

## XIII FIT WORLD CONGRESS

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## **The Training of English Language Translators in Slovenia**

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*The need for accurate translations in all possible fields has become even greater since Slovenia gained independence. Details are given of translator training in English Language (undergraduate level) currently available at Ljubljana University's Arts Faculty. An inter-university Institute of Translating and Interpreting is to be established in the near future. The activities of translators' societies, etc. also make a useful contribution for professional translators.*

### **Introduction**

Slovenia (area 20,256 sq. km., population 2,020,000) occupies a very favourable geographical position at a significant crossroads between north and south, east and west (bordered by Italy, Austria, Hungary and Croatia). The northernmost republic of former Yugoslavia, Slovenia declared independence in June 1991 (followed by the "10 day war" against the Yugoslav Federal Army) and was recognized (together with Croatia and Bosnia) by the EC in January 1992. So far it has been recognized by over a hundred countries around the world. In May 1993 it became a full member of the Council of Europe, and is aiming at inclusion within the EC in the foreseeable future.

With the loss of the ex-Yugoslav market, Western Europe, to which Slovenia has historically looked (considering itself as culturally belonging to Central Europe and not to the Balkans), has become even more important. Efforts are constantly being made to maintain the necessary high standards of production and to qualify for joining various international bodies. Although information on current developments of this nature are soon dated, I might mention a Memorandum on Scientific and Technical Cooperation signed between Slovenia and the USA in late April 1993, the first inter-state agreement between these two countries. About 50 projects are operating, with more expected soon, as well as proposals for joint conferences, exchanges, etc. Moreover, the second PHARE programme was signed in May 1993, which will provide 10 million ECUs for economic reforms (the increase from 6.7 million ECUs in 1992 reflects confidence in Slovenia's capacity for development). The money allotted will help to finance privatization, bank reforms, restructuring of the public sector, the social network and a project concerning EC entry. Of special interest are funds allocated to a TEMPUS project for training academic staff and implementing university programmes.



Since Slovene is a language of limited diffusion (LLD), knowledge of foreign languages has always been a necessity; historical as well as geographical factors have also conditioned this (Slovenia was a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; in former Yugoslavia the main languages – in north to south order – were Slovene, Croatian, Serbian and Macedonian). At present English is the leading world language in use, followed by German. The Arts Faculty of Ljubljana University has all the usual European language departments as well as a Department of Comparative and General Linguistics and Oriental Studies. This paper will focus on the training of English Language translators.

## University training

A two-year postgraduate specialization course (extra-mural) in English Language translation was introduced at the Ljubljana Arts Faculty in autumn 1982 and had three intakes before terminating in spring 1988 for financial reasons. The candidates, mostly those already employed as professional translators, had 7.5 hours of instruction weekly in four 12-week semesters, totalling 360 hours. The title of "translation specialist" was awarded on the basis of examinations and a dissertation. In fact very few achieved the title, partly because of little time for preparing a dissertation (many candidates were married women in full-time employment) and partly because the qualification brought little if any financial or promotional improvement anyway.\*

At undergraduate level, the 4-year Honours degree course in English is identical for all students in the first two years.\*\* The students then choose among three options: 1) the long-established pedagogical, 2) the fairly recent non-pedagogical (i.e. omitting methodology lectures and teaching practice) and 3) the translation option, introduced in autumn 1986 (the first language department to offer such an option). This third option is open to students who have achieved an average examination result of 70% (categorized as "good" compared with "very good" and "excellent" grades) in their first two years. The student intake has varied considerably from 15 in 1986-87, 26 in 1987-88 to 36 in 1988-90, 23 in 1990-91, 8 in 1991-92 and again 15 in 1992-93. (The sudden drop after 1991 was due to an additional condition laid down – that students must have as their subsidiary subject another language and not any other subsidiary subject available at the Faculty; in general, all possible combinations of main and subsidiary subjects are allowed.) This restriction was introduced to avoid overburdening the teaching staff (only one colleague teaches full-time in the translation option, the other two teach in all three options) but it is rather artificial; a more appropriate one might be to raise the required examination performance to 80% in the first two years. With this present staffing, an intake of 15 is considered optimal.

\* The title "specialist" (graded between the bachelor's and master's degrees) is available in a variety of professions and is not restricted to medicine, as in Britain. The lack of effect in this profession reflects the somewhat low status of translators in firms, institutions, etc.

