



UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

IAMLADP

International Annual Meeting on Language Arrangements,
Documentation and Publications

Distr.:
RESTRICTED
IAMLADP/2007/R. 4
13 June 2007

Original: English

United Nations Office at Geneva
25 June 2007
Executive Session
Host's Strategic Topic for Discussion

BACKGROUND PAPER FOR THE EXECUTIVE SESSION

Outreach to Universities: A Common Platform for Action

Executive summary

The aim of this report is two-fold: (1) to present the preliminary work accomplished by international organizations (IO) and European Institutions (EI) and partner universities in order to help candidates to prepare better for the competitive language exams and develop a common platform for action; (2) to explore potential avenues for cooperation between international organizations and training institutions in the area of external training for linguists working in such institutions, in order to maintain high quality standards.

A. REACHING OUT TO STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

1. BACKGROUND

For the last several years, managers of IO and EI, that are the major employers of language professionals in the world, have been discussing increasing shortages of qualified staff and free-lance interpreters and translators, especially for certain language combinations. In particular, interpretation and translation into English have been identified as an area where the market was being more and more tilted against the employers, as many universities and colleges in the English-speaking countries were phasing out specialized foreign language courses and replacing them with ESL programmes.

At their annual meeting in 2006 in Vienna, members of IAMLADP adopted a joint statement in which they expressed concern that conference and language professionals possessing the high level of expertise and experience required by international organizations were in short supply on the commercial market. They felt, therefore, that the problem of identifying, attracting, recruiting and retaining such qualified professionals must be addressed in order to meet the demand, both at present and in the near future when large numbers of translators and interpreters are and will be retiring, and because certain language combinations are in very short supply.

They also advocated closer cooperation between the international organizations and universities and other reputable academic institutions to promote the training of conference and language service professionals. In this context, they approved the proposal from the Working Group on Training to set up a Universities' Contact Group (UCG) (in place of the former Standing Committee), co-chaired by DG Interpretation and the University of Bath, subsequently replaced by the University of Leeds. IAMLADP approved the UCG's mandate to look into two items of interest to international organizations and universities: 1) on professional development courses offered by universities for language professionals and 2) on alleged shortages of qualified language professionals.

The statement was presented to the UN Committee on Conferences, which supported the renewed attention to the training of conference and language service professionals by reaching out to the academic community, as well as to EU Education Commissioner Jan Figel, who also encouraged work in this direction.

It should be noted that both the UN and the language directorates of EI have a long history of fruitful cooperation with academic institutions, aimed at training of their future interpreters and translators. The UN had very effective post-graduate programmes in Moscow and Beijing, which trained hundreds of high-caliber professionals before they were closed in the early nineties, presumably based on a perception that existing pools of graduates would not be exhausted for many years. However, 15 years later, the UN Russian Translation Service is already encountering difficulties with identifying and attracting suitable candidates to offset natural attrition. In 2007 the US Department of State singled out 3 UN languages (Arabic, Chinese and Russian) as "critical" in terms of availability of qualified service providers and launched scholarships for intensive overseas studies targeted at US tertiary-level students.

The results of the questionnaires sent out by the UCG to its 34 members bear out the claims that graduates specializing in several language combinations are in very short supply, beginning with the English as target language, although the need for such professionals is acute both in translation and the interpretation services. 9 out of 14 respondents put English on top of their shortage lists, followed by Arabic. These hard facts give significant backing to statements which before that moment could have been perceived as allegations or impressions.

