

## **Translation Studies : An Independent Discipline**

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### **Introduction**

This paper is about «translation studies» in the UK. It highlights the state of art of this field and shows the perceptions and expectations of this profession. Malmkjær (2006), at a workshop presented the same topic and went into details of what makes a «good» translator. She also looked deeper into a BA course taught at the Translation Centre at Middlesex. I added to that my experience of teaching Translation studies at a postgraduate level (MA in Applied Translation English-Arabic-English) at Exeter University.

In order to provide more detailed information, I exposed what exactly is taught week by week as a sample of an MA course in the UK, without claiming that it is what or how a programme should be. The paper expects to share ideas, raise concerns and above all contribute to the ongoing discussion of how we can better our programmes based on each other's expertise.

### **1. Perceptions of the Subject and its Profession**

Despite the recent boom in translation studies and the desperate need for translators (e.g. Iraq War), translation studies in the UK is still poorly recognised (Malmkjær, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. «Translation studies» has been recognised as an independent field only in the recent years. It used to be associated with other disciplines such as linguistics. Furthermore, it is not a subject that has traditionally been taught at undergraduate levels in the UK. It is often taught at the postgraduate level, after graduating with a first degree. There is no doubt that this lack of awareness is greater in the UK than in most of the rest of the world (Malmkjær, 2006). On the contrary, in Algeria for example, translation studies degrees

are highly valued and the students' acceptance rate to these degrees is usually higher than other humanities subjects. In addition, students are expected to be native in one language and native-like or highly proficient in two more other languages, for example Arabic-French and English, which is not necessarily the case in the UK.

Despite the negative picture given earlier, translation courses are very popular. They attract particularly foreign students (for example, English immersion courses). They are particularly well-liked at the postgraduate level, as they are seen as «hands on courses». They provide students with both theoretical and practical matters of translation. The teaching in the UK is often done in relatively small classes, where contact hours are used more efficiently due to the equally important role given to the work done outside class through sometimes e-learning spaces.

## **2. Market Forces: Students versus Employers**

The perception of translation studies as a profession is motivated by its prospective customers, who are the students, and by the prospective customers for those students, who are their potential employers. Obviously, students will not usually apply to such a programme if they do not believe it will provide them with the necessary skills that enable them to perform well in this profession; and employers will not employ the graduates of such a programme if they do not think that the graduates will come to them well equipped (Malmkjær, 2006). Therefore, prospective students and their prospective employers can have an implicit input on the programme's contents. Questions related to what and when to teach are to be answered in the following sections.

## **3. Bachelor of Art in Translation (BA)**

More and more universities are now offering translation studies at the BA level, e.g. Salford, London Metropolitan University, Edinburgh, Middlesex, Roehampton and Birmingham University (Aston). I will take an example provided by Malmkjær (2006), which is the BA in Translation Course at Middlesex University. A 4 year programme.

- The course includes a one year abroad in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the programme, where the students spend one whole year in the target language country. This gives the students the ability to deal with authentic language. It is found to be very beneficial for students' language proficiency. If this option is not suitable, students are required to spend a one year work placement in UK, where they are expected

to work in a translation firm to gain experience. Students have the option to have both (i.e., 6 months abroad and 6 months work placement).

- Prior to that (i.e. in Year 1 and Year 2) students pay or receive visits from or to translation businesses. This is done under modules called «Introduction to Translation Practice» and «Quality in Translation» (see Figure 1).
- The Translation Centre at Middlesex organises «Seminar Series» inviting speakers from outside the university to give talks in related topics. This enables students to be up to date with the latest theoretical and practical issues in the field.

### **3.1 The Programme's Aims (Malmkjær, 2006)**

The programme aims at achieving the following:

- Increase students' awareness of the nature of translations: the history of translation; the cultural impact of translation; the texture of translation.
- Improve students' awareness of the processes involved in translating and in the production of translations.
- Provide access to contemporary theoretical approaches to translation.
- Prepare students for the translation industry and related occupations and for further academic study.

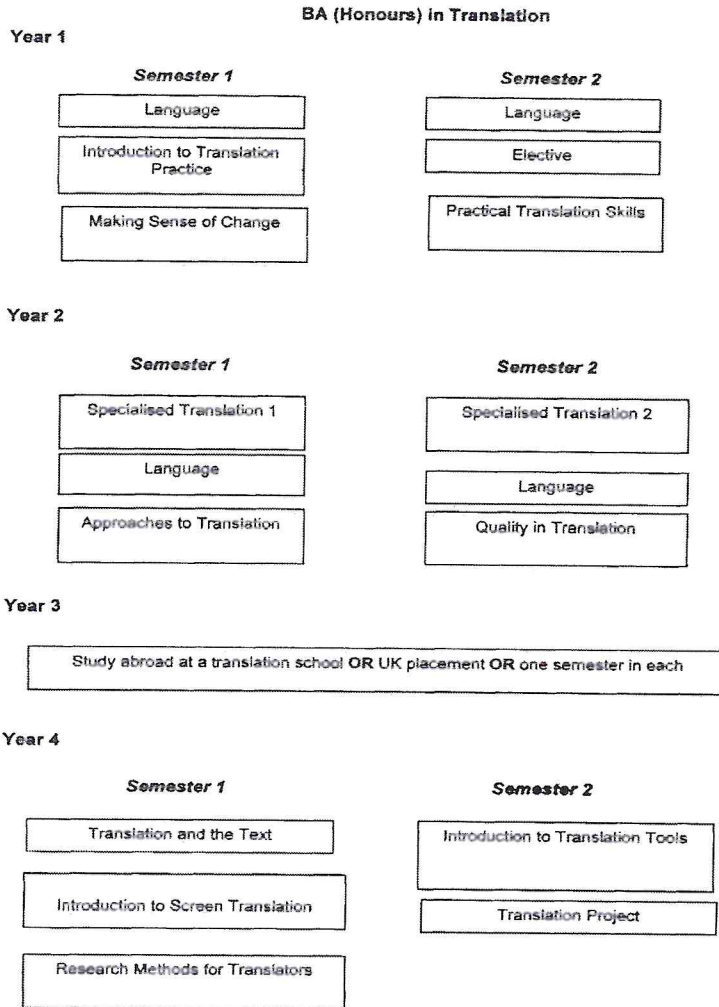


Figure 1: BA in Translation course at Middlesex University (Malmkjær, 2006)