\*\* In this outline I omit a further option, introduced in 1991-92, in which students take English as a single subject, compared with the usual two-subject study, as these students are excluded from the translation option.



The specialization syllabus formed the basis of the undergraduate translation programme, with the exclusion of "Special practical classes in technical translation" and "Introduction to business English" and the addition of other subjects. The full syllabus is as follows:

### 3rd year

- ☐ English sentence syntax ○
- ☐ Practical classes in Eng. Language III ○  
Translation into English I
- ☐ Contrastive analysis I
- ☐ Slovene language I
- ☐ Idioms and stylistics

☐ courses with examinations

### 4th year

- ☐ English word-formation ○
- ☐ Practical classes in Eng. Language IV ○  
Translation into English II
- ☐ Contrastive analysis II
- ☐ Slovene language II
- ☐ Culture and society (1 semester)
- ☐ Theory of translation (1 semester)

○ obligatory course for all students of English

All the above courses are obligatory; an optional non-examination course "Theory of language" offered by the Linguistics Department for all language departments at the Faculty has been followed by only a few students. The degree examination is taken in two stages: the first part consists of translating an English text into Slovene (2 hours), followed by oral examinations taken by all students of English, and the second part of translating a Slovene text into English (3 hours), plus a viva voce before the 3-member examining board. Between these two parts (usually when students have the status of "absolvent") a dissertation on some contrastive Slovene-English topic is submitted and defended. Some of these dissertations have provided material for articles in Slovene journals for the teaching and translating professions, or have won a Prešeren Prize – the highest award at Slovene universities for undergraduate dissertations. More could perhaps be done to bring the best results of such research to the attention of translators and teachers.

Since the qualification gained by students specializing in translation is a university Honours degree, the syllabus should – and I think does – satisfy the demands of "academic discipline", while the attention obviously paid to practical translation (in both directions, Slovene ↔ English) is of "vocational" usefulness. (In the entire syllabus only Theory of translation consists purely of lectures; several courses are a combination of lectures and practical work.) It will be observed that the syllabus deals exclusively with English language (and Slovene) and not at all with literature. Curriculum reform throughout the Faculty is about to take place and one area of improvement might be to make the separation between the (non-)pedagogical and translation options less rigid, giving all students more freedom to choose and combine courses. Traditionally, the English language courses throughout the four-year syllabus have been obligatory; only for English literature are there options, especially regarding British/American/Australian literature and also different literary genres. An optional seminar on literary translation into Slovene has recently been added to the (non) pedagogical syllabus.

In the translation option, the approach in teaching is predominantly "contrastive", and draws from the teachers' translation experience and their own investigations. So far there is no established full-scale Contrastive Analysis research project (Slovene ↔ English) similar to those for Croatian ↔ English and Polish ↔ English, though some MA and PhD theses completed in recent years by the teaching staff have involved contrastive themes (primarily in syntax and



phonetics). Were such a project launched, undergraduate dissertations, too, could be planned more systematically to fit into an appropriate framework. Six graduates from the translation option are currently registered for an MA course in English Language and Didactics (with examinations and a thesis) initiated in autumn 1989. Seminar courses at this level include Theory of language, General linguistics, Contrastive analysis and Lexicology; professors from other universities (in Austria and Italy) are invited to fully carry out (and partly extend) the programme.

Apart from these MA candidates, the percentage of students completing their studies with the title "graduate translator" is somewhat small, though growing, while some have gained employment in teaching, despite their lack of teacher training theory and practice. Thus the department's efforts to produce good quality graduate translators cannot, so far, manage to satisfy the entire need. This, of course, is not to decry the work of many older translators (with a degree in English), the quality of whose work is based on years of experience and attendance at continuing education seminars, etc. (Some of our undergraduate students also attend specialized summer schools in Britain or study at an appropriate institution abroad – on their own initiative. Student exchange through official channels is something still to be explored and implemented, if possible.)

