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Translators and interpreters have to deal with information related to various domains of human activity. In your opinion, in addition to linguistic disciplines, what courses should be added to the curriculum to improve translator training and better prepare them for a career?

Translation and interpreting is a complex social, interactive and contextualized activity bringing people together across cultures. There is a lot more to being a professional translator or interpreter than being able to speak one or more foreign languages well.

The standard training model today is student-focused and competence-based. It is aimed at equipping future translators and interpreters with the necessary skillset, judgment and knowledge to meet the needs of real users in real conditions. As a result, a typical translator and interpreter training curriculum is a combination of four components (modules) either enhanced or acquired through the course: language, knowledge, skills and professionalism.

Language and knowledge enhancement are the key supporting components, whereas translation and interpreting skills and professionalism are acquired in the course of training. These four competencies must be fully integrated, in order to achieve operational translation or interpreting expertise at initial professional level. It is important to find a good balance between the practical and the theoretical components of initial translator and interpreter training programs. This is when students acquire the skills and principles relevant to translation and interpreting in all areas, modes and settings.

The exact content of each of these four modules depends on the programme, its admission requirements and learning outcomes. For example, additional language and knowledge enhancement modules in conference interpreting training courses usually focus on law, economics, politics, parliamentary procedures etc. Medical or legal translators and interpreters will require their own specialized knowledge and language

enhancement modules. Future interpreters will need additional training in public speaking and voice hygiene, as well as special language enhancement support for interpreting into their B languages.

In terms of professionalism, future graduates need to be introduced to proper working conditions and the overall organization of the profession. They also require practical information about market organization and acquiring work. Students need to understand the concept of ethics and their importance for translators and interpreters. They need to understand how to work in a team and deal with disputes in the profession, as well as to distinguish between an ethical translator or interpreter and an unethical one.

Of course the curriculum needs to be updated from time to time, in order to reflect the changing professional environment, the development of information technologies and possible reforms of education systems.

What aspects of the translator's job do you value most?

Since I am mainly a conference interpreter, I will talk about the aspects of the interpreter's job that I appreciate the most. Interpreting, as I have already said above, is a social and interactive activity bridging cultures and communities. This job has taken me to many incredible places, some of which I had never dreamed of visiting: a control room of a nuclear power plant and a nuclear fuel assemblies production facility, an off-shore salmon farm and an oil refinery, a presidential palace and the wine cellar of a large wine institute.

I observed the Victory Day Parade at the Red Square sitting next to official guests and then had the opportunity to talk with some of them at the reception in the St. George Hall of the Grand Kremlin Palace. I have interpreted for UNESCO in Paris and Euro-control in Brussels, at a President's swearing-in ceremony at the Ukrainian Parliament and at the OSCE Summit in Astana.

As presidential interpreter, I have interpreted at official and informal meetings of Bulgarian Presidents, Vice Presidents and Prime Ministers with Putin and Nazarbaev, Aliiev and Hu Jintao, Heinz Fischer and Shimon Peres, Marie-Louise Coleiro Preca and Mahmoud Abbas.

Every new assignment is a new challenge for the inquiring mind. It is also very demanding, since one has to do a lot of preliminary reading and research. For example, to be prepared to interpret at a seminar on diseases of terrestrial and aquatic animals or at an international conference on natural disasters. It is also very exciting in that you learn so many new things and meet new and interesting people.

Being an interpreter teaches you a lot about working in a team with your booth-mates in simultaneous interpreting, with people from the Office of the Chief of Protocol and security guards during official and state visits, with translation agencies and direct clients.

I also thrive on stress and the resulting adrenaline rush you experience just seconds before stepping out on the stage in front of a hundred people or taking my place in the booth.

To summarize, these are the things I love about interpreting: going to new places, acquiring new knowledge, meeting new people and feeling the adrenaline rush before every single job.

How has the development of information technology change the work of translators? Which technologies do you consider particularly useful and which would you be willing to discard?

Again, I will answer this question as an interpreter. Of course, I also do translations using CAT tools but this is a much smaller part of my work compared to interpreting.

Undoubtedly, the rise of technology within the language services industry has its implications for interpreters. On the one hand, interpreters have not so far benefited from the same level of automation or innovation when compared with the wide choice of CAT tools available to translators. On the other hand, technology-assisted interpreting is already a fact.

Virtual Interpreting Technology (VIT) is one of the fastest growing areas in the language industry thanks in part to the development of Web Real-Time Communication (WebRTC). Applications such as Speakus, Interpretfy, VoxBoxer etc. are among the leading interpreting systems on the market today.

There are new terminology tools and applications designed to meet the needs of different interpreting contexts and modes. For instance, Intragloss, InterpretBank and Interplex UE are user-friendly terminology management tools which help manage, learn and look up glossaries and term-related information.

