Development of formative environments with translation trainees

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Abstract

University translation training programmes underpin knowledge generation and transfer, critical awareness, self-directed learning, trainees’ autonomy and creativity, interdisciplinary approach skills, an eclectic philosophy of learning and practising, appreciation of best practices, increased awareness of the factors that affect professionalism, etc. Admittedly, the facilitation of growth orientation, built on the premise of capitalising trainees’ insights, knowledge and expertise shapes formative environments.

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1. Rationale

Education providers, policy makers and other stakeholders agree that education and training need to be envisaged at the micro-level (learners'/trainees' sense of achievement and degree of satisfaction), meso-level (institutional capacity) and macro-level (education and training programmes are demand-driven and have an impact on society).

Therefore, relevance of research for educational policy making and best practices tops the agenda, alongside enhancing the development of empirically grounded theories via the investigation of the

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learning/training environment, learning/training outcomes, mapping of theory to practice and market orientation.

2. The intended added value

The study is aimed to trigger systemic, critical and creative thinking in specialized translation training with respect to design, implementation and evaluation success measures. Furthermore, it is intended to shape a flexible framework of reference for a more interactive (involving all stakeholders) and integrated policy-making.

3. Research object

The Faculty of Letters and the Faculty of Law and Administration Sciences, University of Craiova have been jointly running the Master Programme of English and French Languages - European Legal Language Translation and Terminology (2-year length, full time Master programme, 120 credits) since 2008 – please visit http://cis01.central.ucv.ro/litere/masterat/masterat.html. It is worth mentioning that the programme is affiliated with OPTIMALE (Optimising Professional Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe), an ERASMUS academic network including 70 partners from 32 European countries (for further details, please visit http://www.translator-training.eu).

4. Research objectives and deliverables

The desk research on the development of formative environments with specialised translation trainees aims to:
- shape formative learning and training environments with a view to marketable competences. In this respect, various definitions of education and training— with particular reference to the tertiary level of achievement - endorsed by well-known scholars and management authorities have been closely examined to achieve a flexible frame of reference;
- strengthen the European-oriented dimension of formative translation training environments seeking harmonisation, based on the European Commission EMT flagship project (please visit http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/index_en.htm) as setting current lines of action; at the same time, we are concerned with context-embedded improvement work by benchmarking and following examples of best practice.
- identify innovative feasible practices and quality assurance sustainable mechanisms.

5. Conceptual landscape

The complex, multifaceted notions of adult education - adult learning — adult training seem to be overlapping, to a certain extent. Nonetheless, distinctions are enforced: the first makes reference to institutionalised processes of knowledge generation and transfer, to recognition of validation of products; the second is not necessarily institutionalised, taking place in shorter timeframes and smaller stretches, but being more committedly-oriented; the third is featured by increased specificity and “operative efficiency” (Dearden, 1984: 59), i.e. by savoir faire. Tight (2000: 23) advocates that there is no clear demarcation line between the three due to “a strong apparent linkage between education and school,
training and work, and learning and enjoyable discovery”. In what follows we shall use education, learning and training indiscriminately, advocating an integrated model (on account of their overlapping nature).

Tertiary education and training are currently demand-driven, premised by the idea that there is no value-free knowledge, knowledge is marketable and becomes a source of competitive advantage so as to map a socio-economic critical agenda and balance market pressures of adaptation and pro-active behaviour.

Knowles (1980) raises the question of the social relevance of andragogy (a blanket term referring to the targeted support underpinning adult education); hence, education and training go beyond mere transfer of knowledge to meaningful practice (modus operandi). Similarly, Mezirow (1991: 199) associates andragogy with enhancement of employability since learners/trainees adopt a reflective approach. With specific reference to our programme, education and training underpin learner-centredness and growth orientation and provide targeted support.

