



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

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

Report of the Dissemination Conference East *Current and Future Linguistic and Intercultural Needs of Graduates on the European and International Labour Markets*

Uniwersytet Warszawski, 21 September 2007

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Conference, attended by 117 participants from Austria, Germany (Länder), Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and the European Commission, was held under the patronage of the Rector of Warsaw University and of the Mayor of Warsaw in the historic environment of Kazimierzowski Palace.

The local conference organiser had gone out of her way to invite a substantial number of plenary speakers from Poland -, who had experience and expertise relevant to TNP3 and TNP3-D aims and objectives. For example, Ewa Chmielecka, a national Bologna promoter, related project aims to the issue of generic competences in European and national qualifications frameworks – a theme that was to be taken up again at the Closing Conference held a few days later in Brussels.

However, as in the other decentralised dissemination conferences, the presentation of the main points of the three regional synthesis reports and the subsequent panel discussions formed the centrepiece of the Conference.

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

The panel was introduced by Alan Walton (Freie Universität Berlin, DE), who introduced TNP3/TNP-D findings, focusing on

- recent economic, political, and societal changes and their effect on the language industries and professions;
- modifications to the structure of degree programmes as a result of Bologna;

- the issue of gearing learning outcomes, content and quantity of course provision to identified professional needs;
- consultation and collaboration between universities and the language industry.

The panellists included Barbara Górska, an editor at a well-known British publishing company and a teacher trainer at Warsaw University's Foreign Language Teacher Training College; Danuta Kierzkowska, president of the Polish Society of Sworn and Specialised Translators (TEPIS); Agnieszka Przewloka, a recent graduate of the Interpretation and Translation Study programme at Warsaw University; Andrzej Jonas, editor-in-chief of the English-language magazine *Warsaw Voice*; Peter Axel Schmidt, professor at the Institute for Applied Linguistics and Translation Studies at Leipzig University (DE) and a member of *Transforum*, an association comprising practising professionals in the field of translation and academics; Manfred Schmitz, head of a German translation company (*Intertext*), and Secretary of the *International Association Language and Business*.

The panel focused on the following issues.

1) Accuracy of project findings.

The German panellists and the TEPIS president expressed the view that TNP3 findings provide an accurate picture of changes and changing needs in the market. Moreover, the latter confirmed the increasing importance of legal translation and other forms of community translation and interpreting. In this context, she commented on increasing competition between agencies and freelancers.

2) The adequacy or otherwise of current course offerings

The following questions were raised.

- *Degree of specialisation*. Although there was general agreement that the market wanted graduates who had specialist knowledge of specific domains, university representatives made the point that higher education (HE) programmes had to be more general in nature. It was felt that qualifications such as "open mind" "curiosity", and "ability to adapt to changing market needs" were more important. University representatives argued that it was the duty of employers to introduce young graduates to the language of specific domains.
- *Relevant skills absent from HE programmes*. It was felt that universities needed to pay more attention to the ability to work in teams, terminology work, IT skills, and cultural knowledge, as well as to new job profiles such as editing, proof-reading and revision.
- *Professional experience*. There was a kind of catch 22 situation in that the market expected graduates to have professional experience, while such experience could really only be gathered on the job. This seemed to suggest that universities and employers needed to give more consideration to the integration of internships / job placement into training programmes.

- 3) *Consultation and collaboration.* The following aspects were highlighted.
- There was a need for the systematic tracking of graduates' careers.
 - Alumni associations could serve a useful function in providing students with a realistic picture of professional needs and market demands; however, the situation varied from country to country, and in Poland it was felt to be more important that students should have the opportunity to meet employers during their course of studies.
 - Universities and professional associations should work more closely together; professionals should be invited to teach on training courses.
 - The example of *Transforum* demonstrated that regular consultation between universities and employers was in the interest of both sides; while universities were made aware of changing professional requirements, employers could ensure that universities produced adequately qualified graduates.

While it was encouraging to note that TNP3 findings and recommendations were received positively by both the panellists and participants in general, it has to be admitted that a number of important issues did not receive adequate attention.

- The question of learning outcomes at the end of first- and second-cycle programmes was hardly mentioned. Moreover, there seemed to be little, if any, awareness of a need for specialists in multilingual communication.
- It remained unclear at which levels consultation and collaboration would be most useful, or, to put it differently, which aims should be pursued by consultations conducted at local, regional, national, and European level respectively.
- The tension between specialist language skills and more general professional skills ultimately remained unresolved.

