



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

DISSEMINATION DOCUMENT – CHAPTER 1

Language needs for the language industries and language-related professions

The following chapter aims to summarize the findings of three years of research and consultations undertaken between 2003 and 2006 by the sub-group of the Third Thematic Network Project responsible for identifying and mapping changes within the language industries across Europe, the new needs arising as a result of those changes in terms of professional competences and skills and the way European Higher Education institutions are meeting or preparing to meet those needs with language specialist programmes at Bachelor's and Master's level.

The findings on which this chapter is based are taken from a number of different documents produced in the course of the project, namely:

- The national reports produced in 2004 and recently updated
- The Synthesis Report highlighting the common threads running through the different national reports published in 2005
- The Copenhagen Conference report, integrating the results of discussions with representatives of the language industry and professions
- The results of the consultation conducted among employers and graduates in 2005-2006, presented at the Rennes Conference in September 2006.

1. The National Reports: identifying a changing professional environment

All the national reports underlined the rapid changes taking place within the language industries and language-related professions.

Within a very short time frame, a number of major changes have brought about fundamental and often contradictory reappraisals of the role and value of foreign language competences and skills in Europe. On the political level, EU enlargement has increased the need for experts in the new member state languages while strengthening at the same time the call for a reduction in the costs of multilingualism. On the economic level, accelerating globalisation has brought about a tremendous increase in multilingual communication, while the role of English as a *lingua franca* in international exchanges has become ubiquitous. Technological changes have opened up new opportunities and increased productivity in the language industries and professions while threatening to make certain types of language-related jobs obsolete in the not too distant future.

All these changes are bound to have a major impact on the use of languages in society and in professional contexts, not least in the language industries and language-related professions. Although it is still difficult to assess the precise impact of these developments, and although significant regional or national differences may still prevail across Europe, a number of general trends can be identified.

More widespread foreign language competence...

One noticeable trend right across Europe, as highlighted by the latest *Eurobarometer* findings¹, is a steady increase in foreign language competence. Between 2001 and 2005, there was a rise of 3% in the number of Europeans stating that they could express themselves in a foreign language, a trend further substantiated by surveys of language competence in the business community. This can be put down to a number of factors, including easier access to foreign television programmes and web sites, the growth of the global marketplace, which has made proficiency in English and, if possible, knowledge of another major language, a pre-requisite in most modern business schools, and increased mobility among the general population and among students thanks to low-cost air travel and EU mobility programmes. The young generations of European professionals are thus better prepared for working in a foreign language environment than were their parents' generation.

Of course, the overall figures need to be seen in perspective, as the level of foreign language competence can vary tremendously from one country to another, whether in terms of the numbers of languages spoken, the social background of those able to communicate in another language or the actual degree of language skills that people possess. However, the very perception of a more widespread knowledge of foreign languages has reduced the scarcity value and therefore, the market value of language competence *per se*.

...but a growing demand for language services.

This overall trend does not appear, however, to have in any way diminished the need for language services. Never have there been so many language service companies across Europe, serving an ever-increasing number of customers and generating ever larger sales figures.² This apparent paradox can easily be explained.

Firstly, the growing awareness of the importance of foreign language skills has naturally expanded the private language tuition and language certification market, with the emergence of new industrial-scale operators with aggressive

¹ EUROBAROMETER 63.4, 2005, *Europeans and languages*, Brussels, TNS Opinion & Social, 2006

² According to a survey conducted by Common Sense Advisory, Inc., a US consultancy, the European Language Services market represented over \$3.6 bn in 2005, with projections of over \$5bn by 2010

(http://www.commonsenseadvisory.com/members/res_cgi.php/060301_QT_top_20.php)

marketing strategies and online learning platforms, alongside the more traditional "language school" and "language examination" sector.

Secondly, the upholding of the EU's policy of multilingualism and the expansion of national and regional multilingual policies in a number of European countries (e.g. Spain, Belgium, the U.K., some of the "new" member states) has maintained and even increased the need for official translation services: it is worth remembering that the European commission alone translates over 1.3 million pages of text a year, both in-house and via sub-contractors.