More recently, Knowles et al. ([1998] 2005: 4 ff) endorse the 6 principles of andragogy, which may be interpreted as follows:

- **the trainees’ needs and interests**, further shaped by their tendency to plan and structure funds of knowledge (why, what, how);
- self-perception of the trainee (autonomous, self-directed) – actually, they are allowed to negotiate and cooperate in planning their own learning and in pursuing career paths;
- valorization of prior experience of the trainee (resource, mental models), i.e. they tend to extend/generalise or change patterns and meanings;
- readiness to learn while seeking functional adequacy;
- orientation to learning (focused learning) – i.e. learning via the development of context sensitivity;
- personal payoff attached to learning and training – apart from intrinsic motivation (drive for lifelong productivity, identity re-shaping, interconnectedness), trainees experience extrinsic motivation due to the tremendous pressure from the workplace and community roles and expectations.

It is obvious that trainees perceive, to a more or less extent, their ownership of learning by reducing certain aspects of professional and social life to a manageable level. Learning potentialities and marshalling and channeling resources take place via the interaction with the environment – work and leisure activities, as well as via a constructivist stance.

In the same climate of opinion, Merriam and Brockett (2007: 8) point to the adults’ proactive learning behaviour: “activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning”, at the same time hinting at the adults’ biological, psychological and social status: “those whose age, social roles and self-perception define them as adults”. It is obvious that the learners’ attitudes to learning (motivation and the value they place on learning, among other things), are complemented by cognitive strategies and metacognitive strategies (ability to plan and structure learning). We should add the learners’ overt or covert ideologies and axiologies.

Implicitly, we may detect the learning and training environment characteristics: completeness - accommodation of different learning goals and modalities in a coherent whole, comprehensiveness - no learning mode should be excluded from the learning environment, and formative character – the information provided during the development of the programme orients remedial work and/or secures tailor-made programmes.

Furthermore, according to Field and Leicester (2000: 3), the pursuit of career development is beginning to occur laterally – which holds true for tertiary education and training alike - through “constantly emerging specific and personal portable skills”, broadly equated with intelligence by other scholars.
6. Legal background

This section is dedicated to highlighting European policies in the field of adult learning and training, higher education programmes, included. In this respect, the following guidelines are of paramount importance:

- The Commission Communication “Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning” of February 2006, which is aimed at raising awareness of the importance of including entrepreneurship education in all stages of general education;
- The Communication from the Commission of 23.10.2006 provides an all-encompassing definition of adult education, while also admitting that it lacks a unitary definition: all forms of learning undertaken by adults after having left initial education and training, however far this process may have gone (e.g., including tertiary education). Obviously, the definition contains both quantitative and qualitative terms and the word undertaken may involve pro-active behaviour and an ethics of personal empowerment and autonomy. The development or actualisation of knowledge, skills and attitudes to fit the purpose is likely to result in renewed self-confidence and in “protective and risk-reducing effects” (Evans and Niemeyer, 2005: 1).
- There is need to mention that adult education is encompassed by lifelong learning, further subdivided into schools, higher education, vocational training and adult education sectors. Although the notion of lifelong learning (LLL) has a rich history (it started gaining currency and ascendency in the 1970s when UNESCO’s educational policies moved forward lifelong education and the learning society, culminating in Learning to Be – see ‘The Faure Report’, UNESCO 1972), it can be said that it became a leading concept following Decision no 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006 establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning. Article 1 broadly defines adult education as “all forms of non-vocational adult learning, whether of a formal, non-formal or informal nature”;
- The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning;
- The Council Resolution of 15 November 2007 on New Skills for New Jobs;
- The Council Conclusions of 22 May 2008 on adult learning;
- The Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies;
- The Council Conclusions of 11/12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (ET 2020). It urges taking action so as to raise adult participation in education and training to 15% (instead of 12.5%) by 2020, to meet real life demands (both professional and personal). Likewise, the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%.