The EI language directorates, and first of all the Directorate-General for Interpretation (also known as SCIC) and the Directorate-General for Translation of EC, facing the challenges of multilingualism and enlargement, developed very strong ties with European and non-European universities. DGI/EC took the lead when a decade ago it spearheaded the setting up of a consortium of European universities to launch a European Master's in Conference Interpretation (EMCI)¹ degree. DGI provided the consortium members with some funding and, more importantly, methodological and pedagogical assistance, such as sending its staff to teach students and sitting in on admission and graduation exams, including their marking, training the trainers, and participating in the development of curricula and study materials. This initiative has now involved two US universities – Monterey Institute for International Studies and Georgetown University, and EMCI Steering Committee led by Prof. Moser-Mercer of the University of Geneva has submitted a proposal to launch an international master's degree in conference interpreting for funding under the *Atlantis* agreement between EU and US on joint activities in the area of education, which was signed in April 2006². Prof. Moser-Mercer is also providing methodological and pedagogical assistance to both of the aforementioned universities in order to help them prepare the curricula. The participants of the IAMLADP Executive Session hope that the US State Department, which this year is represented for the first time in the Annual Meeting as observer, will support this mutually beneficial initiative.

DGT/EC took an important step forward in building the base for training of future generations of conference translators when in October 2006 it held in Brussels a Conference to launch a new European Master of Translation degree. The participants, including major European universities and European Institutions, the UN and a number of other IOs, adopted, in principle, a proposal to launch the degree along the lines of the *desiderata* presented by DGT³. Soon after that, UNHQ prepared a concept paper on outreach to the Universities, while UNOG hosted a CIUTI conference on translators' training and suggested another set of elements for a prototype curriculum. UNOG subsequently participated in the CIUTI General Assembly on 24 May 2007, at which avenues for cooperation between the 32 member institutions and the international organizations were further discussed. The present paper is to a large extent based on the results of the aforementioned DGT Universities' Conference and seeks to integrate them with the approach taken by the UNHQ and UNOG in their efforts taken since last IAMLADP in order to encourage development of programmes that would suit the needs of the all major institutional employers. Their views are also included in the report from the UCG (UNHQ, UNOG and DGT are members) which outlines concrete measures to

¹ See <http://www.emcinterpreting.net/>

² Information about ATLANTIS can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu-usa/call_en.html; see also <http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/812&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> and http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/eu-usa/call06/guideus_en.pdf. Under ATLANTIS, a student can start his/her master's studies in one university – member of a “consortium” and graduate in another one. It also encourages faculty mobility.

³ Materials of the Conference, including a detailed model curriculum, can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/events/emt2006/index_en.htm.

be taken in the field of training, including several new ideas for incorporation into university curricula.

During the period between the IAMLADP 2006 and the 2007 meeting, at least three concept papers on the subject of training new language professionals were prepared within the UN system alone, in addition to the aforementioned DGT Conference proposals. Results of the Universities' Contact Group's survey and its meeting in May, as well as its recommendations for the future reflect the same concerns. A successful translator training programme that was conducted at the Economic Commission for Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s is being studied at UNHQ with a view to determining how it might be adapted to current training needs for translators and interpreters.

Obviously, organizational resources will be optimally used if such projects are thoroughly coordinated – in particular, if the ideas are widely shared among IAMLADP participants and their comments/input sought and analyzed during the projects development phase. Cooperation between IAMLADP (UNHQ and DG Interpretation) and EMCI to set up a training programme at Georgetown University seems to be a convincing illustration of good practice of mutually beneficial common action and, therefore, deserves to be described in some detail.

The process started when IAMLADP members, first of all DGI (SCIC) and the WG on Training which it leads, identified shortages of interpreters in certain language combinations. They contacted EMCI Steering Committee to see whether they were able to help in expanding training programmes and reaching out to universities, especially in the US. The Steering Committee discussed the matter and decided that indeed, dissemination of its model curriculum was high on its agenda, but overseas dissemination was not explicitly covered by the grant it was working under. However, EMCI concurred with IAMLADP and decided to go ahead without asking the US-based IOs for additional funding.

Then EMCI representative prof. Moser-Mercer went on a “fact-finding” mission to GU to establish the necessary contacts and academic structure and reported back to IAMLADP and DGI. In co-operation with the UNHQ and the IAMLADP Secretary, DG SCIC/IEC then organized a high level mission to GU with the participation of UNHQ, EC/DGI and all the Washington-based IOs and the US State Department.

