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The Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers: Building a Network of Teaching Excellence

Boris Naimushin¹ and Maria Stepanova²

¹ New Bulgarian University, Sofia 1618, Bulgaria

² Peter the Great Polytechnic University of Saint Petersburg, Saint Petersburg 195251, Russia

Abstract. Existing national and international associations of freelance translators and interpreters are predominantly business-oriented and aim to promote networking with other professionals, protect their rights and ensure quality of services. They show little interest, if any, in translator and interpreter training issues. Associations of translator and interpreter trainers are almost non-existent both nationally and internationally. In view of the recent establishment of the World Interpreter and Translator Training Association (2016) in China, the paper discusses the advantages and benefits of having independent national professional organizations of translator and interpreter trainers as an important foundation for creating a national community of translator and interpreter educators and trainers and advancing international cooperation. The authors analyze their experience of establishing the Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers (2017) in Russia as a national network of excellence in this area.

Keywords: Translation, Interpreting, Training, Professional Association.

1 Associations of Translators and Interpreters vs. Associations of Translator and Interpreter Trainers

In many countries, translators and interpreters have national professional associations alongside international professional organizations. Many of these associations bring together both translators and interpreters. There are also associations specific to translators in general or only to literary translators. Some of these unite interpreters in a particular field, e.g. sign language interpreters or police and court interpreters.

Professional associations of freelance translators and interpreters are business-oriented and aim to promote networking with other professionals, protect their rights, ensure quality of services and help search for jobs and new clients. Associations adopt regulations and by-laws which govern their relationship with members, as well as relations between members and clients. They promote professional standards and codes of ethics to ensure quality of services, professional confidentiality and compliance with other ethical requirements. As a result, they show little interest, if any, in translator and interpreter training issues.

On the other hand, independent associations of translator and interpreter trainers are almost non-existent both nationally and internationally. One rare example of a national association is the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) in the USA [1]. However, its membership consists primarily of teachers, mentors, and workshop providers of American Sign Language (ASL)/English Interpreting and teachers of ASL.

In view of the recent establishment of the World Interpreter and Translator Training Association (2016) in China [2], the paper discusses the advantages and benefits of having independent national professional organizations of translator and interpreter trainers as an important foundation for creating a national community of translator and interpreter educators and trainers and advancing international cooperation. The authors will present their experience gained in establishing the Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers (ATT) in 2017 in Russia as a national network of excellence in this area [3] and plans to consolidate the community of translator and interpreter trainers in Bulgaria.

2 Professional Associations of Translators and Interpreters

In the brief overview below, the situation in Bulgaria and Russia will be outlined with special attention to the activities of professional associations of translators and interpreters in the area of translator and interpreter training and training of trainers. The authors of this article are both members of the Union of Translators of Russia. Maria Stepanova is Chair of the ATT Steering Committee. Boris Naimushin is member of the ATT Steering Committee and member of the Association of Interpreters and Translators in Bulgaria.

2.1 Associations of Translators and Interpreters in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has two professional associations of translators and interpreters. The Association of Interpreters and Translators in Bulgaria (AIT) established in 1996 as an alternative to the Bulgarian Translators' Union (BTU), which was founded under Communist rule in 1974 as an initiative of over 200 intellectuals, university professors and practitioners. Many members of the AIT still retain their membership in the BTU and are active in both associations.

The Bulgarian Translators' Union (BTU). The Union brings together professional translators, interpreters and researchers in translation studies [4]. The Union has four

sections: Fiction and Humanities, Scientific and Technical Literature and Sworn Translators, Conference Interpreting, Translation Theory, History and Criticism. The website is only in Bulgarian and has no English version or version in any other foreign language. The website does not provide any explicit membership numbers. However, the lists of members in the four sections give the number of 337 members to date. The BTU website features its Statute, Code of Ethics and Code of Good Practices outlining the principles for all BTU members to adhere to and uphold.

Although advertised as a non-profit organization, BTU has its own Translation Agency offering job opportunities to its members.

The Panorama Journal, BTU's regular print publication, features materials on foreign literature, translations studies and the practice of translation. BTU is a member of International Federation of Translators (FIT) and European Council of Literary Translators' Associations (CEATL).

The Association of Interpreters and Translators in Bulgaria (AIT). Established as an alternative to the BTU, it does not have sections and focuses predominantly on conference and community interpreters [5]. According to the list of AIT members on its website, current membership stands at 61 persons.

