The LMD Reforms and the Vocational Translation Curriculum Development : Some Reflections on Technical Writing

Mr MAOUI Hocine
Université Badji-Mokhtar – Annaba

INTRODUCTION:

In fact, what prompted me to deal with this question of writing and more specifically technical writing as related to translation in the Algerian university context is the new binary academic and vocational system of education which is newly introduced through the LMD reforms. This new structure of the three-cycle system of tertiary education in Algeria is now commonly referred to as the licence, master, doctorat, or LMD, in reference to the three qualifications available after 3, 5 and 8 years of study respectively. As part of these reforms, both academic and vocational degrees (licence académique et licence professionnelle or professionalisante) are offered. On the vocational track, the third year of study is introduced and this qualification is awarded after the successful completion of 3 years of post-secondary study. Different career prospects are expected to be offered to the students who get a vocational licence. They can also continue on the new two-year master professionnel program. Of course, my objective is not to paint a glowing picture of the LMD reforms but I should say that these new orientations have given me food for thought about the future qualifications for translation studies. It is to be mentioned that in Algeria there are no pilot projects in translation running that implement these new reforms, unlike some departments of foreign languages, the case of

Constantine and Bejaia. Among the aims of these reforms we can mention:

- The creation of new professional degrees and the increase in employability
- Limitations in the harmonization of degrees
- More flexibility in the programs
- Students have more freedom, more choices, less specialization.

The aim of my paper is two-fold because it is an assessment of the writing course content which is currently taught in the Algerian translation curriculum and some reflections on the reinforcing course content within the vocational system of education (licence professionalisante) which is to be implemented through the LMD reforms. I limit myself to technical writing, which is one among the types of professional writing such as editing, journalism, and commercial writing.

Indeed, the importance of training translators does not only lie in the acquisition and command of languages and translation strategies and procedures, but also in specific knowledge areas. So the knowledge of specialized subjects is derived from specialized training. I am led to believe that in Algeria the rather provisional and sketchy program for the vocational degree (Option: Translation or Interpreting) suggested by the national translation pedagogical board (C.P.N) is worth thinking of. Among the credits or study modules (UE) which make up the fifth and sixth semesters of this particular major (professional translation) are E.S.P., functional French (FOS /Français aux objectifs spécifiques) and Arabic with a major focus on the techniques of writing for the major in translation. I believe that these courses, especially the first two, are closely intertwined and need to be considered

within a complementary and harmonizing perspective. Also, as a teacher of technical writing, I found it difficult to draw the line between both disciplines or compartmentalize their course contents between technical writing and specialized translation.

At first glance, the vocational degree is alluring and very promising in terms of job outlets because of rising international trade, increased migration, globalization and expansion of the mass media and technology.

But before considering the importance in the vocational licence of translation within the LMD reforms and the writing course as such, it is worth referring to the curriculum development pointing out that curriculum development is a gradual multi-layered process which involves looking not only at available information (such as data from previous course evaluations or even information about courses available at other institutions), but also constraints (such as the availability of time, finances, classroom facilities and the availability of human potential including professional teachers.) Indeed, like any other training program, in designing a translator training program for a licence professionnelle, we should not move forward by trial and error and abide by some borrowed, far-fetched, illusory orientations. We need to follow some specific steps which are pre-requisite components for any curriculum design. These components must cover the needs of both the students and the market. Although teaching translation is age-old, no serious research has been conducted to evaluate the criteria set for designing and implementing the translation programs being taught. Translators have been trained informally, with neither clearly-defined curricula nor proper training methodology. Caminade and Pym report:

"Translators ... have been trained informally, basically through trial and error, unstructured apprenticeship arrangements, or any of the various translating activities that

accompany the study of a foreign language and culture within the Liberal Arts tradition." (Caminade and Pym 1998, 280)

Therefore, before speaking about the LMD reforms and their implementation, I find it necessary to give a general survey of the four-year translation program offered in the Algerian universities, Annaba as a case in point. In my survey, I relied on a 15-item questionnaire which I distributed to 50 students out of 96 fourth-year students. The choice of this sample was motivated by the following reasons: 1. Fourth-year students have attended more translation classes and as a result can evaluate the situation more objectively and comprehensively. 2. They are more advanced and therefore they are more reliable in their feedback.3. They are about to graduate and definitely have their sights set on the market; they can compare what they have been taught as undergraduates with what is actually required of them by the market. This investigation tries to identify and then provide answers to the question : « to what extent is the process of translation curriculum design and implementation successful ? and to what extent is the program successful in meeting its objectives ? The majority of the respondents' answers reveal that the students do not have a clear understanding of the skills necessary to the professional translator. The relevance of what is being offered in these courses to market needs is non-existent. The course content is not oriented to commercial practice so that graduates will have better opportunities in the labor market. This is partly due to the fact that most teachers have not received any kind of training in teaching translation nor do they have a professional background in translation. Besides the respondents' dissatisfaction with the teaching methods used in the course and the random selection of material, there is a severe shortage in resources and classroom facilities. In fact, no one seems to know what the best way to

approach the subject is. There seems to be no clear distinction between academic or literary translation and professional translation. The students in the translation department like many other departments, under ideal circumstances, attend less than 18 sessions every academic year (two months of the eight months are used up by mid-term and re-sit exams and vacations). As a result the overall program is not successful and does not meet the students' needs. The training of translators and interpreters requires the development of a very particular curriculum.