The groundwork for the mission had been laid by EMCI. The mission was successful in persuading the GU to consider re-establishing a training programme which had ended in the early 90's. EMCI was invited back by GU to help develop a project proposal to set up a new course.

The EMCI representative again visited GU to discuss the project proposal on site, which was submitted to the Faculty. It passed this first stage of approval with the full support from IAMLADP in form of recommendation letters. The next step will be to

submit the proposal to the University Board. If approved, the new course will be established.

At the same time, a proposal to apply for funding under the EU/US Atlantis Programme was prepared by EMCI and Monterey Institute of International Studies (MIIS) and submitted to the Atlantis screening body. If the bid is successful, financial help would be provided and the GU, when its new course is introduced, could join the consortium after a year or two.

2. SOME GENERAL FEATURES OF THE PROPOSED APPROACH

Some general principles emerged from the experience of the UN programmes and EMCI and from the conclusions of the UCG. To succeed, the future graduate programmes should encompass the following features:

- Interpretation and translation techniques should be taught by experienced interpreters and translators, not just by general language specialists or linguists; however, best results are achieved when the actual training is provided at the universities or colleges with the help from IOs, rather than directly by IOs, which lack the necessary capacity and general pedagogical expertise;
- Programmes should contain courses devoted to enhancement of communication skills in the mother tongue;
- Programmes should be targeted at building practical skills, rather than devoted to teaching theory of translation and interpretation; courses on in-house linguistic resources (e.g., on-line documents and databases) as well as stylistic rules in use in international organizations should be included.
- In addition to communication skills, students should enhance their knowledge of subjects dealt with by IOs;
- As the second foreign language appears to be the Achilles heel of many candidates at the IOs qualification exams, intensive courses to enhance the second languages are recommended;
- Admission to programmes should be highly selective and based on general aptitude tests and examinations designed to ascertain necessary cognitive abilities, language proficiency and broad general knowledge. As a rule, to be admitted to a graduate programme, candidates should have completed undergraduate or higher degrees in the target language of their choice, normally their mother tongue. Graduate programmes should be open not only to language or linguistics majors, but also to those with degrees in law, economics, political science and scientific and technical subjects etc., who demonstrate adequate proficiency, even “passive”, in at least two foreign languages⁴.

⁴ The Working Group on Services' Task Force on the Status of the Language Professions also refers to the last point above, i.e. that graduates of all disciplines be addressed in any awareness raising campaign. Furthermore, such a campaign is advocated by the UCG as one of its future mandate items.

3. OUTLINE OF THE PROTOTYPE INTERNATIONAL MASTER'S OF CONFERENCE TRANSLATION PROGRAMME⁵

3.1. Type of training programme envisaged

The suggestions in this paper presuppose an intensive training programme along the lines of the EMCI model curriculum. The basic assumption is that the programme should correspond to some 60–100 credits (under the European Credit Transfer System, ECTS) and take a minimum of 1 year and a maximum of 2 years to complete. Experience of UN translators' training programmes in Moscow and Beijing shows that 10 months may be an optimal duration. Obviously, such a programme must focus primarily on the translation component of the training, and not on the language skill / language acquisition component, although the enhancement of the second foreign language might be suggested. Therefore, selection of candidates possessing adequate proficiency in source languages is of paramount importance. A long-term solution of the problem of inadequate knowledge of the 2nd source language can only be reached by systematic outreach by the consortium members to undergraduate colleges.

3.2. Objectives of the programme

The main objective of the programme should be to produce highly qualified translators who possess all the basic skills required of a professional conference translator and who are capable of carrying out translation and translation-related tasks in a highly demanding and sensitive environment of IOs and of acting responsibly as members of their profession and as international civil servants. Secondly, the programme should produce – in sufficient numbers – translation professionals who meet the special requirements of the IOs which are major institutional employers of conference translators. It should cover modern telework-inspired non-traditional modes of translation (off-site translation, retainer-contract option, etc.)