Thirdly, the increasing demand for multilingual technical or user documentation, multilingual websites, subtitled DVDs, videogame adaptations, "localised" software products, international news programmes and international commercial, scientific or institutional events, generates multimillion euro turnover in the technical translation, "localisation", multilingual content authoring and events management markets. Most of this is produced by specialized language service companies, rather than in-house, as larger corporations increasingly externalize these services for cost-cutting reasons, and smaller companies because of the lack of staff with the relevant levels of linguistic competence.

Fourthly, the increasing availability of broadband internet access throughout Europe has stimulated the expansion of IT language tools, and particularly of machine translation software and bilingual or multilingual terminology resources, hence, the ever-increasing number of companies and individual entrepreneurs offering products and services in the so-called language engineering sector.

2. The consultation: identifying changing language service needs

The consultation of language graduates and language industry employers carried out between June 2005 and January 2006 in the 15 countries represented in the sub-project highlighted certain common trends. They show in particular that the changes described above have accelerated the emergence of new activities and specialist areas of competence.

First of all, the days of protected markets and guaranteed rates are over in this area as they are in many other sectors of the global economy. While conference interpreters may even today be able to command relatively high fees due to the scarcity of their skills and to the physical presence that their performance still requires, other language service professionals such as translators, with the notable exception of those working in large publicly funded organizations, have had to face growing international competition and reduced rates, compared to former western European standards.

Secondly, traditional professional ring-fences are disappearing as the labour market becomes increasingly flexible and competitive and professional practice grows more diverse. In salaried employment within language service companies, graduates trained as linguists, translators, and even interpreters, may be expected to take on a whole range of multifaceted tasks requiring

competences and skills that go well beyond language expertise, such as database management, project management or even sales and marketing. Even in official and organizational language services, the emphasis is shifting from translation proper to revision and editing, because of the growing volumes of work being outsourced to private operators and freelancers, some of whom may be thousands of kilometers away and working into their B-language, or being semi-automatically processed by machine translation systems. In both cases, the output requires extensive proofreading or editing by a native language speaker.

Thirdly, the drive towards greater productivity and lower costs has accelerated the use of language engineering tools. These include large scale terminology bases and dictionaries, which are now easily accessible to the general public online or to professionals via dedicated resource platforms; translation memory systems which automatically recover pre-translated segments and are now in standard use in language service companies and among freelancers; and machine translation systems, which provide an instantaneous "translation" of any source material into the required target language. The latest generation of language engineering systems is now combining search engines, terminology resources and translation memory systems which can in one operation scan all the existing multilingual resources either on the internet or within a dedicated resource bank, leaving the human operator to make the relevant choices and to "fill in" gaps where no resources already exist. All of these tools can be combined with content management systems to produce and manage multilingual multimedia resources.

Emerging skills profiles

However, far from signalling the end of the language professions, the consultation shows that these rapid economic and technological changes have in fact given a new lease of life to activities that were considered to be on the way out only ten years ago, such as text writing and editing, proofreading, terminology creation and management or the creation of language learning materials for professional purposes. They have also given rise to a range of new skills, including multimedia translation and localisation, multimedia content authoring and editing, multimedia content management, multilingual events management or the designing and management of online language learning platforms.

In terms of generic skills, consultation with employers in the commercial sector on the one hand and with institutional language service employers on the other, revealed that a premium is now being placed on language graduates who a) can demonstrate excellent communication skills (both written and oral) in their own language and a high degree of communicative proficiency in one or two other languages, b) have a good knowledge of the background and cultures of the language areas they have studied, preferably gained through prolonged work and study periods in the countries concerned, c) know how to process information in a variety of ways (i.e. summarizing in one or several languages,

translating, rewriting for different media and different target audiences, etc.), d) possess good organisational and management skills, and e) are perfectly at home in an IT environment and are familiar with standard language engineering applications and resources.

In terms of specialist skills, the premium is on those graduates who a) can show their ability to rapidly master specialised knowledge in a variety of areas (information technology, economics, law, finance, etc.), either because they have themselves studied and worked in the areas concerned at some stage, or because their training has given them the intellectual agility required to grasp the concepts involved, b) who have acquired advanced professional skills in one or several specific fields (e.g. technical writing, website authoring, conference interpreting, specialised translation, content management, events management, etc.) and c) who have a good knowledge of the organisational, economic, legal, and ethical framework within which they are expected to work.

