

A Crash Course for Future Translators

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the objectives, contents and teacher-learner relations reflected in a course in English for specific purposes taught in the study branch English for Business. The course addresses the problems of future candidates for official interpreters and translators. The author presents a brief overview of translation practice in the Czech context, concentrating mainly on the basic terminology within the translator's field of interest. The article lists the most frequently translated official documents and legal acts relating to an interpreter's competence with view to the specific terminology to be acquired. Special attention is paid to terminology glossaries created by students. An integral part of the course is an overview of the used authentic materials and their adaptation for students' needs.

1 INTRODUCTION

The recent changes in European education accompanied by a growing number of student and teacher exchanges within Europe and beyond have led to new approaches to education and professional training in various fields of business. Among the most important issues in modern educational methodology is the connection of theory with practice. The requirements of theoretical education and practical training have undergone major changes, moving from a traditional way of gaining knowledge of one or more branches of science towards the acquisition of applied skills, independent thinking and simulation of real conditions in the given field of interest.

Teaching foreign languages is, due to the recent European integration, considered one of the priorities in education. Approaching a real language environment is among the main objectives of the learning process in a foreign language acquisition. As part of the overall trend to achieve a high authenticity of language learning, it is strongly recommended to develop new courses focusing on professional preparation while developing specific language skills.

Among the fields receiving special attention is translation and interpreting connected to European mobility. This task requires the thorough preparation of professional interpreters/translators whose main task is to cooperate with the state and public administration bodies, the police and the courts in official communication with foreign citizens.

1.1. The Role of an Interpreter

The required level of professional interpreting performance is conditioned by certain prerequisites, such as a clean criminal history and a university degree, proficiency in the given language certified by a university diploma or an equivalent, including the sound knowledge of the related cultural environment. Obviously, the most qualified interpreters are recruited from bilingual families, where one of the parents or spouses is a native speaker of the given language. Another important condition is a long-term stay abroad enabling the candidates to become familiar with the real language environment.

Situations that interpreters need to be able to negotiate will be dealt with in the following section; they pre-determine the terminology required by interpreters to complete their role effectively. Interpreters in the Czech Republic can also use the service offered by the Chamber of Court Interpreters and Translators. For example, lifelong learning education and qualification-oriented course are organized by the Law Faculty of the Charles University of Prague.

Nevertheless, the most important prerequisite for successful court interpreting is hands-on-experience. The Act on Authorized Experts and Interpreters stipulates their professional role and position. However, none of the newly appointed interpreters has sufficient practical knowledge to appropriately grasp the work with official documents, such as a birth certificates, university diplomas, tax returns or prenuptial agreements. Nor are they aware of their position in a court room, or their duties at a wedding ceremony in which one of the spouses is a foreign national with a limited or zero knowledge of the Czech language. This is just to mention a few of the

many different situations requiring an interpreter's assistance: there exists no institution that prepares candidates for the performance of these highly demanding tasks.

The author of the article made an attempt to bridge the gap between a novice and an experienced official interpreter through a course in English for specific purposes (ESP) she opened in the study programme of English for Business at the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy. It was essential to do thorough needs analysis among the students and to make the appropriate conditions viable within the framework of standard language lessons.

2. Course in ESP

2.1 Needs Analysis

The preparation of the course was based on a thorough needs analysis of foreign language communication skills of students. It was carried out in the form of an interview with teachers of specialized subjects in the above-mentioned study programme. The aim of the interviews was to ensure a mutual link between individual courses and to match their level of communicative competence. An inquiry was made into the previous skills achieved in specific language courses. In the first year of study, students are introduced to the basics of business English. The course is linked to a follow-up subject in the second study year, which aims at academic skills and cultural differences. Therefore, the last study year should provide students with a practically- and professionally-oriented course linked to the previously-acquired specific language skills.

2.2 Preparation of Texts

The next step in the course design was collecting the relevant materials which mainly consisted of authentic texts, textbooks and publications designed for students of law and public administration. Text such as *The Court of First Instance of the European Communities*, *Office for Official Publications of the European Communities* were used as a background for the course preparation.

A substantial part of the text materials is the author's collection of adapted texts, which form the terminology base for the course. It covers most of the required areas of interest and contains thematic glossaries corresponding to the most frequent types of translation. The collection of texts was followed by consultations on terminology with lawyers specializing in the European Union community law and international law. Such consultations were an inevitable part of the preparatory work due to the fact that the author does not have the appropriate legal background. Therefore it was essential to cooperate with experts in order to verify the concordance of the terminology with different legal situations.

The next step in the course design was the linguistic and graphic adjustment of materials. Texts collected in the real language environment (such as newspaper articles, articles from scientific journals, Internet-based texts, etc.) can rarely be used in lessons directly with no adaptation. They need adjustments especially in terms of their length and level of language difficulty. Materials for teaching have been complemented by a set of language exercises with the stress put mainly on the development of specific terminology. It is essential to adapt the text and adjust it with the aim to enhance the relevant language skills. Certain authentic texts are suitable for the development of reading comprehension while others can be used to improve grammar and vocabulary.