The AIT website has identical Bulgarian and English versions featuring its Statute, Code of Ethics and Standard Terms and Conditions. Contrary to BTU, AIT does not serve as an intermediary between clients and its members. Clients are encouraged to contact its interpreters and translators directly through their profiles published on the website.

AIT also offers advice and guidance to people who want to enter the profession and who need to be educated of the importance of communication and language services in general. It is a full member of EULITA (European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association).

2.2 Associations of Translators and Interpreters in Russia

The history of professional associations of translators in Russia goes back to 1917 when the All-Russia Professional Union of Translators was established in Saint Petersburg. In 1922, it was transformed into the All-Russia Society of Professional Literary Translators with over 200 members. In 1924, a Translation Section was set up at the Leningrad Chapter of the All-Russia Union of Writers. Efforts of the Section to establish an independent Leningrad Society of Literary Translators met with official resistance from authorities. Sections of Literary Translation existed at the Chapters of the Union of Soviet Writers (1934-1991) under the auspices of its Literary Translation Council. Three All-Union Conference of Translators were held in 1936, 1951 and 1970.

The Union of Translators of Russia (UTR). Established in 1991, the UTR has positioned itself as a professional association of language industry practitioners, theorists, teachers, universities and companies [6]. The association aims to unify and develop the language industry community in Russia, protect the rights and interests of translators

and interpreters, contribute to translator and interpreter training and strengthen professional international relations. The website exists only in Russian and has no English version or in any other foreign language. The UTR is a member of the International Federation of Translators (FIT). It publishes two periodical journals.

The UTR has fifty Chapters throughout Russia with a total membership of approximately 1,300 [7]. Its Moscow Chapter is the only one to have sections, i.e. Humanities and Media Translation, Business, Scientific and Technical Translation, Translation of Fiction, Translation Studies and Translator and Interpreter Training, Conference Interpreting.

The National League of Translators and Interpreters. Established in 2004 in Moscow, the NLT is a non-profit professional association of freelance and in-house translators and interpreters [8]. Its website has shorter versions in English, French, Spanish and German. There is no information on the NLT membership.

2.3 Professional Associations, Translator and Interpreter Training and Training of Trainers

Professional associations of freelance translators and interpreters in Russia and Bulgaria show little interest, if any, in translator and interpreter training issues. This is the case with the BTU and the AIT in Bulgaria and the NLT in Russia.

Only the UTR in Russia has activities in this area. Thus, it has launched, through its *Translation Studies, Translator and Interpreter Training* Section, a project to strengthen links between universities and language industry companies. The UTR also organizes Summer and Winter Schools for students of translation and interpreting.

3 The Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers

The Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers (ATT) is the only professional association in Russia and Bulgaria that represents the interests of a wide range of professionals involved in translator and interpreter training [3]. It is a non-profit organization incorporated under the laws of the Russian Federation. The website of ATT is <http://translation-teachers.ru/>. Currently, there is no English version of the site. Plans are underway to implement a website translation and localization project involving ATT members and their students aimed at producing and maintaining an English version of the ATT website.

3.1 ATT Goals

The ATT was established in 2017 as an initiative of a group of educators and translation and interpretation professionals, including the authors of this article, who recognized the need for such an organization. As set out in its by-laws, the objective of the ATT is

to promote the recognition and advancement of the profession of translator and interpreter trainers; to establish a professional community of translator and interpreter trainers in Russia; and to protect and safeguard the rights and interests of its members.

The ATT website provides information about the Association: resources and references for translator and interpreter trainers, information about conferences, workshops, projects and useful networks and an explanation of ATT membership. This information is intended to assist newcomers to the profession and enhance the abilities of established practitioners.

3.2 ATT Membership

Membership of the ATT is open to individuals and organizations in Russia and abroad involved in translator and interpreter training and willing to make their contribution to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the ATT. We recognize the fact that majority of those involved in translator and interpreter training are full-time university lecturers, and thus the ATT has initiated an awareness-raising campaign aimed at universities across Russia.

Furthermore, since the ATT also recognizes the importance of internship opportunities for students of translation and interpreting, it welcomes applications from translation agencies already involved in internship programs or wishing to establish relations with universities. Thus, the ATT is a useful point of contact between universities and translation agencies.