3.3. Translator's skills profile

In selecting candidates for the degree, universities are advised to include sufficient numbers of students with one active and at least two passive languages that are official languages of the UN, EC and other major employers.

A professional conference translator, working in the international setting, would be expected to have sufficient **language skills**, including writing skills in the mother tongue, which is the target language, **communication**

⁵ This paper is focused only on translation. An outline of the prototype conference interpretation training curriculum is contained in a separate proposal already submitted by EMCI for financing under the EU-US Atlantis programme.

skills, thematic proficiency (including expertise in the acquisition of knowledge), and **technical skills, and also** ability to use all sources of reference and information relevant to text at hand; ability to maintain an adequate speed and volume of output, taking into account the difficulty of the text and the specified deadlines and ability to establish priorities and to plan, co-ordinate and monitor own work.

**EXAMPLE:
UN TRANSLATOR’S PROFILE AS CONTAINED IN GENERIC JOB PROFILE FOR P-3
LEVEL (ENTRY LEVEL FOR RECRUITS WITH AT LEAST 2 YEARS QUALIFIED
EXPERIENCE) IS AS FOLLOWS:**

“Professionalism - Good writing skills; high standards of accuracy, consistency and faithfulness to the spirit, style and nuances of the original text; good grasp of the subject matter; ability to use all sources of references, consultation and information relevant to text at hand; ability to maintain an adequate speed and volume of output, taking into account the difficulty of the text and the specified deadlines.

. **Planning and Organizing** -Ability to establish priorities and to plan, co-ordinate and monitor own work.

. **Commitment to Continuous Learning-** Commitment to pursuing in-service training, external study or independent study to acquire the ability to perform at higher levels of difficulty and complexity.

. **Teamwork** - Good coordination with others working on same document in order to ensure consistency of terminology and style; demonstrated ability to gain the support and co-operation of others in a team endeavour, with sensitivity and respect for diversity.

. **Communications** -Good interpersonal and communication skills.

. **Technological Awareness** - Acquisition of experience in using translation technology and word processing packages.”

3.4. Recommended basic components of the programme

To enable students to acquire the skills and knowledge listed above, it is suggested that the curriculum include the following components.

– **Translation as a profession/ Translation studies:** Translation history, reviewing the main trends of thought world-wide on translation, basic outline of translation theory and intercultural communication. The course would include an overarching review of major theories and lay solid foundations for professional expertise.

Students will be acquainted with the most important and authoritative literature in this field. A link between theory and practice is advisable. It would develop a strong professional identity and pride and emphasize the ethics of the profession

- (Optional) intensive course in a **second foreign language** to enhance comprehension skills

- **Basic facts** about major international organizations

- Basic linguistic categories and text/discourse analysis and translation assignment analysis, including types/genres of texts translated in major international organizations; basic comparative grammar and comparative stylistics

- **Special fields and their languages (registers/functional styles):**

- Legal matters in major international organizations

- Social and economic matters in major international organizations

- Budgetary and financial matters in major international organizations

- Organization-specific subjects (e.g. for the UN - disarmament, non-proliferation, international peace and security, peacekeeping and peacebuilding, human rights, environment (climate change, desertification), etc.)

This component may be enhanced by supervised readings and/or basic orientation courses in the following academic disciplines:

- International public law;

- Comparative law studies (common law, *shari'a* or Islamic jurisdiction, etc.).

- Constitutional law

- Civil and criminal law

- International relations and international organizations;

- Regional and inter-regional organizations;

- Economics;

- Chemistry (for environmental issues)

- Current global issues;

- Introduction to media studies;

- **Terminology work:** sources, basic lexicography, search methodology, with emphasis on practical applications. E.g., students can be involved in preparing specialized terminology, in cooperation with the United Nations, and updating and supplementing DtSearch and UNTERM terminological data bases.