7. Towards a frame of reference

We plead for an ecological approach to legal translation training in the sense that we favour a value neutral framework in which a common core is extracted from similarities and dissimilarities of locales so as to marshal and channel resources to certain systematic lines of action, with no pretence of universalism or of exhaustiveness. Instead, the common core should result from cross-fertilising ideas, from a
multiplicity of perspectives that become mutually enhancing and enlightening, allowing for a coherent and holistic vision. In this line of approach, Simeoni (1998) favours an ethics of location, understood as knowing when and how to apply general functioning principles to give them legitimacy, and Chesterman (in Duarte et al, 2006) promotes the sociology of translation, i.e. translation as meaningful practice. Admittedly, the framework should comply with the criteria of reliability as desired consistency (or reproducibility), and of validity, directing to the meaningfulness and appropriateness of its interpretations and applications to various cultural contexts.

We can rightly state that full awareness of the rich and complex nature of translation training programmes has been raised, ranging from methodology- and curriculum-based instruction to Human Resource Development (HRD) as achievement-related and performance-based. Hence, specialised translation training programmes are aimed at the development of competences - we use the term competence holistically, i.e. integrating knowledge, attitudes and skills, the complexity of performance becoming observable in overt behaviour. The complexity of performance is given, according to Marginson (quoted by Scott in Field and Leicester, 2000: 25ff) by the development and effective and efficient operationalisation of a complex package of skills.

- first-rate interpersonal and human relation skills (labelled the interpersonal dimension in the EMT framework);
- critical reading and interpretive skills to handle and make sense of the enormous amount of information available, complemented by knowing how to learn: collect, analyse, apply information and use technology appropriately (an aggregate of information mining competence and technological competence as defined in the EMT framework);
- communication skills (encompassing language competence, sociolinguistic dimension, text dimension, thematic area competence as presented in the EMT guidelines);
- adaptability skills: solving problems and thinking creatively (again equated to the interpersonal dimension, but also to product dimension);
- entrepreneurial skills to run a business or work for others, seeking (business) opportunities (interpersonal dimension);
- developmental skills: managing personal and professional growth (once more, activating the interpersonal dimension).

Scott (2000: 25) strongly supports a more coherent paradigm of learning and training by declaring the assimilation of higher education into lifelong learning: “The Death of Mass Higher Education and the Birth of Lifelong Learning”.

8. Raising awareness of quality assurance and sustainability

Quality assurance in specialised translator training programmes is still a challenge due to the complex profile of the sector and to the work on progress on harmonising curricula, methodology and deriving competences.

In order to streamline quality assurance mechanisms, we adopted both a top-down approach and a bottom-up one, which we consider complementary, informing each other with respect to follow-up actions. The former embeds the PDCA cycle in evaluation (either external or internal): Plan-Do-Check-Act (Deming’s wheel), which is translated in the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for VET and training as Planning (i.e., develop a strategic mission and vision) - Implementation (i.e., the related procedures) - Assessment and Evaluation – Feedback and Procedures for change. The last item refers to the trainees’ satisfaction (i.e. practicality for users in real contexts.
Admittedly, the curriculum design and implementation, teaching and learning resources, teaching methods and assessment procedures should be tailored to specific needs and vested interests. It is a question of:

