translator will certainly need such a wide-ranging basis. But this also applies to those who choose another profession. Thanks to the broad base of the translator and interpreter training, our students easily find their way in the different sectors of the labour market.

The students also study their mother tongue, which in the case of the Ghent College is Dutch of course. This is an intensive study, three or four hours a week, especially in the first two years. This is a primary condition: a professional translator or interpreter needs a perfect knowledge of his or her mother tongue.

The Dutch courses are meant to improve the students' communicative skills in the mother tongue. Besides, the courses are also meant to provide the students with a better understanding of the structure and working of language in general.

Of course, the principal part of the programme, both in the first two years and in the last two years, are the two foreign languages which the student has chosen. The two foreign languages are given the same importance. In other words, there is no distinction between a main and an additional language.

In the first two years, lectures and exercises in the foreign languages are intended to broaden and deepen the understanding and command of these languages. Translation courses are also part of the programme, but not the main subjects. The stress is on the linguistic and metalinguistic element, rather than on the translinguistic aspect.

Summing up, the programme of the first two years can be said to consist of four main components:

— general subjects,
— mother tongue,
— foreign language 1,
— foreign language 2.

All Flemish colleges for translators and interpreters recognize the importance of these four components. However, this does not mean that the number of teaching hours (or contact hours) should be the same for each component. Actually, two thirds of the contact hours in the first two years are spent on two of the four components, namely on the foreign languages.

In the final two years all attention is focussed on language teaching, especially foreignlanguage teaching. The lectures and exercises mainly aim at improving the student's command of his two foreign languages and concentrate on the practice of professional translating and interpreting. Translation exercises are more specialized than in the first two years. Also, the students translate more from their mother tongue into the foreign language, and the texts which are used are more difficult as they relate to specific areas such as economics, technology, informatics and law. It is partly due to the presence of students from the European Union's Erasmus programme that some institutes have started translation exercises from one foreign

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language into the other foreign language. In the last two years metalinguistics fades away to be replaced by linguistic and especially translinguistic lectures.

Much attention is given to what the Germans call *Landeskunde*, or social studies concerning the countries of which the language is studied. Part of the programme is also spent on the literature of the foreign languages. The lectures on *Landeskunde* and literature are always taught in the foreign language.

In the fourth year the student has to choose whether he wants to become a translator or an interpreter. Most institutes offer their students the possibility to take a course in conference interpreting in the third year, but this is only meant to be an introduction. The intensive training in simultaneous and consecutive conference interpretating only starts in the fourth year.

There is one institute in Antwerp which does not offer this choice between translating and interpreting: all students have the translation courses, and interpreting is an optional course. Most students however find it hard to combine translating with the interpreting courses; if they do not succeed for this optional course they take one more year (a fifth year) for interpreting separately.

In the third and fourth years the students have to write an end-of-study dissertation or thesis. This thesis usually deals with terminographic or grammatical problems. Some students write an annotated translation or discuss a *Landeskunde* subject. Most institutes require this dissertation to be written in one of the two foreign languages chosen by the student.

The programme at the college of Ghent was expanded in 1988 with a compulsory on-the-job training period. As far as I know, this is not compulsory at the other institutes. In Ghent this on-the-job training scheme offers no more than a short look-around; the students work in a company, a public institution or a non-profit organization for two weeks. In this way they get acquainted with a real work situation similar to their later job. The students can propose their own project, but it has to be closely related to their training as a translator or an interpreter. At the end of the training-period the student has to submit a report to the trainee supervisor. The company or organization also writes a report on the student's performance. on the basis of these reports and an interview with the trainee supervisor the students get a final mark. Almost all students consider this practical experience very useful and interesting and would like to extend the two weeks to one month.

2. COMMENTARY

In my presentation, I have tried to describe the three main tasks that Flemish colleges of higher education have to perform in accordance with the decree of october 1991. If you will allow me, I would like to add some brief comments to the description I have given.

In my opinion Belgian colleges for translators and interpreters are overstressing their educational task. This type of training requires students to concentrate on their mother tongue and on two foreign languages, and in addition they have to acquire the skills of a translator or an interpreter. This is made even more difficult by the fact that most students usually do not have a preliminary know-

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ledge of both the foreign languages they choose. They do not have to do an entrance test or examination for the languages of which they are supposed to have this preliminary knowledge. Finally the training programme provides for only four years of study for all language combinations and for both translators and interpreters.

Moreover, although there may be a huge demand for translators and interpreters in Belgium, the recession is also affecting the market of translators and interpreters, so much so that one often has the impression that the market is saturated. As a result, the colleges for translators and interpreters are looking for new market opportunities for their students. In this way, for example, they are introducing optional courses in the programme, such as language training for companies. But it follows of course that the colleges no longer concentrate exclusively on training professional translators and interpreters. They now seem to want to provide career-oriented language training.

In doing so, the institutes for translators and interpreters consider the fact that only a minority of some 20% of their graduates are working as full-time translators and/or interpreters. In this context it is worth citing an inquiry that the Ghent College has conducted into the professional activities of its graduates. About 67% of the graduates participated in the enquiry. The results are as follows:

— Some 93% of the respondents actually had a job. The remaining 7% chose to not to work for various reasons. only 0,5% said they were unemployed.