Conversely, when asked to pinpoint current shortcomings in relation to graduates' professional skills, employers mentioned lack of practice in professional conditions, insufficient familiarity with specific areas and terminology, poor command of their mother tongue, and, more worryingly in some cases, a poor command of foreign languages. Other failings related to the lack of IT competence and a lack of understanding of the business context.

3. Meeting the new needs

The challenges of change

The national reports, the consultations and the workshops and discussions which took place both at the Copenhagen Conference in September 2005 and at the Rennes Conference in September 2006, showed that the awareness of these changing needs and the way higher education language programmes are taking them on board in terms of new curricula and learning methods vary greatly across Europe.

Traditionally speaking, foreign language programmes have led to "philology" or "language and literature" degrees, and with very few exceptions, the existing non-philology degree programmes have led to qualifications as translators and/or interpreters, often at higher education institutions outside the traditional research universities. The changing professional environment and the competences and skills required in the age of globalisation are clearly not all accommodated in these programmes, and many universities are therefore confronted with the need to reassess their programme offerings and adjust the content of these to cater to the needs of the labour market, as they implement new first and second cycle programmes within the Bologna framework.

In some areas there appears to be a general consensus as to what should be taught and learned in new bachelor and master degree programmes for language specialists. As regards the linguistic and communicative areas of expertise, correct language use and precision is considered equally important in the mother-tongue and the foreign languages: the consensus in most European

countries is that there is a need for the strengthening of mother tongue competences, especially where writing skills are concerned. Similarly, the knowledge of intercultural differences and cross-cultural communication is seen as a key point in many language curricula, with a combination of knowledge acquired through the curriculum and of first-hand experience gained through work or study abroad.

In other areas, there remain significant divergences between countries and institutions. Computer literacy or the ability to use specialist language engineering applications, for instance, are not included in some programmes, either because these skills are taken for granted, or because they are not considered to fall within the remit of higher education, or because the level of IT equipment does not yet allow access to the necessary resources. Similarly, the non-linguistic management and organisational tasks and skills that are proving increasingly important to language graduates' employment and career prospects, are often neglected or ignored, either because they are not considered compatible with academic standards, because the academic framework and the resources available do not allow any scope for project-based learning, or simply because the teaching staff themselves lack the experience and methodology required to implement the necessary activities. Similarly, the practice of mandatory work placements for students is by no means universal.

Good practice

Conversely, the TNP consultations and surveys also revealed many examples of innovation where the introduction of new first or second cycle programmes has been seen as an opportunity to introduce new curriculum objectives and content or new learning methods and outcomes. Examples include:

- incentive given to learning a third or fourth language, including major non-European languages such as Arabic or Mandarin Chinese;
- the redefinition of language competence in terms of communicative competence, with clear learning outcomes and benchmarks;
- language mediation modules including different information processing techniques;
- joint programmes combining languages with a range of other specialist subjects;
- the development of new methodologies for the teaching of specialised translation, making full use of online documentation and terminology resources and IT tools;
- project work and team work considered as integral parts of the study programme;
- work assignments given and executed in the university context under real-life conditions (with strict specifications, resource management constraints, deadlines, etc.)
- mock conferences and other mock settings for interpreter training;
- mandatory work experience regulated by a clear legal framework as an integrated part of the study programme;

- practising professionals taken on as part-time teaching staff for specific modules (e.g. technical writing, content management, specialised translation, interpreting, etc.)
- specific IT programmes for language specialists focusing on multimedia applications;
- specific distance learning courses and modules for mature students or practising professionals wishing to acquire new competences and knowledge.

Good practice also included regular consultation with employers and professional associations in the area of language services at the local, regional and national level, in order to map changing needs and practices, the use of feedback from students having completed work placements relating to work practices, IT tools, and new skills required and from graduates in employment, via networks and alumni associations.

4. Questions to be addressed

Among the questions that need to be addressed by all those in charge of higher education specialist language programmes are the following:

- What is the ideal balance between academic knowledge and professional competence?
- How can organisational rules and workload standards evolve to take into account project-based work management on the part of academic staff?
- How can student assessment methods be adapted to take into account teamwork and project-based work assignments?
- What place should IT competences have in specialist language degree curricula?
- How can increasingly sophisticated language technology be used to enhance, rather than to undermine linguistic competence?
- Should work placements be a mandatory part of any degree programme, including first cycle programmes?
- What is the best way to establish regular consultation with employers and professional circles?