I believe that translation and interpretation do not only require language ability but also cultural sensitivity, area expertise and the capacity for research. In other words, a translator or interpreter has to have more than just understanding of language but also must be aware of socio-cultural, terminological and business issues in the course of practicing the T§I profession. Regardless of the type of student in the program, all translation and interpretation programs should include courses which cover the business of being a translator, the use of computers including word processing and translation software. It is true that a translator can't work with material from any field. One solution to this problem is to create categories for specialized field. A possible categorization is : General, Technical, Legal, Political, and Financial. The vocational licence which is devised within LMD reforms can be an adequate outlet and an appropriate track to implement to a certain extent this idea of categorization. If we want to prepare students for the professional world, we must equip them with the ancillary knowledge they require through a training which should be more vocational than academic. A common misconception is that most professional translators earn their living by translating works of literature. This is in fact far from being

the case. In reality, translators work on the widest possible variety of material, ranging from medical reports and research papers, through parliamentary proceedings, to publicity material, etc...

1. Identifying Market needs : In order to put together an effective training program for preparing, or creating, an efficient translator, one must consider the demands of the market. Antony Pym argues that market demands should shape the way in which translators are trained. He proposes that students should be taught translation as « a general set of communication skills that [they] can apply and adapt to the changing demands of future markets, and indeed changing professions... The greater the specialization of the market, the greater the translators'interest in diversifying their competence. (Pym, A.1998.On the Market as a Factor in the Training of Translators, (http://www.fut.es/~apym/market.html.) variety of markets exist today (as opposed to 20 years ago). This is reflected in the contents of translator training programmes with courses on legal translation, commercial translation, financial translation, subtitling, multimedia translation, localization, translating using voice recognition systems, etc.(Gouadec.2000.Notes on Translator Training. From International Symposium on Innovation in Translator and Interpreter Training. (http://www.~fut.es~apym/symp/gouadec.html.)* Therefore, before designing a curriculum market needs analysis is required. For the case of Algeria, the socio-economic as well as the cultural contexts and specificities for each region should be taken into consideration. The market needs of an industrial coastal city of Annaba do differ from those of an inland agrarian city of Batna.

2. Identifying student Needs : The course ought to integrate both the broad objectives of the curriculum and the

personal needs of the students . The student is expected to acquire the general skills required by the would-be translator. These are « text interpretation, composition of a coherent, readable and audience-tailored draft translation, research, checking/correcting » (Mossop2000).

Therefore, the students, the would-be vocational translators are in great need of the technical writing course which goes along with the specialized or technical translation. Why should we include "writing about a technical subject in a translation vocational curriculum? The reasons seem to be simple and obvious. Technical Writing and Academic Writing, which in my opinion both correspond to the above definition, widen translation students' professional horizon. It allows them to become acquainted with the characteristics of a number of new genres and equips them with the necessary skills to produce texts corresponding to these genres.

For example, by teaching our students how to write abstracts we will enhance their reading and writing ability, engaging them in an activity that is communicative and in which students apply knowledge previously acquired. (Uso and Palmer 1998).This technical writing is the process of preparing documentation, usually computer hardware and software manuals, for mass consumption. Technical writers are expected to combine strong writing skills and superior understanding of technology. However, writing courses within this professional licence are not meant to be strictly oriented to a technical writing career producing professional technical writers but they are rather an introduction to the kinds of writing skills students need in practically any technically oriented professional job. For instance, one of its main objectives is to lead the students to the elaboration of technical reports which are due in the 3rd year of their degree, writing abstracts, advertising materials, institutional

documentation such as reports, regulations and guidelines, etc. While in the first two years, the students are initiated to some basic knowledge related to technical writing such as paraphrasing, summarizing, note taking, letter writing (business and academic), writing abstract, resumé, C.V, memos, fiche de lecture, book review, specification sheet, user's manual, etc. No matter what sort of professional work students do, they are likely to do lots of writing—and much of it is technical in nature. The more they know about some basic technical-writing skills which are covered in technical-writing courses, the better job of writing they are likely to do. In this context, can we consider the technical writer a translator and vice versa? Teaching technical writing, I believe—indeed, teaching all writing—involves teaching visibility. Dobrin considers technical writing as a means of « accomodating technology to the user" (242). Indeed, besides the creative talent, both the technical translator and the technical writer should have some knowledge of the language and a working knowledge of the science or technology they are using. The skills of technical writing and translation overlap. The types of translation –poetic, technical, journalistic, commercial and official translations—all have their different applications. By its nature, problems of « style » are largely secondary when a technical text is being translated. However, some features of scientific translation should be noted. Firstly, scientific texts are intended to be read by scientists—and so are scientific translations. Obtrusive « style » should be notable by its absence. Secondly, a scientific translation is usually made from a recent original work, intended to be read immediately—unlike literary translations, which may be made from classical texts, and used for centuries. Professional Documentation (PD) is a course which can be inserted in the writing course because it is designed to make students of

translation acquainted with those written genres of linguistic (interlingual) mediation, that are not translation, but which a translator may be required to write.

PD begins in the fifth semester of the translation vocational degree with its oral counterpart which can call Negotiation practice.

CONCLUSION:

As a conclusion, I think it's essential that the implementation of the LMD reforms and more specifically the vocational degree as for the case of translation cannot be carried out without the joint efforts and the commitment of the university, the industrial and economic operators and social organisms. It's high time the Algerian university reconsidered its bonds with the economic and industrial sector by setting stimulating mechanisms for a long-lasting partnership.