### **3.2 What Modules?**

As seen in Figure 1, the modules taught are as follows:

- Language module which helps in strengthening the students language skills (years 1 & 2).
- Practical Translation module which provides practice in the translation of a variety of text types in both language directions over the two semesters (Year 2).
- Modules on Screen Translation and on Translation Tools are offered in (Year 4), subsequent to the students' year abroad and/or placement in a professional setting.
- Translation studies introduced in the first semester and carried out to the end of the programme.

### **4. Masters of Art in Translation (MA) in the UK**

Most MA translation programmes provide translation theory modules as well as practice or applied ones. The translation modules evolve around the following themes:

- Methods and Approaches in Translation Studies
- Language and Translation
- Translation Theory
- Theoretical Issues in Translation
- Translation and Interpreting Studies
- Specialized/Applied Translation

In addition to the above modules in translation, other modules in the fields of linguistics are provided. The linguistics or linguistic related modules are around (Shuttleworth, 2006<sup>2</sup>):

- Corpus Linguistics for Translators
- Principles & Applications of Machine Translation
- Cross-Cultural Pragmatics
- English Language Study using Corpora Analysis
- Written Discourse Analysis
- Creole Linguistics
- Sociolinguistics

In the following section, I will present an MA programme I taught in Applied Translation (English-Arabic-English) at Exeter University, Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies:

**Entry Requirements** Normally a 2 :1 Honours degree or equivalent in a Middle Eastern language (Arabic) from a recognised institution, and an excellent knowledge of English. Non-standard applications are also considered on their merits.

**Duration:** *11 months full-time; 23 months part-time*

### **Modules**

- Translation Methodology.
- Specialist Subject Translation *either* from a Middle Eastern language (Arabic) to English *or* from English to a Middle Eastern language (Arabic).
- Option modules from a selection including Structuring Electronic Texts, Machine-Aided Translation, Lexicography, and approved modules from the Institute's other Masters programmes.
- Dissertation or project of 15,000 words based on a research project on any aspect of the programme or, where appropriate, on a work placement.

**Assessment:** By coursework/projects/portfolio as appropriate and final dissertation.

### **Module Outline**

#### **Aims**

The module provides students with a thorough introduction to specialist subject domains in the source language (Arabic) and target language (English). These will normally cover business, commerce, politics and social sciences.

#### **Intended Learning Outcomes**

**Module-Specific Skills:** Students will acquire an in-depth knowledge of the subject domain that will enable them to translate specialist texts from the source language to the target language.

**Discipline-Specific Skills:** Students will develop expertise in a specialised domain which they may wish to offer for the purposes of professional

translation. They will, independently of the tutor, be able to access, evaluate and use electronic and paper-based resources.

**Personal and Key Skills:** The expertise acquired in translating for a specialist domain will be extendible to another domain for the purposes of further professional development. Students will demonstrate the ability to produce, to deadline, a substantial translation (written text) of a complex nature and present it to the required professional standards.

### **Learning/Teaching Methods**

Students will be taught via 20 x 1 hour seminars.

### **Assignments**

Students will complete weekly written assignments of practical translation tasks (between 500 and 800 words). These assignments will not count towards the final assessment.

### **Assessment**

One x 7,500-word written assignment [100%]. This will normally take the form of a portfolio of three equally weighted (33%) translation texts selected from topics of the syllabus.

### **Syllabus Plan**

I think that providing a syllabus gives a clearer breakdown of what this sample (MA) contains. Below is the syllabus for Applied Translation Arabic-English module.

Weeks 1-3: General Arabic-English

Weeks 4-6: News and current affairs

Weeks 7-9: Historical texts

Weeks 10-12: Politics and society

Week 13: Business and commerce

Week 14: A technical area (information technology)

Week 15: Preparation for final assignment

## **Conclusion**

Let us ask this question: who is the ideal translator? In other words, what do we expect from a translator? What should he/she know?

To answer this question, few essential requirements need to be present to make: a) awareness that a language is a network of choices which are influenced by the culture they express, b) reflectiveness, the capacity to practice, store and use more or less specific strategies and procedures involved in translation achieved through e.g. dual text analysis, reading and writing, and perhaps also through practice at project management and group work and c) resourcefulness: the ability «to exploit finite resources indefinitely ... to cope with new and unexpected challenges, and to acquire new resources autonomously, as the need arises». The dilemma that remains is that these MA courses are too short for both education and training (one year). They also have no work placement or time abroad like the BA. Furthermore, they do not contain an editing module. I finally end my presentation with a question: is it better to teach translation studies at Undergraduate or Postgraduate level?

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1. Malmkjær (2006) «Teaching Translation» Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies WORKSHOP, 20 January 2006, University of Wales, Swansea.
  2. Suttleworth, M (2006) Teaching Translation, Swansea, Jan 2006