As more and more interpreters are turning to mobile devices to take notes in consecutive interpreting, there are note-taking applications like Evernote, LectureNotes and PenSupremacy that can help keep notes that are more effective. There is also a computer-assisted tool for the semi-automation of note-taking in consecutive interpreting and digital pens capable of synchronizing writing with ambient sound.

Technologies help interpreters work better. What interpreters use depends on their needs and preferences, but also on market requirements. If my client is organizing an event using a particular platform or application, I will need to learn to use it to be competitive on the market.

What aspects of your work do you consider to be most difficult and demanding?

It may sound strange but the most exciting aspects are also the most demanding. Every component in conference interpreting may pose a source of varying degrees of complexity. This is true only to a certain level where we have ‘complex but routine real-life tasks’ (Setton & Dawrant, 2016). These advanced and challenging tasks are common in everyday interpreting. Complex mixed-media input, unusual topics, highly formal or technical speeches, high speed and accent are all demanding but manageable tasks; ones which interpreters can be reasonably expected to cope with and deliver clear and user-oriented performance.

Unfortunately, interpreters sometimes have their performance limits put to the test in extreme and near-impossible conditions with unreasonable client expectations, i.e. impossible accents, highly specialized texts read out monotonously at high speed but not supplied in advance etc. Interpreters can sometimes adapt to these conditions for a certain period, using survival and coping tactics. For example, faced with high-

speed input, interpreters may shorten their active interpreter shifts from the regular 20—30 min to 10—15 min to maintain the quality level of the interpreting.

Working in front of an audience is both exciting and challenging, especially in consecutive conditions where the interpreter performs in front of the same audience as the speaker. In fact, consecutive interpreters always have two audiences: the speaker and the speaker's audience. The interpreter must be able to make both these audiences feel satisfied and confident that he or she is the right person for the task of maintaining communication. Hugo Cole (1958), an English composer and writer, claims that the relationship between composer and performer is a perpetually uneasy one because "...each is at the same time master and servant. The composer decrees, the performer obeys; but he obeys at his own discretion, knowing that the last word is with him".

I think that this describes very well the relationship between the speaker and the interpreter. The speaker decrees and the interpreter is required to obey. However, interpreters obey at their own discretion. This is shaped by interpreters' self-perception of their role and function in the communication process. It is also linked with the issue of quality, since interpreters' perceptions of the nature of their task will ultimately shape their performance.

In one of my articles (Naimushin, 2014), I compared the consecutive interpreter to the solo performer who has both to write the song and then perform it in front of an audience. Similarly, learning a language and interpreting techniques is one thing; delivering quality performance in front of an audience is another. Consecutive interpreters require focused training to develop specific performance skills different from linguistic skills and interpretation techniques. In my classes, I always take time with the students to talk about performing and to help them bring out and develop their individuality and their performance skills. To me, this is the most exciting and at the same time the most challenging aspect of my work as both an interpreter and interpreter trainer.

Could you give an example of a translation failure, the most challenging or the most amusing professional situation you have encountered?

People like to talk about translation mistakes and failures. Menu translations all over the world have always been the target of ironic comments. There is even a joke that if you want to make a translator laugh, all you have to do is to give them a menu to read. The truth is that menus are usually translated by Google Translate or by restaurant staff with poor or no knowledge of foreign languages. This has nothing to do with professional translation.

If you google 'translation mistakes', you will see a great many results describing '5 translation mistakes with serious consequences', 'Top 10 Translation Errors of All Time' or '9 Little Translation Mistakes That Caused Big Problems' etc. Given scrutiny, however, more often than not these mistakes have been committed by people who are not trained and experienced translators or interpreters, or by professionals who have ventured into an area in which they are not sufficiently competent.

Let us have a closer look at the following widely discussed case (Kelly & Zetzsche, 2012): 'When President Carter traveled to Poland in 1977, the State Department hired a Russian interpreter who knew Polish, but was not used to interpreting professionally

in that language. Through the interpreter, Carter ended up saying things in Polish like “when I abandoned the United States” (for “when I left the United States”) and “your lusts for the future” (for “your desires for the future”), mistakes that the media in both countries very much enjoyed’.

So is this a translation mistake? On the surface, yes. However, in essence it is a personnel selection mistake on behalf of the US State Department plus an ethical issue with the Russian-born interpreter Steven Seymour accepting to work into his obviously passive (C) language at governmental level.