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

Prior to the introduction of the theme by Silvia Blašková of Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave (SK), Sylwia Sadalska, representing a commercial employment agency operating in Poland (*Randstad Financial Staffing*), and Marek Frankowicz, a professor of chemistry at Uniwersytet Jagielloński (PL), talked about language requirements in their professional and academic environments. In her presentation on *The use of language skills on the labour market – opportunities in commerce for young graduates*, Sylwia Sadalska referred to a noticeable trend in the development of the biggest multifunctional organisations in the world: outsourcing. Countries in central and east Europe were perceived as particularly attractive. A key criterion for the choice of location was the availability of language skills. English was a must, but she mentioned no fewer than 16 other European languages that were also in demand in outsourced establishments. There was a lack of candidates who had

a good command of English and of one other language (in addition to Polish). She expressed the view that student mobility was an invaluable experience, and stressed the importance of internationally recognized language certificates.

The panel discussion proper revealed that Sylwia Sadalska's views were not shared by everyone in the private sector in Poland. Monika Butrym of Procter & Gamble painted a picture of English only. The company's staff in Warsaw came from 26 different countries, but everything - from the application form and job interviews to communication in the company - was done in English. She proposed the well-known formula English plus intercultural skills. Sabine Archam of the Institute for Research on Qualifications and Training of the Austrian Economy acknowledged that English had a special status and that English was likely to increase in importance; she expressed the view that other languages had the function of icebreakers. She stressed that a study prepared by the Institute in the context of TNP3 had triggered discussions among employers and had raised awareness of the importance of consultation and collaboration; she was wondering, though, what form of consultation would be particularly useful.

Bartek Banaszak, a student of African Studies at Warsaw University and a representative of the Polish national student association (PSRP), called for languages to be made obligatory and offered free of charge in all courses of study. Jan Madey, a former vice-rector of Warsaw University and at present Vice-president of the General Council of Higher Education in Poland, made three points: (i) students at Warsaw University are motivated to learn foreign languages; (ii) currently, 58 foreign languages are offered at Warsaw; (iii) students should be enabled to learn the language of their choice. However, HE language teaching and learning required the definition of standards. Interventions in this thematic block made it clear, however, that the issue of standards and quality in HE language study required further reflection.

A rather special note was sounded by Janusz Danecki, professor of Arabic at Warsaw University, who had participated in the TNP3 pilot experience on *Arabic Language and Culture*. He drew attention to the increased importance of Arabic as a result of migration into Europe and globalisation. He argued that the universities as autonomous institutions had a special responsibility in this respect. He called for a European effort to develop European proficiency levels for Arabic. He thought that a group of universities from across Europe might even conduct a joint curriculum development project.

Panel 2 confirmed the outcomes of similar panels at the foregoing regional conferences.

- The picture painted by business representatives is rather diverse. While a number of international corporations subscribe to the formula "English

is enough”, employment agencies and companies engaged in selling goods and services stress the importance of other languages in addition to English.

- There is evidence of an increasing importance of languages of the wider world, such as Arabic – as a result of globalisation and migration into Europe. Few universities are prepared for changing needs in this area.
- Even universities that invest in language teaching and learning cannot automatically be expected to have a clear idea of standards, and of the learning outcomes that should be achieved in view of the demands of the labour market and post-university language learning (lifelong learning paradigm).

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

Neva Šlibar of the Univerza v Ljubljani (SI) presented a comprehensive overview of TNP3 findings and of the TNP3-D updates prepared for Hungary and Slovenia, highlighting the contrast between the enthusiasm for consultation and collaboration expressed by experts consulted and the widespread absence of such consultation and collaboration. Neva Šlibar stressed the importance of a dialogue between the different sectors, highlighting the need to

- make language learning more coherent, i.e. to remove obstacles to smooth progression and learning paths;
- enhance motivation for learning a number of languages;
- raise individual and societal awareness of the importance of regarding language learning as a lifelong activity.

Neva Šlibar deplored the fact that consultation and collaboration – where it did exist – was limited to the purpose of resolving specific problems. Because of this, she called for the creation of new structures, such as language learning networks, designed to facilitate dialogue between different sectors on a broad scale.

Bärbel Kühn’s presentation on *Networking: A new kind of Language Centre in Bremen*, provided at least a partial answer to Neva Šlibar’s call for structured dialogue. In the state of Bremen, a “Round Table” has been created, comprised of representatives of the school authorities, primary, secondary and vocational schools, adult education institutions, three cultural institutes, and the Language Centre of the higher education institutions in the Land of Bremen. The declared aim of the Round Table is to raise awareness of the importance of language learning and of multilingual competence and to facilitate smooth transition from one sector to the next. To this end, the Round Table organises joint training courses and conferences and maintains a structured dialogue with decision-makers in the public and private sectors. The Table has developed a tool designed to help to facilitate transition from one sector to the next – a joint electronic language portfolio. Bärbel Kühn expressed the hope that the e-ELP could be further developed through a European project.

