

Meeting language needs: co-operation between universities and their socio-economic environment within the area of translation

[Table of contents](#)
[en français](#)

Daniel Gouadec

Université de Rennes II, FR

It is clear that universities have greatly contributed to meeting the needs of their socio-economic environment as regards international communication.

The success of this contribution is evident in the recognition and acceptance of translator training programmes by society as a whole, as these programmes cater for a real need, and people are aware of this need. Even though it is now often overshadowed by the discourses of globalisation and other types of internationalisation, this need was first brought to light by the process of Europeanisation, which is a result of both the construction of Europe and the proximity of the countries which make up the European market.

This explains the enormous increase in the number of translator training programmes in higher education, initially in Europe, and subsequently in the rest of the world. The number of professionally oriented postgraduate programmes in translation (DESS) increased in France from 5 to 26 in just a few years, while the European record is held by Spain, where translation and interpreting schools have multiplied. Furthermore, such programmes of study are now offered not only at undergraduate and postgraduate level, but are also tailored to meet the ongoing training needs of working translators. The number of programmes of study in this area is also increasing in the candidate countries and those in the process of accession, stimulated by European programmes such as TEMPUS.

One can justifiably put forward the hypothesis that the provision of a readily available pool of translators through what we can term "mass" education (given the increase in numbers involved) has significantly contributed to stimulating the demand for translations, or more precisely, has increased the overall awareness of the very nature of translation – in all its diverse forms – and thus made the end-user aware of the economic, cultural and technical added value and image enhancement that translation represents.

A simple observation backs up this hypothesis: the introduction of every translator training programme at university level is accompanied firstly by the appearance of several translation firms and freelance translators in the region, followed by an increase in the volume of translations purchased by clients at the local or regional level. In addition to this, certain studies have shown that, in areas where partnerships between translator training programmes and professional translators exist, more than seventy-five percent of firms or organisations commissioning translations are new clients.^[1] According to these clients, the proximity of the translators (and thus the existence of the professional training programme) impelled them to start having work translated, and they are very satisfied with their decision. It is important to add, however, that every local or regional pole soon attracts a national and international clientele.

Globally, translator-training programmes at university level have also contributed to providing a much-needed workforce for what is quickly becoming an industry (the translation and language service industry). In particular they have done this by training the future translators in new technologies, which are both a characteristic of this new industry and a driving force in its development. The aim here is not to discuss issues concerning the working conditions or the levels of payment, but to point out that this is an example of a response to a genuine need through this new form of co-operation with the socio-economic environment, in the broad sense of the term.

In addition, the most effective training programmes and those that are making the greatest effort to satisfy the market's needs are currently anticipating new needs, which now extend well beyond traditional translation needs. These have arisen from the focus on the exploitation of new technologies to achieve greater efficiency in international communication. This development involves defining and proposing new profiles for engineers in multilingual communication who are capable of meeting all of the language needs of organisations and firms, large or small, by offering increased services and facilities that cover all forms, media and modes of communication, going beyond translation, but yet essentially including this particular profession. In order to cater for changes in language needs, certain university translator training programmes now include everything connected with multilingual technical writing, intra- and extranet management, website creation, translation and maintenance, and all of the corresponding logistic material and software.

From this viewpoint in particular, the importance of co-operation between the economic environment and university translator training programmes is evident, because neither of these domains can hope to succeed single-handedly. Hence the emergence of official or informal consortia, modelled on European projects, which bring together key university and economic players in order to define precise objectives and to establish the conditions under which these objectives are carried out. It is worth mentioning at this point the council for the improvement of translator training programmes, which informally brings together trainers, - from Belgium (Marie Haps), Finland (Turku), France (Rennes) and Spain (Tarragona), - the world of business, and clients. Sometimes the needs of the socio-economic environment determine the nature of the project; sometimes training institutions propose and plan new dimensions.

In this perspective it is interesting to note, for example, that the movement for quality assurance in translation (and in terminography) originated in certain universities and has been one of their main concerns since 1986. From that time on, comprehensive quality assurance systems have been developed within the context of special training programmes for professional translators provided by universities, in particular in France, Germany and Belgium, and have been set up in both in-house services and translation firms (and sometimes even in translation agencies). It is important to note the pioneering role of universities, in setting up structures which allow for developments of an 'industrial' nature, and particularly in introducing pilot programmes and control systems for the implementation and provision of language services. The PERFEQT (MLIS) project (1999-2001) is an example, among many others, of a project that involved the development of a tool for quality control in translation, through a consortium bringing together European universities and key players in the economic field.^[2] The close co-operation between the two sides aimed at finding effective solutions in order to cater for a social need, which had become so important and complex that local, traditional methods were not enough to satisfy it.

If we consider that in recent years universities and their social partners have also taken into account 'new' needs in translation and interpreting of a "community" nature, we see the extent to which the synergies have been able to play a part. From whatever angle we observe the situation, we see that the most marked transformation in the domain of translator training has been (for those who have already taken the plunge), is (for those who are currently shifting) and will be (for all concerned) the redefinition of syllabuses and of the architecture of translator training programmes in order to take account of changing needs. Within this redefinition, it is to some extent the socio-economic environment which determines the objectives, while universities put forward solutions that are both tested and validated by social demand. Co-operation in this area is - fortunately for all concerned - inevitable.

Notes

[1] CFTTR/CRAIE Telephone survey, 1990, 1995 (Université de Rennes II).

[2] Mannesman Demag (Germany) and LCI (France).