Let me give an example. My first language is Russian and I have lived in Bulgaria ever since I was fourteen. I have an MA and a PhD in the Bulgarian language and literature from Sofia University and for over 10 years, I have worked as an interpreter for the Administration of the President of Bulgaria. To sum up, I can confidently claim Bulgarian to be my near-native language. Leaving aside all political and emotional disputes, we can say that Macedonian is the closest relative of the Bulgarian language, with the two languages having a high degree of mutual intelligibility. When I go to Macedonia, I can almost freely communicate with Macedonians in Bulgarian. I understand them and they understand me. On several occasions, I have performed simultaneous interpreting from Macedonian into English at working meetings when some of the Macedonian participants would just switch into their mother tongue. Nobody asked me beforehand whether I would agree to interpret from Macedonian. In informal or semi-formal meetings, it can work out and in fact, it has worked on these occasions. However, I would never accept an official assignment to interpret from, let alone into, Macedonian at any level, especially not a state or official visit.

Once I had to interpret at a lecture on British Literature from Serbian into English. Again, I was completely unprepared and caught unawares. At a major international conference at Sofia University, a participant from Serbia came out and announced in English that he would prefer to deliver his talk in Serbian. He was sure that speakers of Bulgarian and Russian would have no problems in following him. However, all the other participants surely would. So my booth-mate and I decided to give it a try and interpret the talk the best we could making the best use of survival and coping tactics. Again, it worked with the added chance of it being the last presentation before lunch break, but I would have never accepted and would never agree to interpret from Serbian at any level as an official assignment.

Looking back, I find these situations amusing. Back then in the booth, ‘amusing’ was the last thing that would come to my mind. This is an example of extreme conditions when interpreters have the right to deny service in view of unreasonable expectations. Of course, ‘utterly impossible conditions (and sometimes, whole assignments) must be refused’ (Setton & Dawrant, 2016: 320), but the conditions described above just could not have been known or managed in advance. I use such examples in my classes to show that coping with unexpected challenges and emergencies is part of the overall expertise in interpreting. I have also described some of the amusing situations in my interpreting career in the following articles (Naimushin 2012, 2015).

What tips would you like to give to translators as they start out?

Teaching translation and interpreting is an important part of my professional life. Indeed, I have many useful tips for future translators and interpreters in all four modules

of the curriculum, i.e. language, knowledge, skills and professionalism. Many sound tips can be found on the Internet in articles, comments and interviews of experienced professionals. One of my favorite tips is to try to acquire some work experience as soon as possible, even if it entails working for free. At New Bulgarian University, my students successfully interpret at seminars and talks by guest lecturers, both consecutively and simultaneously.

Here, I would like to bring up a more general issue that is from time to time discussed by scholars, professionals and students, especially with respect to simultaneous interpreting. This issue is ‘talent’.

Students are often intimidated and discouraged by the uncompromising position of some of the ‘old masters’. This position is very simple: interpreters are born, not made. You need a special talent, a heavenly gift to become a simultaneous interpreter. If you are not endowed by such talent, forget about this career. Nothing and nobody could possibly help you. Simultaneous interpreting cannot be taught.

This position recently resurfaced in an interview with Nikita Krivoshein (Tolstoy, 2019). He claims that while sitting on admission exams at some of the leading interpreting schools, he was able to diagnose applicants as ‘talented’ or ‘not talented’ within a matter of minutes by just talking to them. He also laments the profanation and commercialization of simultaneous interpreting which, according to him, started out as a ‘noble craft’ and then has since degenerated into a ‘profession’.

However, before simultaneous interpreting became a profession, there was no simultaneous interpreting. Before simultaneous interpreting, there was no training methodology or interpreter trainers. The pioneers, whom we all deeply respect, just sat down in their booths and started interpreting because there were no trainers to train them. They received on-the-job training. It would be very interesting and insightful to compare their performance on their first day in the booth and then on the 100th day in the booth.

Do not get me wrong: I am not casting doubt upon the exceptional professional qualities, courage and achievements of the people who laid the foundations of our profession as they ventured into the unknown. However, the fact that they started out as ‘self-taught’ and ‘self-made’ simultaneous interpreters should be no reason to claim uniqueness. I can understand this position: ‘Nobody trained us, we just sat in the booth and it worked all by itself because we had talent. And now, some people say that it’s 1% talent and 99% hard work. Some people have the audacity to claim they can teach simultaneous interpreting to people without our talent’.

Therefore, my word of encouragement to people interested in conference interpreting and who are contemplating a career in this exciting field is this: interpreters are made, not born. The situation now is very different from more than half a century ago. We have at our disposal modern interpreter training methodology which I briefly described in my answer to the first question. We have experienced teachers and leading schools like FTI in Geneva, ISIT and ESIT in Paris or SCIT in Saint Petersburg. In any area, talent is a great starting point. Then comes the most exciting part, i.e. hard work under the guidance of experienced teachers who know how to help budding translators and interpreters to realize their dreams.

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