



Network project for the decentralised and centralised
dissemination of TNP3 results and outcomes

CONFERENCE REPORT

Dissemination Conference “South”

Network for the decentralised and centralised dissemination of
TNP3 results and outcomes (TNP3-D)

Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal 18 June 2007

Introduction

The TNP3-D conference South Europe attracted some 80 participants, among them representatives of the European Commission, of local and regional professional associations and of business associations, as well as individuals from universities and enterprises in South Europe.

The conference programme was structured in accordance with the three TNP3-D sub-themes:

1. Skills and competences required in the language industries and in language-related professions
2. Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour markets
3. Consultation and collaboration between universities and the other sectors of education

For each sub-theme, a presentation was made by a TNP3-D expert, summarising pertinent results and findings of TNP3 and the status quo in South Europe. Each presentation was followed by a panel discussion. The panels were comprised of project-external experts from higher education and representatives of private enterprise.

Towards the end of the Conference, *knowledge cafés* were held with a view to involving all Conference participants in discussion about two core questions directly related to the aims of TNP3-D and of the Conference.

Outcomes

I. Panels

Panel 1: Skills and competences required in the language industries and in language-related professions

Panellists:

José Agoas (Associação Portuguesa de Empresas de Tradução (APET), Cascais, PT)

Isabel Jiménez (SLS International, Barcelona, ES)

Andreia Silva (Freelance translator, graduate of Universidade do Minho, PT)

Anthony Pym (Universitat Rovira i Virgili, Tarragona, ES)

Initial input:

Manuel Célio Conceição (Universidade do Algarve, Faro, PT)¹

The panel discussion focussed on the qualifications required of language graduates and their employability as language specialists.

Comments on the status quo

The employer representatives expressed a rather critical view of the situation. The following points were highlighted.

- Graduates tend to lack general communication skills, such as the ability to structure and prioritise information.
- Mastery of one's first language (traditionally referred to as "mother tongue") is of fundamental importance to professions in the language industry. The declining competence of students in their first language is an important challenge for the training of language specialists.
- All panellists agreed that today language specialists needed skills over and above those traditionally required of translators and interpreters. The training of language specialists should include the development of "secondary" skills such as project management, (terminology) research skills, technical writing, proof reading, revising, and editing.
- These days, language companies employ fewer in-house translators, preferring to work with freelancers. This situation makes it difficult for young graduates to gather work experience, which poses a fundamental dilemma; work experience is a prerequisite for being able to act as a freelance translator, yet it is difficult to gather the necessary experience outside employment. A possible solution to this could be the expansion of internship programmes.
- Another difficulty graduates are confronted with in trying to adapt to new conditions on the market is insufficient knowledge of the prerequisites for freelance work. Graduates know little about how to operate a business, about software licensing etc.

¹ For the presentation, see Manuel Célio Conceição's detailed powerpoint presentation, which can be downloaded from the TNP3-D website.

- The panellists noted a general decline in language proficiency in the countries covered by the Conference, especially in Portugal. As a result, there was now a shortage of translators and interpreters for certain languages. After all, advanced skills in the second and third language were one of the essential entrance qualifications for higher education (HE) translation and interpretation (T&I) programmes. In this context, the time factor was highlighted; for example, it needs five years to attain a sufficient level in German. Moreover, in countries like Portugal there was now a need for “new languages”, such as Bulgarian, Czech, Polish, Mandarin Chinese and Hindi, for which universities were totally unprepared.
- Another criticism aired by the employer representatives was the fact that today’s linguists are not specialised; the market, however, required specialised knowledge in areas such as finance and law. At the same time, it was stressed that language specialists needed general knowledge of the world.
- Opinions differed with regard to the question as to which skills and competences higher education institutions can be expected to equip their students with, especially in the field of technology. Whereas the employer representatives expected HEIs to produce graduates who were familiar with pertinent technological tools, the HE representatives explained that the cost of software licensing made it impossible to include training in the use of up-to-date CAT tools in their programmes.
- Many students in South Europe cannot afford study abroad in countries where the cost of living is much higher than in their home countries. This prevents students from experiencing the languages they study in their original context – an indispensable prerequisite for acquiring thorough mastery in a second or third language.

Recommendations for improving the status quo

- New curricula should be developed based on clearly defined professional profiles. In first-cycle programmes, the focus should be on the acquisition of complete mastery in the second and third language, while at second-cycle level a range of specialised masters degrees should be offered, aimed at also equipping students with skills, competences and knowledge in such fields as project management, IT, and business administration. The aim should be to enable them to establish a foothold on the diversified labour market, and to work efficiently in their respective domains.
- Higher education institutions (HEIs) should maintain contacts with their graduates who, once in a position of responsibility, can be instrumental in arranging internships for T&I students.