- training services provision: the selection of teaching staff and practitioners is based on their relevant competences/expertise, degree of involvement in continuous professional training programmes in the field, degree of involvement and performance in related research programmes, number and quality of field-related publications, national and international visibility (for instance, participation in international conferences, seminars, round tables in country and abroad, web citations, affiliations with professional national and international bodies), degree of involvement in supervising students’ research (dissertation paper supervision and students’ research groups, positive evaluation by students and peers);
- teaching and learning resources availability: translation software, tailored course books, reference literature (library and e-library), etc;
- wide recognition of a distinct professional category, i.e. specialised translators (in terms of accountable professional practice) at the national and European level;
- flexible study programmes: balance between teaching hours, workshops and internship. In our case, practical training is related to seminars and workshops, amounting to 50% of the contact hours (compulsory and complementary subjects) and to 52.03% of the contact hours (elective subjects, included); moreover, a 1-week/semester/year is specified in the curriculum, which is, in fact, a short placement period at local Notary Public Offices, Lawyer Offices, Court of Appeal, etc by virtue of the strategic platform of inter-institutional cooperation. Last but not least, there is a 3 month-up to 1 year-internship provided in a translation industry abroad (status: elective).
- a variety of teaching and learning methods and techniques so as to secure the trainees’ active engagement: discussions, problem solving, conceptual and perceptual mapping, scenarios, modeling, simulations, role playing, surveys, case studies (provided by literature and acting as a springboard for critical discussion during course/workshop; also based on work placement experience as a measure of success), learner-driven projects, good practice analyses, etc;
- accountability, of documenting and assessing the learning and training outcomes insofar as to increase their visibility to trainees and other stakeholders, i.e. a question of recognition, validation and certification of (newly acquired or extended) competencies both at the national and European levels, following the implementation of a career guidance system and of an evidence-based evaluation mechanism (against measurable standards); such documenting also involves trainees’ portfolios and logbooks (as collection of evidence of practical competence).

In a detail-oriented approach, the learning and training objectives fall into scientific objectives and professional objectives. The former category comprises:

- development of the trainees’ critical and reflective thinking processes;
- development of the ability of efficiently assessing the level of difficulty of items of information;
- development of research and information dissemination skills;
- fostering of self-directed learning and autonomy;
- development of successful task management skills;
- development of self-evaluation skills enabling learners to monitor their intellectual progress and secure solid scientific knowledge;
- comprehension, assimilation and operationalisation of current methodological (linguistic and (inter)cultural) approaches in real life situations;
- accurate and creative manipulation of the key concepts in the field of translation, terminology and law.

The latter category includes:
• further development of linguistic proficiency (in English and French as L2) and acquisition of specialised knowledge (legal language terminology, legal text typology, recurrent problems in legal translation, etc);
• development of interdisciplinary approach skills in handling current and recurrent translation problems;
• enhancement of an eclectic philosophy of learning and practising through recontextualisation policies and appreciation of best practices;
• viable insights into the process of translating and achieve professional recognition;
• increased awareness of the factors affecting the standards of professionalism;
• enhancement of a more active collaboration and networking between translators as well as between translators and terminologists and experts in the legal field;
• facilitation of growth orientation, built on the premise of capitalising the translator’s insights, knowledge and expertise;
• mastery of computer-assisted translation and terminology tools: automatic translation software, database and workbench design and management.

With reference to the competences acquired upon the successful completion of the programme, we mention:
• communicative and cultural competence in Romanian (L1), English and French (L2);
• strategic ability to manage different tasks in which the translator’s visibility is secured through successful performance;
• ability to understand and produce various legal texts in various formats (be they whole texts, summaries etc);
• mastery and effective use of the specialism, i.e. legal language in Romanian, English and French;
• ability to translate and evaluate the translation(s) of legal texts from L2 into L1 and vice versa;
• ability to use and build bilingual/plurilingual databases and workbenches on a regular basis;
• ability to work under pressure against (tight) deadlines;
• ability to socialise and fully integrate into international teams;
• ability to maintain a high degree of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic ones) and of intellectual curiosity.

9. Evidence-based conclusions

The Master Programme of English and French Languages – European Legal Language Translation and Terminology is currently strengthening its European dimension: we are engaged in detecting commonalities across Europe, more particularly across the countries of the OPTIMALE project. On the other hand, we do not exclude the specificities that shape the specialised translator training programmes in each and every country, deriving from historical, socio-economic and cultural conditions (the culture of learning, included).

10. The forward looking nature of specialised translation training programmes

In the light of all of the above considerations, we can rightly state that formative translation training programmes and developmental process evaluation are not only present-, but also future-oriented, contributing to collective learning and sharing, uncertainty reduction in decision-making, exploration of
new horizons and development of new toolkits that fit for purpose. They will build routines and inroads of interference to secure the training programme replication and cost-effective application.

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