However, a statement in the previously published Abstract must now be updated. Discussions are already underway for setting up an Institute of Translating and Interpreting under the aegis of the Arts Faculty. This will function not only in Ljubljana but also at Maribor University and at Koper, where the Institute will signal the commencement of Slovenia's third university. To qualify for TEMPUS funding, the Institute will have links with the Institut Libre Marie Haps, Brussels and the Institut für Übersetzer und Dolmetscherausbildung, Graz. (Such an institute has been established in Timisoara, Romania with the help of the Marie Haps Institute, and initial experiences there should prove illuminating for us; another possible organizational model is the Inter-University Summer School in Dubrovnik.) So far our closest links have been between the Graz Institute (founded in 1946, c.1400 students currently registered, with 12 languages offered for study, including Slovene) and the Ljubljana German department, which introduced its translation option in 1991. The preliminary proposals and locations should be finalized by December 1993 and if TEMPUS funds are made available, the Institute will be launched in the academic year 1994-95, initially offering English, German, Italian and French, while other languages will be added later (including Chinese and Arabic, which are already taught at the Faculty).

## Translation societies

Translators' interests are catered for by two main societies, the Association of Scientific and Technical Translators of Slovenia and the Association of Literary Translators of Slovenia, which have a membership of c.600 (with c.340 for English) and c.170 respectively. The former periodically organizes seminars/workshops for various European languages, publishes a bi-annual periodical (Mostovi) and offers various other services, including vetting the acceptability of translations. In October 1992 it organized the first translators' conference within the Alps-Adriatic Community (6 countries). (One year previous to this, professional translating was unanimously accepted as a relevant field of activity by the Economic Commission of the Alps-Adriatic Community.) The conference papers were grouped according to translator training, computer aspects of translating, interpreting, terminology and links between translators. An Information Bulletin for Alps-Adriatic translators is to be prepared (the first issue is planned for autumn 1993) by an international editorial board, giving details of publication of specialized bi-lingual and multi-lingual dictionaries, etc., of training seminars/workshops, etc. The Literary Translators' Association organizes monthly lectures on topical themes, which are published in annual volumes.



In Slovenia the quality of professional translations varies greatly, and the necessary task of raising standards may seem somewhat daunting when financial problems (especially in this transitional period) are added to the comparative lack of training facilities and of qualified teaching and research personnel that obtain at present. Nevertheless there is scope for personal initiative, e.g. the Economics Faculty in Ljubljana has organized well-attended translator seminars over several years. An International Translator Training Centre was set up in early 1992 and ran a number of effective seminars in various professional fields until economic problems dominated, while participation in various TEMPUS and PHARE programmes has started.

## Conclusion

The desire and need to succeed in today's competitive world provides a strong incentive to improve and expand our translator training activities. The proposed Institute of Translating and Interpreting will have a vital role to play alongside the education of translators at the Arts Faculty and the short, more specialized in-service training sessions mentioned just above. It is hoped that the exchange of ideas and experience made possible by a conference of this scope (especially with its specific LLD section) will prove helpful in furthering our aims.

## Addendum

To update this article, further information is here given concerning the current planning at the Ljubljana Arts Faculty (see pp. 21–22). The originally proposed "Institute" will, in fact, be a new department at the Faculty, to be named the Department for Translation and Interpreting, eventually offering 4-year degree courses. The preparation for such a department (part of Ljubljana University's developmental strategy) has been accepted as a 3-year TEMPUS Structural Joint European Project (1994–97), in which the collaborating institutions are based at: Louvain Catholic University, Brussels (Institut Libre Marie Haps, legally the "contractor"), Copenhagen University, Ruprecht-Karl University, Heidelberg, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Karl Franzen University, Graz and Bologna University as well as the Slovene Chamber of Economy and the Ministry of Education and Sport. The project coordinator is Prof. Meta Grosman.

The objective of the project is to set up this department and to design its curriculum in terms of a core programme for all the relevant languages – initially English, German, French, Italian, and in the second year Spanish – and specific programmes for the individual languages. The latter part will include pilot courses to be tested out on students in the already well-established English and German translation orientation (*prevajalska smer*). Special attention will also be paid to the teaching of Slovene. All the programmes will have to conform to the requirements of the recently passed Law on University Education and be approved by the Ministry of Education.

The Faculty teaching staff will be supplemented by practising translators and interpreters, who will also collaborate in producing teaching materials. Both course design and teacher training will benefit from scheduled exchange visits (due to start in the current academic year, 1994–95) between the Arts Faculty and the participating institutions in other countries enumerated above. The necessary equipment will be financed from the project funds. The first full intake of undergraduate students is planned for 1997–98.

It is hoped that this new department will go a considerable way towards meeting the ever-growing demand for fully competent translators and interpreters arising from embassies, international organizations and Slovene firms and institutions.

(The above information is summarized from the TEMPUS Project document.)