- **Information technology for translation and CAT tools,** including inputting methods: The purpose is to make the student aware of all aspects of the state-of-art in the sphere of CAT tools, and in particular as regards available translation memory software

and systems as well as computer-assisted quality control, and to prepare him/her for the utilization of these tools.

- **Developing advanced writing skills in the mother tongue** The course aims at enabling students to acquire advanced writing skills through learning and practical exercises, with special emphasis on technical writing and obstacles and interferences in the communication process.

- **Practical translation (in at least two language combinations).** Can include both “homework” during the year and end-of-course internship at a chosen IO. E.g., students can be offered a two-month contract at the entry-level, after successfully passing their graduation exams, and their performance would be assessed as part of the overall evaluation process for awarding the Master's degree in conference translation. A representative of the IO would be a member of the board of examiners and the MA in Conference Translation would be recognized by the IOs and would qualify for external translation contracts.

- **Revision, editing, précis-writing and verbatim reporting.** The exact structure of the programme remains for the training institutes to determine. However, it is evident that some of the components listed above and some of their sections have to precede others. For instance, some sections of the information technology component should be offered right at the beginning of the programme so that IT tools can be used. Similarly, “Translation as a profession”, “Text/discourse analysis” and “Terminology work” would by their nature be better placed in the early part of the programme. It is recommended that practical translation courses be started very soon after the beginning of the programme, so as not to separate them too much from the other components. IOs might assign to students having demonstrated their ability to provide quality translations, subject to revision by the IOs-approved faculty members, some jobs for official translation as part of financial assistance to partially offset the tuition cost. Specific terms of such assignments should be discussed directly with the universities that will host proposed programmes, but will always be based on the IOs rules and regulations with regards to contractual translation.

3.5. Admission criteria

The admission criteria should be in general similar to those applied in the EMCI programme. In other words, to be eligible for admission an applicant must:

- normally hold a recognised degree from a university or equivalent educational establishment at which the applicant’s mother tongue is the language of instruction, although there should be room for exceptions, subject to specified, transparent criteria, for those students who studied at universities where the language of instruction is not their mother tongue but who nonetheless possess the high level command of and communications

skills in that language (A-language) over a wide range of topics and registers;

- have an in-depth knowledge of his/her working source languages (at least 2 languages, B and C);

- be well-informed about the economic, political, legal, social and cultural background of the countries in which his/her working languages are used and the world in general.

In addition, s/he should have:

- good powers of concentration

- an ability to grasp varied and often complex issues swiftly

- general erudition

- a high degree of motivation and intellectual curiosity

- an inclination to show initiative and imagination

- an ability to work quickly, consistently and under pressure, both independently and as a member of a team

- a readiness to accept advice and an ability to give feedback

- basic computer skills.

Admission should be subject to an aptitude test.

3.6. Practical implementation

The programme may combine different modes of teaching/learning (contact teaching, remote learning, e-learning). However, personal contact between the trainees and the trainers and among the trainees is vital, especially in teaching practical skills such as those related to document handling and the use of terminology tools and translation tools. It is equally important in practical translation courses where discussion and debate among the participants serve a fruitful purpose.

The involvement of experienced conference translators in the programme is recommended. For instance, experienced professionals could play a role as guest lecturers, assessors, outside tutors, teachers and staff trainers. The DGT's Visiting Translator Scheme could make a useful contribution in this respect. The UN could also provide its staff for limited periods of time for the same purposes as above, and help with study materials, including terminology databases. An internship programme for translators will be

developed at the main UN duty stations. In order to address possible training needs of the teaching staff, the UN, the EC and other IOs may provide orientation seminars for trainers.

3.7. Assessment

The students' progress should be monitored closely. In addition to tests related to the individual courses/modules, collections (or “portfolios”) of selected student work representing an array of performance could be used. These portfolios could also include “work in progress” illustrating, for instance, the evolution of translations through various stages. Student self-evaluation could also be used.