Panel 2: *Linguistic and cross-cultural skills and competences for enhanced opportunities on the European and international labour markets*

Panellists:

Manuela Guilherme (Center for Social Studies, Universidade de Coimbra, PT)

Angeliki Petrits (European Commission, Brussels)

Ricardo J. Machado (President of *CT128*, Technical Commission of Normalization in Engineering of Software and Inform. Systems, PT)

Rui Diogo Serra (student representative, FAIRe, PT)

Initial input:

Ole Helmersen (Handelshøjskolen i København, DK)²

The discussion focussed on the question as to which language-related skills can enhance graduates' opportunities on the labour market and how HEI can go about equipping students with these skills.

- It was stressed that all students in HE, irrespective of their specialisation, should have the opportunity to learn a language or languages. The incorporation of practical language studies into all HE programmes would equip students with communication skills that were crucial for their later careers.
- Generalised language training should focus on the development of communication skills that are linked to specific tasks, e.g. making oral presentations, writing reports etc. The goal should be to develop qualification profiles which help graduates quickly to become linguistically independent in a professional environment.
- From this follows the need for HEIs to cooperate with employers in order to establish systems of descriptors for modules and degrees that clearly indicate a graduate's competences.
- The tracking of graduates' careers should be systematically expanded, and the feedback received should become an important element in the development and innovation of language curricula and offerings.
- Non-university panellists were critical of the lack of flexibility on the part of HEIs, i.e. their inability or unwillingness to adjust their offerings to changing needs.

Panel 3: Consultation and collaboration between universities and the other sectors of education

Panellists:

Mary Drossou (Ethniko kai Kapodistriako Panepistimio Athinon, GR)

Carmen Pérez Vidal (Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, ES)

Helena Araújo e Sá (Universidade de Aveiro, PT)

Input:

² For the presentation, see Ole Helmersen's powerpoint presentation, which can be downloaded from the TNP3-D website.

Neva □libar (Univerza v Ljubljani, SI)

The panellists presented case studies of teacher education programmes (Greece) and programmes for bilingual education (Catalonia / Spain). In the discussion, the following actions were recommended:

- Collaboration with private providers should be strengthened, as they are more flexible, and able quickly to adapt to changing needs in the non-educational environments. They can offer tailor-made courses for specific purposes. This potential should be exploited by HE to complement their curricula.
- The development and implementation of language policies, both in HEI and at national / regional level, should be addressed as a matter of priority.
- In order to facilitate the continuity of lifelong language learning, the use of standardised tools such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* and the *European Language Portfolio* should be promoted in all sectors of education.

II. Knowledge cafés

Participants were advised to split up into groups of 6+. Each group was to discuss the following two questions.

1. Given the specific conditions prevalent in your organisation / country, what types of consultation and collaboration do you regard as particularly relevant to higher education language studies?
2. In view of your own experiences, what do you regard as the principal difficulties that have to be overcome in order to make consultation and collaboration between higher education institutions and other stakeholders a fruitful endeavour?

In each group, both questions were to be discussed following a set procedure, giving each participant a specified amount of time to express his or her position and to comment on statements made by other members of the group. The knowledge cafés proved to be an efficient way of involving participants in discussion who would otherwise not have opened up. Moreover, the cafés provided instant feedback on the dissemination efforts made.

Conclusion

The Conference can be deemed a success in that it attracted a large number of newcomers from HE and enterprise. The high level of interest generated demonstrated that there is an urgent need for the creation of structures for cooperation and consultation in the area of languages, especially in South Europe. During the course of the Conference, it became clear that many

universities in the country group have neither institutional policies or practices nor appropriate structures such as language centres in place; moreover, HE language teachers have a rather low status. This state of affairs is a serious obstacle to structured dialogue with other stakeholders. The Braga Conference went quite some way towards raising awareness on these issues – something that could not have been achieved through a centralised dissemination event.

The immensely fruitful discussion conducted by the first panel showed that in the field of the language industry / language-related professions, there is a solid basis for consultation and cooperation between HEIs and companies, as well as a high level of awareness of the issues at stake, and of the difficulties to be overcome. However, this part of the Conference also revealed a number of problems that require initiatives from other stakeholders: insufficient financial support for student mobility; poor results of language training in the primary and secondary sectors; insufficient awareness on the part of public authorities and private enterprises of the importance of the work of language professionals to, for example, integration and intercultural dialogue, and foreign trade.

The second and third panels revealed that consultation and collaboration between HE and enterprise on the one hand, and the other sectors of education on the other is at best beginning to develop. Employers seem to underestimate the relevance of language skills to economic performance, especially to their export effort. Here, HEIs will have to take the initiative to raise awareness among non-academic stakeholders. As regards collaboration between HE and the other sectors of education, the Conference provided evidence of isolated cases of successful projects and practices at local and regional level. Ways will have to be found to make cases like these more widely known, and to integrate local and regional initiatives into national or European networks.