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TRANSLATOR TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN HUNGARY AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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Abstract: *This paper examines translator training programmes in Hungary and the USA. Programmes operated by different institutions reveal greater differences of structure and content in the US than in Hungary. Most US programmes offer training in Spanish–English translation/interpreting, with a number of European and Asian languages also available, whereas in Hungary the dominant foreign languages are English and German, with other languages having a relatively marginal role. The number of training programmes, relative to economic needs, seems adequate in Hungary, while in the US there are far fewer than would be needed, in view of employment growth projections.*

Keywords: *translation and interpreting profession, translation studies, translator training, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes*

1. Introduction

In this paper I survey and compare translator and interpreter (T/I) training programmes in Hungary and the United States. Such a comparison might be interesting in view of the fact that the two countries are very different in a number of aspects: size, population composition, economic situation etc. Also, there are significant differences between their higher education systems, which came to my attention during a study visit to the US in 2014 (International Visitor Leadership Program, Contemporary Challenges in Higher Education).

I seek to answer the following questions: What employment needs are served by T/I training programmes in higher education in Hungary and in the USA? Are training capacities adequate in terms of satisfying the needs of the job market? What sorts of undergraduate and postgraduate study programmes are available? How are these programmes structured? What is the relative weight of practical elements compared to theoretical elements in these programmes? What languages are taught in T/I training programmes in the two countries? What are the general differences and similarities between T/I programmes in the two countries?

2. The Job Market

2.1. The United State of America

According to the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016), in 2014 the number of people employed as translators and interpreters in the US was 61.000, with a projected growth of 29 percent from 2014 to 2024, which is much faster than the average for all occupations, resulting in an estimated 17.500 new jobs. In 2015 the median annual wage for interpreters and translators was USD 44,190. Wages depend on a number of

factors including the language, specialty, skill, experience, education and certification of the interpreter or translator, and also on the type of employer. In 2014, interpreters and translators were employed in the following sectors. Professional, scientific, and technical services: 29%; educational services (state, local, and private): 26%; healthcare and social assistance: 16%; government: 7%; and about 20% were self-employed.

Although interpreters and translators in the US typically need at least a bachelor's degree, currently there is no universal certification required of interpreters and translators, except for court interpreting exams offered by most states. There are, however, a variety of proficiency tests that can be taken optionally. The best-known example is the certification provided by the American Translators Association (ATA).

2.2. Hungary

To the best of my knowledge, there are no official statistical data available concerning the T/I profession in Hungary. What little can be known about the question can be gleaned from pieces of writings published here and there. Probably the most representative among these is a 2011 survey of the T/I sector published under the title *Fordítói körkép* [A panoramic view of the translation market] (Espell – fordit.hu 2011), according to which 42% of T/I professionals in Hungary only do translation, 32% mostly translates but also occasionally does interpreting; 20% does both on a regular basis; 5% only offers interpreting services; 1% did not provide information.

As for working languages (besides Hungarian), the survey shows that the market is dominated by English and German (Espell – fordit.hu 2011). Translators and interpreters work in the following language pairs and directions: English–Hungarian 69,8%, Hungarian–English 50,4%, German–Hungarian 29,5%, Hungarian–German 19,8%, French–Hungarian 14%, Hungarian–French 8,2%, while all the other languages (Italian, Russian, Spanish, Romanian, Slovak, Czech, Polish) are well below 10%.

There are no reliable data available concerning wages in the T/I profession. An article published in May 2014 on the fordit.hu web portal (Fordit.hu 2014) estimates that in 2011 the average earning of a translator was HUF 472.000 (ca. EUR 1520, calculated with a 310 HUF to EUR conversion rate) per month. In a 2011 article, the news portal hvg.hu (Hvg.hu 2011) wrote that the average daily rate for consecutive interpreting was HUF 45–50.000 (EUR 145–160) plus VAT, while the rate for simultaneous interpreting was HUF 60–80.000 (EUR 190–260) plus VAT. According to another source, the web page fizetese.hu (the word *fizetés* means *salary*), the current average monthly wage of a Hungarian interpreter is HUF 215.077 (EUR 694) (Fizetese.hu 2016b), while the average monthly wage of a Hungarian translator is HUF 277.835 (EUR 896) (Fizetese.hu 2016a). The truth must be somewhere in the middle, as usual.