The efficacy of the adapted materials was tested directly in the lessons during the pilot semester. The main objective of this stage was to get reliable feedback from students in the course of English for Specific Purposes III. Students cooperated in the assessment and also in the preparation of materials, having an opportunity to express their opinion about the course contents, to comment on the materials and to suggest extensions to the course with further topics of their interest.

Having tested the materials in language lessons, the texts were published in the form of a workbook. Individual parts of the book can be made directly accessible on the University website, which allows a regular update and completion of further units.

2.3 Course contents and outcome

The annotation of the course English for Specific Purposes III summarizes the course contents in the following way:

“The course objective is to achieve effective and fluent communication in profession-oriented situations. The main stress is put on systematic enhancement of specialized vocabulary and intensification of the communicative competence level. Receptive language skills are trained through authentic materials and special attention is paid to the corresponding level of a written utterance. Specific language is structured as a three-level module, while transfer to a higher level is conditioned by completion of requirement of the preceding level. Entrance level of language skill is B2 (CEFR).”

Module ESP III is the last and most advanced of three specific language modules taught in the undergraduate study programme English for Business Studies. The initial level B2 CEFR ensures sufficient communicative competence for the development of a highly specific vocabulary that legal terminology certainly represents.

The course outcome as described in the study agenda system indicates the following specific skills:

“Upon a successful completion of the course requirements, students are able to communicate independently and effectively in professionally oriented situations in the framework of the course content. They acquire an overview of the role and daily work of a public service interpreter. Using the relevant language tools, they translate the basic formal documents in both directions (CZ-Eng-CZ)”

* <http://portal.upce.cz>

The basic documents referred to in the course description include frequently translated official instruments, such as various certificates, school reports and diplomas, tax and internal revenue documents, court judgments, business contracts.

On the basis of the aforementioned findings, the author compiled a course syllabus containing the following topics:

1. Institutions of translators and interpreters in the Czech Republic
2. The role of an interpreter in the state administration
3. Definitions of law
4. Division of law - Criminal, Civil and Commercial Law
5. Law and Order. Crime and Punishment
6. Law of Contract
7. Translating official documents.
8. Reflection of justice in movies.

The selected areas of interest correspond to the workload in a course with two-hour teaching units per week, (a twelve-week semester) while respecting the standard length of a semester, that is 12 weeks. This structure gives the teacher an opportunity to deal with certain themes in detail. It is evident that the greatest attention and scope falls on the translator's acquisition of the terminology. During the course of seminar work, students compile their own glossary of terminology reflecting individual themes of the syllabus, with the aim to compile final version of a legal terminology glossary. The glossary is presented in the form of a bi-lingual list that includes students' comments and explanations. The assignment is based on the hands-on-experience of analyzing authentic materials and has a great practical value for the future translator's work, being much more than a single purpose task designed solely to satisfy course requirements.

The work of a public service interpreter is dealt with in units 1, 2 and 7. The unit "*Institutions of translators and interpreters in the Czech Republic*" introduces to students the role and functioning of the Union of Translators

and Interpreters and of the Chamber of Public Service Interpreters. These institutions support the registered translators of all language combinations.

The second unit, entitled "*The role of an interpreter in the state administration,*" provides students with an overview of activities, situations and documents requiring official translation or interpreting and explains the most important aspects of an interpreter's work.

The unit "*Translating official documents*" enables the students to try out translation of documents that most frequently require official seal. They are asked to translate their personal birth certificate, get acquainted with the wording and use notary's and interpreter's verification clauses, verification of a translated text and keeping records of translations. Practical experience of public service formalities is very important and hands-on-experience cannot be replaced by any theoretical preparation.

The last topic "*Depiction of justice in movies*" is devoted to criminal law, despite the fact that it is the least occurring situation for interpreters. Nevertheless, this topic is reported to be one of the most attractive areas of interest among the students, despite the complexity of its terminology.

To present the most useful aspects of penal code terminology, the author selected two movies of American origin: the first is a classical drama directed by Sidney Lumet in 1957 "*12 Angry Men*", and the second is "*The Fracture*", a crime story directed by Gregory Hoblit with Anthony Hopkins playing the main character. This movie appeared in 2007 and represents semi-authentic material illustrating the US criminal procedure, from the committing of a crime, including police investigation, the role of the state prosecuting bodies, up to the lively and vivid court hearing, providing a meaningful and complex occasion to use the relevant terminology.

3. Conclusion

This course in specific language has no ambition to substitute for hands-on-experience. It aims to equip the students with the essential skills and terminology to be used in their future professional life. The accession of the

Czech Republic to the Schengen Zone opened many opportunities for labour force migration and student and teacher exchange visits. All of the above require numerous administration acts which in turn call for interpreting and translation services, thus justifying the need for the preparation of highly qualified professionals.

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