— Some 25% work in the civil service. 67% work in the private sector and 8% are selfemployed .

— The graduates working in the private sector are active in various economic sectors mainly in the service industries, but also in other sectors and organizations.

— The graduates have very diverging jobs, but especially commercial jobs. I would like to illustrate this with a short list of occupations or functions which our graduates say they have. They call themselves: reviser, commercial assistant, export manager, shipping agent, teacher, account executive, journalist, sales coordinator, product manager, diplomat, editor, copywriter, translator, executive secretary, travel guide, dispatcher, interpreter, purchasing assistant, office manager, and so on and so forth...

The inquiry has shown that our training programme offers many openings in addition to working as a translator or interpreter. However, the aim of the Flemish institutes remains training professional and competent translators for the market. The only question left is: how can this educational objective be made compatible with the social reality of the present-day labour market? Many graduates do not seriously think of working as translators or interpreters, but opt for a related profession. However, we do not consider changing our educational objective as we still deem it appropriate in view of the current market situation. Being a good translator or interpreter requires many different cognitive and communicative skills, and these skills also enable our graduates to perform well in many different fields. The wide range of professions and occupations that I have cited is not really in contradiction with the real core of the training.

The Flemish colleges for higher education were given a clear definition of their tasks only two years ago. Previously, interpreter and translator colleges used to be

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just educational institutes. They were not really obliged to carry out scientific research or to provide services to the community at large.

The recently started research often has to lead to quick and useful results for the customer. I would prefer research being more focussed on prodiving the training with a scientific basis. The professors master the foreign language they teach and they can rely on a solid linguistic background. However, there is not much interest for translation science, and what is more, the Faculties of Letters of the universities try to get involved in the field of translation science. At the institutes for translators and interpreters only little time is spent on fundamental reflection on the discipline of translating and interpreting. Some professors mainly work with a pure empiric method of demonstrating and repeating. The Flemish institutes for translators and interpreters certainly do not set the tone, although the colleges of Antwerp are building up a firm reputation.

The Katholieke Vlaamse Hogeschool (Catholic Flemish College of Antwerp) has been publishing a series *New Books for Translation Science* since 1992. There have been three editions until now: the first edition deals with the Limits of translating, the second is entitled *Men and machine in translator training* and the third edition *Building up Babel* is devoted to the problem of untranslatability.

It goes without saying that the Flemish institutes want to carry out their tasks as well as possible. However, they can only partly accomplish their ambitions as they are too small and they will always be too small because they are too numerous. There are too many colleges for translators and interpreters in Flanders. Three colleges, one in Antwerp, one in Brussels and one in Ghent, would be more than enough. And even better would be one big college with a campus in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent. The three cities are situated at about 50 kilometres' distance from each other. In all three departments of the big college (namely Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent) the general subjects, Dutch and the six most popular foreign languages could be programmed. other foreign languages could be organized on one campus.

Scale enlargement in higher education is aimed at in Flanders, but a possible fusion of the five colleges for translators and interpreters is not taken into consideration yet.

These considerations may sound somewhat pessimistic. But there are plenty of reasons for positive reflections as well. In my view, a very positive element is the transition of the Flemish colleges for translators and interpreters from somewhat schoolish institutes to institutions with a truly academic outlook. Partly this is due to the actions of the authorities: each reform of higher education, whether small-scale or wide-ranging, has meant an enhancement. For example: only recently graduates from colleges have been allowed to take a doctoral degree at university. And if they want to study philology at university they only have to study another two years to obtain the degree. The same goes for university graduates who wish to take a translator or interpreter training.

The colleges have also acquired a larger degree of academic culture thanks to the exchanges of students and teaching staff in the framework of the various programmes set up by the European Union, such as the Erasmus, the Lingua and the Tempus programme. The Flemish colleges for translators and interpreters seize the

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opportunity to take part in these exchange programmes. At the moment 54 students from the Ghent College for translators and interpreters are spending a study period ranging from 3 to 10 months at one of the twelve universities in Germany, The United Kingdom, France and Spain with which the college has concluded an exchange agreement. The students who take part in such an exchange programme are third-year students. This means that one third of the third-year students are studying in the country of which they learn the language.

Finally, the academic status of the colleges has also benefited from the cooperation agreements which some of the colleges have recently concluded with universities. Allow me to refer to the Ghent College one more time. The college has concluded a cooperation agreement with the University of Ghent. As a result of this agreement professors and assistants from the college are in charge of fo reign-language teaching at the university's Faculty of Economics and Applied Economics. The agreement also allows students from the Ghent College for translators and interpreters to take economic courses at university as optional courses.

3. CONCLUSION

If anybody in a large country like Spain is looking for a useful example of a training programme for translators and interpreters, he may find one in the small country that Belgium is. Our colleges for translators and interpreters have managed to gain a reputation of soundness and reliability. But it goes without saying that we do not have an infallible model of an ideal college for higher education. Even if we had, it would be a model that could not be taken over without any changes, if for no other reason than that the first-year students in our respective countries do not have the same preliminary knowledge of their own native language nor of the foreign language or languages which they intend to learn. Spain and Belgium are two different countries, but I do hope that my exposition may have offered some inspiration.

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