As regards training and qualification requirements, under a 1986 regulation, still in force, T/I services can be performed only by people holding a qualification as a specialized translator or interpreter. Under another 1986 regulation, also still in force, such qualifications can be obtained in undergraduate or postgraduate training provided by higher education institutions, or in other institutions designated by the minister of culture and education. It is also possible for people holding a university or college degree to sit for a qualifying exam for specialized translators without taking a training course, and anyone with certification in specialized translation can sit for a qualifying exam in translation and revision. People with an advanced level language certificate can sit for a qualifying exam for interpreters, irrespective of their age or qualifications, people holding a higher education degree can sit for a qualifying exam for specialized interpreters, and those holding a certificate in specialized interpreting can sit for a qualifying exam for conference interpreters.

3. Translator and Interpreter Training Programmes in the USA

3.1. The history of translator and interpreter training in the USA

Translator and interpreter training in the United States started with a programme founded at Georgetown University in 1949 (and then closed in 2001). This was followed by programmes established at Monterey (now Middlebury Institute of International Studies) in 1965, at Brigham Young University in 1976, Florida International University in 1978, the University of Delaware in 1979, San Diego State University in 1980, Kent State University in 1988 and the University of Hawaii in 1988. The first programmes in literary translation were established at Binghamton University in 1971, the University of Arkansas in 1974, and the University of Iowa in 1977 (Pym et al. 2012).

Based on information from the web portal study.com (Study.com 2016a), in the USA T/I training programmes on different levels of higher education include the following: undergraduate certificate, graduate certificate, associate of science/applied science, BA or BSc (also, in certain cases, minor programmes), MA, MFA or MSc, PhD. It is difficult to tell how many such programmes are running at the various institutions. With the help of a range of sources (American Translators Association 2016a, 2016b, Kwintessential 2016, Lexicool 2016, ProZ.com 2016) I compiled a list of T/I programmes at the different levels. I did not include American Sign Language (ASL) courses, of which a great number exists all across the US.

While it is very likely that my lists are incomplete, they provide an approximately precise view of the present situation. I have identified 79 certificate or minor programmes (in 53 different institutions), 4 associate programmes (4 institutions), 10 BA or BSc programmes (10 institutions), 32 MA, MFA or MSc programmes (25 institutions) and 4 PhD programmes (4 institutions) in the USA. According to these lists, altogether there are 68 institutions running some sort of T/I training programme. At the same time, according to the National Center for Education Statistics of the USA, in 2011–12 there were 4706 institutions of higher education in the country (National Center for Education Statistics 2015). Comparing this number to the previous 68 it seems quite obvious that the scale of T/I training is far below the level that would be made possible by the institutional background, and is well below the level that would seem necessary based on the market growth projections. All this may result in a shortage of T/I professionals in the US in the coming years and decades.

3.2. Certificate and minor programmes

An undergraduate certificate programme normally lasts for one year, and typically requires the student to collect 15–22 credit points. (One credit – SCH, semester credit hour – in the American system corresponds to one weekly contact hour through a semester, i.e. 15–16 contact hours per semester). A graduate certificate programme also typically last for a year, and students earn 15–30 credits. Most T/I graduate certificate programmes accept students with an undergraduate degree and require knowledge of at least one foreign language. Many such programmes operate as part of an MA programme, but independent graduate certificate programmes also exist. Programme contents are varied: several different languages and specializations are available (e.g. healthcare, IT, finances, economics, law etc.). Minor programmes in translation are rare; I have only found six of them. They last for one or two school years, during which students need to collect 15–24 credits.

3.3. Associate of science and Associate of applied science (AS, AAS) Programmes

Associate of science/applied science programmes provide a qualification below the BA level, and credits earned here can be transferred if the student decides to work for a BA degree later. A typical associate programme takes two years and prescribes an aggregate credit value of 60–70. I have only found 4 such programmes.