The other panellists – Ulrike Drißner of the Goethe-Institut in Warsaw, Beata Zielińska of PASE and Archibald, Ewa Osiecka of the Polish National In-Service Teacher Training Centre, and Paweł Poszytek of the National Agency for the Lifelong Learning Programme widely shared the views expressed by the two aforementioned speakers, commenting negatively on the current state of affairs and presenting a number of concrete examples of successful practice. They felt inter alia that it was important that universities / teacher training institutions should talk to other providers – schools, adult education institutions, private language schools etc. – with a view to aligning their training programmes to professional needs.

Summary

In her capacity as Conference rapporteur, Klára Szabó of Szegedi Tudományegyetem (HU) drew attention to the fact that the country group East was the most diverse group formed in TNP3-D, and this both in linguistic and socio-political terms. However, she felt that the differences between the old Member States Austria and Germany, and new Member States such as Poland, Hungary and Slovenia made the challenges the new Member States were now confronted with strikingly clear. If only for that reason she thought the mixed nature of the composition of the country group was “not only justifiable, but also of utmost importance”.

Klára Szabó highlighted the following outcomes of the Warsaw Conference.

- Participants shared the view propagated by TNP3 / TNP3-D that HEIs needed to observe openness and exercise greater flexibility in redesigning their programmes and offerings. In particular, HEIs needed to have regular consultations with the labour market, do market research, track their graduates' careers and offer continuing education programmes to cater for changing needs.
- English was not enough. There was an increasing demand for languages of the wider world.
- For reasons of transparency and comparability, HEIs should make wider and more appropriate use of the Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference (CEF)* and *European Language Portfolio (ELP)*.
- While the launch of new programmes for Translation and Interpretation was to be welcomed, it was not always clear how these programmes related to the Bologna structure. Moreover, changes in the professional environment made it necessary to place greater emphasis on generic skills.
- Universities should take the lead in establishing structured consultation and collaboration with actors in the other sectors of education. The creation of networks comprised of different types of players was

particularly promising in this respect – local, regional and national networks, as well as transborder networks.

In his closing remarks, Wolfgang Mackiewicz, TNP3 / TNP3-D co-ordinator, singled out for mention the following issues raised at the Conference, which he thought needed to be pursued further in future projects.

- The issue of English as a *lingua franca*. Participants had heard conflicting opinions on this issue from the world of work. What was now called for was a European research project to investigate the potential and limitations of English as a *lingua franca* – not just in the business sector, but also in politics, education, society etc.
- From upper secondary education onwards, there was widespread lack of motivation in Europe to learn languages other than English. This development would seem to call for trans-sectoral collaboration. Moreover, it was necessary to identify and disseminate policies, strategies and practices that had had the effect of increasing learner motivation. It was hoped that the MOLAN project due to be launched later in the year would mark a step in the right direction.
- The Council of Europe's *CEF* was a trans-sectoral instrument. It was necessary to define language learning outcomes appropriate to higher education in general, and the three Bologna cycles in particular. For example, as Ewa Chmielecka had suggested in her address, the linguistic competences to be acquired by HE students would seem to have to be related to the Dublin Descriptors, notably descriptors of communicative competence.
- In this context, it was important to remember that we lacked European benchmarks for many languages of the wider world.
- While it was understandable that enterprises were keen to get "tailor-made" graduates, we should not lose sight of the fact that students above all needed to acquire competences that will enable them to expand their linguistic repertoire in response to changing needs. In other words, short-term employability needed to be placed in the context of sustainable employability. More thought needed to be given to this, for example in consultation between employers and HEIs.
- At the Braga Dissemination Conference, external experts had been at pains to identify and describe qualifications graduates in translation and interpreting would have to have at the end of first- and second-cycle courses, stressing the importance of language-related generic skills. The recommendations drawn up in TNP3 sub-project 1 could serve as a point of departure.

Wolfgang Mackiewicz took this opportunity to thank Warsaw University in general and Jolanta Urbanikowa in particular for the excellent organisation of the Conference and particularly for bringing together such an impressive array of speakers. He expressed the view that the University's firm commitment to the promotion of language teaching and language learning had something to do

with the fact that it had been actively involved in language projects at Community level since the first Dissemination Network Project. He hoped that the Warsaw Conference would send clear signals to universities in the countries represented to engage in structured consultation and collaboration with other educational and non-educational stakeholders.