As to the final assessment of the students, several options are available, including final translation examinations, a demanding translation project with commentary (which could be used as a substitute for a final thesis), or an assessment based simply on the student's results in the different modules/courses of the programme. UN experience supports official final translation examinations that imitate UN qualifications exams. They would include translations of general and specialized texts from B and C into A to be marked and evaluated by the Exam Board (faculty and IOs representatives). As one of the purposes of such tests would be to prepare the candidates for the IOs recruitment examinations, it should be taken into consideration that currently applicants are not allowed to use dictionaries or computers during the examinations, although it does create an artificial situation of inaccessibility of open information sources.

4. FORMS OF COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES

- Training institutions could mention in course prospectuses or promotional materials that their programmes were geared to preparing students to take the competitive examinations organized by the United Nations and other organizations and could spell out the specific assistance provided to them by the UN and other IOs. However, it would be contrary to established UN practices to allow explicit use of the UN name or logo in external training programmes' titles. Training programmes or degrees could mention in their titles “conference interpretation” and “conference translation” “for international organizations”. In the case of the UN, in order to be recruited graduates of the training programmes will still be required to pass the existing UN competitive examinations.
- Provision of training materials (texts of speeches and documents and sound recordings of speeches, including examples of excellent, good and substandard translations/interpretation, terminological and reference materials, etc.)

- Advising on the structure and content of curricula and assistance in developing course modules and teaching materials;
- Lending of IO staff to conduct training (practical (i.e. financial) modalities to be worked out, including duration of training (short workshops, lecture series, master-classes etc.))
- Participation of IO staff as observers in juries for end-of-course examinations;
- Receiving selected students on internships with IO language services;
- Establishment of on-line learning centres accessible to students and teachers in the training programmes.
- Providing orientation seminars for trainers; also, Non-IO-staff teachers, who are assigned to such programmes, could be recruited to IOs on short term contracts to get acquainted with IO-specific jargon and usage.
- Supporting universities seeking external funding.

5. POSSIBLE PURPOSES OF EXTERNAL FUNDING

- Direct financial assistance to the most desirable students with rare language combinations to offset tuition cost;
- Assistance to universities to purchase specialized hardware/software and attract the best instructors;
- Financial assistance to employers of conference services providers to facilitate:
 - secondment of staff members to universities as lecturers/instructors;
 - assignment of staff to participate in selection/graduation exams as jury;
 - sending staff to career fairs at undergraduate schools;
- Funding the most desirable students to facilitate their internship at IOs;
- Funding a study aimed at further developing and expanding the outreach programme.

B. COOPERATION WITH UNIVERSITIES IN THE AREA OF EXTERNAL TRAINING

External training opportunities should be offered to language staff in order to promote excellence in translation, interpretation, terminology and editing. The expertise available in universities should be better known in international organizations. Several areas of cooperation with universities should be explored in this respect:

- Ask universities to create in-service training seminars for language staff in international organization taking into account their specific multilingual needs;
- Give access to e-learning opportunities that lead to degrees;

- Establish and maintain a list of university experts in languages and/or areas of interest to international organizations;
- Share information about training opportunities offered to international organizations;

Draft decision of the Executive Session:

1. To adopt the paper as their common platform for action
2. To request the Universities' Contact Group of the WG on training in cooperation with the IAMLADP Secretariat to coordinate the outreach activities of the IAMLADP members by collecting and disseminating pertinent information about each organization's projects and activities of the partner universities.
3. To request the WG on training to include information about outreach activities of IAMLADP members into its report to the next Annual Meeting and to support their outreach efforts during the year.
4. To encourage members to cooperate with each other, IAMLADP Secretariat and the Universities' Contact Group in pursuing outreach activities and in areas of external training for linguists working in international organizations, based on this agreed common platform.