3.4. BA/Bsc programmes

An article on the web portal study.com (Study.com 2016b) says T/I training programmes on the BA/BSc level are few and far between in the US. I have identified 10 of them based on my sources. A typical BA programme lasts 4 years, and requires the student to collect 120 credit points. In some institutions students can compile a personalized T/I programme, tailored to their needs with the help of a student advisor.

3.5. MA/MFA/MSc programmes

Relative to the size of the country, the number of T/I programmes at the master's level is rather small: I have only found 32, running in 25 different institutions. These programmes last for one or two years and require the student to earn 35–50 credits. There are various versions of master's programmes in the US. The most typical form is the MA (Master of Arts), but one institution, New York University runs an MS (Master of Science) programme. Most institutions offering a programme with literary translation in focus provide an MFA (Master of Fine Arts) degree. Besides these, the University of Denver has an MLS (Master of Liberal Studies) programme (MLS in Global Affairs with a Concentration in Translation Studies), with a strong interdisciplinary orientation. Finally, the University of Maryland offers MPS (Master of Professional Studies) degrees in translation and interpreting, with the focus placed on practical professional skills.

3.6. PhD programmes

Doctoral programmes take 2–3 years (but earning the PhD degree often takes more, often even 5–8 years), and require students to collect 60–70 credits, including research and the dissertation. There are four intuitions running such programmes but, strictly speaking, only two of these offer genuine Translation Studies education (Binghamton University and Kent State University), the other two (University of California, Santa Barbara and the University of Texas at Dallas) are literary, cultural, interdisciplinary programmes, with an option to focus on translation.

3.7. General characteristics of these programmes

As for the languages offered, besides the traditionally much-translated European languages (Spanish, French, German, Russian and, less typically, Portuguese and Italian) many schools also offer Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and some even Arabic. Programmes are typically bilingual: mother tongue (normally English) plus one foreign language, but there are also trilingual programmes (e.g. Middlebury Institute, University of Maryland).

In terms of specializations, literary translation is quite prominently present on the master's and doctoral level, and such programmes also exist on the certificate level. Among the various areas of specialized translation most schools run programmes specialized in business, law, healthcare and science translation and court and healthcare interpreting.

With the exception of literary programmes, course subjects focusing on practical skills have a far greater emphasis than theoretical subjects. This strong practical orientation suggests an approach in which focus on transferring knowledge and skills needed in the job market is more important than discussing theoretical questions of translation and interpreting. The value of theory in T/I education is a much-debated question, which is too complex to follow any further here.

4. Translator and Interpreter Training in Hungary

4.1. The history of translator and interpreter training in Hungary

The first T/I programme in Hungary was started in 1973 by the Translator and Interpreter Training Group of Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, first in Russian and English, then also in German and French. This was a postgraduate programme for students with a university or college degree and an advanced level of language proficiency (Klaudy 1997:177). Undergraduate level T/I training started in 1974, as a supplementary part of degree programmes in technology, science, agriculture, economics and medicine. The first such programme was launched by the University of Miskolc (Klaudy 1997:178). The dominant foreign language in this kind of training was Russian and the twofold aim was to raise the level of foreign language proficiency of would-be professionals and to train people who could act as mediators between Hungarians and their international business partners (Heltai 2002:10).

The most recent phase of Hungarian T/I education started in 2007, when a government decree regulating the educational and output requirements of master's programmes in translation and interpreting was issued. T/I training, according to this regulation, is dominated by practical courses (66%), with theoretical courses making up about one third of the programmes (34%).

Finally, the spectrum of T/I training in Hungary became complete when in 2003 the Doctoral School of Linguistics of ELTE started its Translation Studies Doctoral Programme.

4.2. T/I Training programmes in Hungary

There are T/I training programmes operating in 16 higher education institutions in Hungary. I have prepared a lists of these programmes based primarily on information published on the felvi.hu higher education web portal, supplemented by information found on the web pages of the different institutions.

4.2.1. BA Specialization Modules

Eight institutions offer T/I training as part of their English Studies or German Studies BA programmes. The University of Miskolc also operates a legal translation module for students of the Faculty of Law. Such specialization modules typically last for 4 semesters and require students to collect 20–50 credit points. (Hungary uses the ECTS credit system, where one credit corresponds to 30 hours of study.) The closest US equivalents to such modules are undergraduate certificate programmes.

