

REPORTS:

Translator Training in the Baltics “*Homines dum docent discunt*”

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Since 1999 the Aarhus School of Business (ASB) has been involved in translator training in the Baltics. Projects have been completed in Lithuania (Vilnius University), in Estonia (Tartu University) and most recently in Latvia (University of Latvia). All three projects are financed by the Royal Danish Foreign Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

BACKGROUND

When the Baltic states regained their freedom and turned towards the West, translators were few and far between. Not translators of Russian or Polish that is, but translators of western languages such as English, French and German. Soon business with the western world exploded and anybody who – more or less – mastered one of the above languages was called upon to translate. Following the Baltic applications to become members of the EU, a more official need for translation arose. In each country the *Acquis* has to be translated along with numerous official documents which must be translated as part of the pre-accession process.

So, in just ten years a massive demand for commercial as well as official translators has arisen, and when EU membership is a reality it will absolutely drain the Baltic market for qualified translators – and still there will not be enough – unless new candidates are trained. Not candidates graduating in accordance with old philological requirements, but candidates who are trained specifically to become translators. That is, candidates who are specialised in LSP translation, not in the translation of literature or poetry. The job of the Aarhus School of Business has been to export an adapted version of our translator training programme to the three Baltic states in order to facilitate the pre-accession process and help meeting the need for candidates anticipated to follow EU membership.

Translation Centres

Each Baltic country has its own national translation centre (often sponsored to a certain extent) which is generally much better staffed and better off than the universities. Employees at the translation centres have typically graduated from the national universities and thus have philological backgrounds. They have earned their skills the hard way and through in-house training. Still most of the translators do not have any formal translation qualifications and, most importantly, they are too few – the reasons why recent EU progress reports were very critical of the standard and especially speed of the translation of relevant pre-accession documents.

Baltic Reality

During the past few years, i.e. very recently, all three countries have introduced post-graduate Diploma or MA translation programmes, but for obvious reasons there is hardly any staff equipped to teach LSP translation. What we find in the Baltic countries is often enthusiastic, but at the same time over-worked and under-paid university staff. Staff as well as students generally have a good command of English (the target language of the projects) and students are often linguistically more well-versed than Danish translation students. How could we ensure a sustainable, quality translation programme taught by qualified staff and at the same time ensure an immediate production of well-qualified candidates?

THE ELEMENTS OF THE PROJECTS

Training of trainers

This is the core element of all the projects – and this is where sustainability is to be ensured.

The element consists of:

Direct training

This means that two Danish lecturers go to the relevant Baltic country and teach all translation lecturers for a week. These courses are methodological and the focus is on how LSP translation is taught at the ASB. We pass on many kinds of knowledge, i.e. from the underlying principles of teaching LSP as well as common pitfalls related to each individual LSP discipline right down to what kind of study material and which information sources we use, how we conduct our lessons and how we structure the term, what we offer our students and what we require of them in return, etc

Shadow teachers

When Danish lecturers teach the students legal, business and technical translation (see below) the relevant Baltic lecturers are supposed to function as shadow teachers to their Danish counterparts. This is to ensure that they experience Danish lecturers in theory as well as in practice. Being shadow teachers also allows the

Baltic lecturers to discuss the curriculum in detail and the focus is both on methodology and subject-matter.

Twinning

The concept of twinning is related to almost all of the project activities. It simply means that right from the onset of each project, we are concerned with having established who of the local lecturers will be in charge of each LSP discipline and to put these lecturers in contact with their specific counterparts at the ASB. Very often (but not always) it follows naturally from the teacher training and the teaching of students, and it is the aim of this effort that Danish and Baltic lecturers will form informal relationships which will outlast the projects as such, ensuring present and hopefully future mutual exchange of ideas, experience, etc.

Study trip

Each project includes a study trip to the ASB. The aim of such an activity is to introduce key LSP teachers from the Baltics to ASB applied teaching methods and systems. The Baltic teachers in question are twinned with their Danish counterpart and participate in the teaching activities (planning, actual teaching, evaluation) of a given week. At the same time they get hands-on experience with the study material and possibilities of support (technical, library etc.) applied at the business school. The activity includes a two-day IT-course which provides an introduction to language-related technological tools to be used in connection with translation and the preparation of study material. The study trip also has a social programme which generally ensures that the informal relationships are strengthened considerably.

Procurement

This activity concerns assistance in connection with the creation and collection of teaching material, including advice on procurement of relevant translation and LSP literature, dictionaries, reference books, etc. In many LSP subjects teaching material with focus on translation is scarce which is why the Baltic teachers are introduced to methods of making their own material and compendiums. Relevant published as well as non-published material from the ASB is made available to facilitate this process. The activity furthermore includes subscriptions to various relevant LSP periodicals.

Training of students

In order to strengthen specific knowledge and secure the graduation of qualified translators in the first years of the new LSP translation programmes we give the students three week-courses on legal, business and technical translation, respectively. Each course is taught by two Danish teachers and consists of a mixture of lectures and workshops.

External examiners

At the final exams Danish lecturers function as external examiners partly to assess the students in question, but also to obtain a basis from which to discuss the required standards of professional translators.

Curriculum development

Right from the beginning of the project we assist in developing the structure of the translation programmes. A prerequisite for the Danish projects is the division of the studies of conference interpreters and translators into two separate study profiles. The activity varies according to the needs of each individual country, but often includes discussions on admission tests, study programme, the nature of the final exams, requirements for MA theses and the evaluation of students.

In-service training for the translation centres

This activity includes three six-day intensive in-service courses in legal, business and technical translation, respectively in order to increase the standard of translation immediately. The courses have varied greatly according to the needs of each translation centre.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The numerous activities involved in the projects do of course require a large amount of coordination. We consider it of utmost importance for project management to pay frequent visits to the respective Baltic institutions. To get acquainted with their ways and means and general working conditions as well as the theoretical and practical backgrounds and status of the people involved. Only sufficient background knowledge, including the willingness to learn and understand the particular conditions of each institution, will provide the best possible chance of targeting each course successfully. It goes without saying that the practical coordination of all activities and the busy schedules of the people involved sometimes take their toll.

As far as the ASB is concerned the projects have meant new challenges and new ways of thinking. The teaching of colleagues as well as students from very different (yet sometimes strangely similar) professional traditions and cultures has broadened the horizons of ASB lecturers and has at the same time led us to reconsider our own teaching methods and resulted in new ideas for the benefit of our own students.

So, *“even while they teach, men learn”*

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you want to know more, please feel free to contact:

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