4.2.2. Postgraduate specialized studies

Postgraduate specialized programmes are offered to people already holding a university or college degree, and roughly correspond to US graduate certificate programmes.

Such postgraduate programmes are run by 16 institutions. Most of them train specialized translators and/or interpreters, but some of them also offer training in translation and terminology or translation and revision.

Specializations include technology, IT, agriculture, economics, the European Union, law, religion, medicine, audio-visual studies, social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, and health sciences. Programmes are predominantly bilingual (mother tongue plus one foreign language), but some institutions offer trilingual training, and the Budapest University of Technology operates an international four-language conference interpreting programme. Foreign languages in these programmes mostly include English and German, complemented in some places by French and, even more rarely, Italian, Dutch, Japanese, Chinese, and Slavic and Baltic languages. Programmes last for 2–4 semesters, and students are required to accumulate 60–120 credits.

4.2.3. Master's Programmes

In 2016, out of the 66 state-recognized higher educational institutions in Hungary, seven operate T/I training programmes at the master's level. Such MA programmes last for 4 semesters and students are required to earn 120 credits. The training includes three languages: the mother tongue (A language, Hungarian), and two foreign languages (B and C languages).

The government decree regulating these programmes does not leave much room for institutional differences, which means that in terms of their structure and content master's programmes at the different institutions are rather similar. Specializations include law and economics; one notable exception is the University of Debrecen, where a literary translation sub-module is also part of the programme.

Where the different institutions can really exhibit their specific characteristics is in the actual contents of the various courses and the choice of foreign languages they offer. English and German are offered at every institution, of course. French is taught in five institutions, Italian in three, Russian and Spanish in two, Dutch and Chinese in one institution.

4.3.4. PhD programmes

PhD education in Hungary, according to the National Higher Education Act of 2011, lasts for 6 semesters, during which students earn 180 credits. PhD education in Translation Studies is only offered in Hungary in the Department of Translator and Interpreter Training of ELTE in Budapest. This programme considers Translation Studies as an interdisciplinary area of study, having an interface with a range of other disciplines including psycholinguistics, cognitive linguistics, text linguistics, corpus linguistics, contrastive linguistics, lexicography, terminology, sociolinguistics and communication theory.

5. Conclusions and Further Questions

Although training programmes are practice-oriented in both countries, differences in terms of programme structure and content across institutions are more marked in the US than in Hungary. One essential reason for this is the fact that in Hungary the educational and output requirements of higher education programmes are regulated in a rather detailed way by the educational administration, while in the US no such centralized regulation exists. It is debatable, of course, which situation is more advantageous in terms of the quality of education, but the issue is far too complex to be treated in any sensible manner here.

The range of languages taught is obviously determined primarily by socio-economic needs. In the US the educational scene is dominated by Spanish–English T/I trainings, in

several programmes complemented by such traditionally important European languages as French, German and Russian, while Chinese, Japanese and Arabic are also becoming more and more significant. In Hungary, the most important foreign languages in T/I training programmes are English and German. In some programmes French, Russian, Italian and Spanish are also taught, while all the other languages have a marginal role. This might be seen as a possible source of problems in the future, considering the fact that Hungary is an open economy and seeks to build good relations not only with her traditional European and western partners but also with oriental countries.

As regards the number of T/I training programmes and institutions, in the US there are conspicuously few of them, far fewer than would seem to be justified by the size of the country and job market projections. This may lead to serious problems in the near future, as Kelly (2012) points out. In the lack of reliable statistical data concerning the job market, it is more difficult to judge the Hungarian situation. What is certain is that according to the admission statistics in the past few years of higher education institutions published on the web portal felvi.hu (Felvi.hu 2016), approximately 400–500 students would like to continue their studies in T/I master's programmes each year, and about 200 of them are admitted to one of the training institutions. This number of students, and possibly even more, can easily be served by the seven institutions running such programmes, which seems to suggest that, at least at this level, there is presently no shortage of training capacity in Hungary in this area.

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