At the present time, ATT members include representatives of translation agencies (28%), university teachers (67%) and freelancers with no university affiliation but involved in delivering training courses (5%). A large part of university teachers of translation and interpreting are also active practitioners (89%).

Motivation to join the ATT. Applicants to join the ATT are asked to submit, among other required documents, a motivation letter to support their application. These letters provide important information about the commitments, which the applicants are prepared to undertake, and their expectations. Below are excerpts from motivation letters submitted to the ATT and quoted here in our translation with the kind permission of the respective members.

Representatives of translation companies view the ATT as a networking opportunity bringing together universities, practitioners and language industry companies. They are confident that their facilities and rich experience in the industry will be instrumental in joint efforts to raise the profession to a new level.

University teachers look forward to sharing their experience and learning from colleagues in all areas of translator and interpreter education and training. They are also confident that this professional association will be instrumental in forging lasting relations between universities and the industry. An additional incentive to join is access to reference and teaching and learning materials on the ATT website.

3.3 ATT Projects

As set out in its annual Action Plan, the ATT acts as organiser or co-organiser of events related to translator and interpreter training. In doing so, the ATT sees its mission in bringing together universities, teachers, students, translation companies and freelancers. The projects described below are already underway or have been completed.

International Student Consecutive Interpretation Competition. One recent successful project was the Second International Student Consecutive Interpretation Contest co-organised with Peter the Great Polytechnic University of Saint-Petersburg and New Bulgarian University on 22-23 March 2018. The competition attracted 47 Bachelor's and Master's students from 18 universities in Russia and 2 in Bulgaria. The language combinations of the competition were Russian – English, Russian – Bulgarian and English – Bulgarian.

The competition aimed to recreate the real working conditions experienced by consecutive interpreters. In the first round, participants were asked to perform bilateral interpreting of a pre-recorded video interview in their language combination. In the second round, they were asked to provide consecutive interpretation with notes of two pre-recorded video statements of up to 3 minutes each (one from A to B and one from B to A). The delivery was judged in terms of fidelity, stage presence and audience interaction. Members of the jury were experienced practicing interpreters, interpreter trainers, representatives of translation agencies, and native speakers of all three languages.

All participants received Certificates of Participation and the winners received Competition Winner Certificates and prizes from our sponsors. The Consulate General of Bulgaria in St. Petersburg organized a reception for the winners, organisers, sponsors and volunteers of the competition. The programme also included a master class in note-taking and a round table on working with translation agencies.

This year, our general sponsor was T-Service, an SDL approved reseller for Russia and the CIS countries [9]. Translation companies AKM-WEST ranking among the TOP 15 translation companies in Russia and the TOP 25 translation companies in Eastern Europe [10] and STAR SPb, a Russian branch of the STAR Group, the largest privately-owned technical translation services and translation software company [11], also co-sponsored the competition and were represented on the jury.

During the wrap-up session, Irina Alekseeva, Director of St. Petersburg School of Conference Interpreting and Translation, told students that in her view, one day of participation in a competition is equivalent to one year of classroom training.

In their feedback, participants rated the event as a good learning exercise. They were particularly appreciative of the opportunity to test their consecutive interpreting skills against other students in a stimulating and challenging environment. Many of them confirmed that the competition had helped them significantly to understand the gaps in their present abilities and had encouraged them to strive for improvement. This has once again demonstrated that competitions are an important and efficient tool in interpreter training [12].

Interpreting Competition Preparation Seminars. After the first contest in March 2017, we realized that students needed focused preparation for participation in competitions. As a result, the authors delivered two seminars (16 hours of training each) prior to the competition: one in February 2018 at the Institute of International Law and Economics (IILE), Moscow [13] and one in March 2018 at the Peter the Great Polytechnic University of Saint Petersburg. In their feedback, participants expressed appreciation for the helpful insights about preparation, stage behaviour, audience interaction, focus and a winning attitude.

Unique Student Translation Project. Natalia Nechaeva, President of the ATT, is supervising this student project. This is a charitable project in which students translate information brochures and guides on chromosome and gene disorders for Unique, a Rare Chromosome Disorder Support Group, into Russian. It is a small charity supporting, informing and networking with families living with a Rare Chromosome Disorder or Autosomal Dominant Single Gene Disorders associated with learning disability and developmental delay. Translations are available for free download [14].

Anthony Pym: Approaches to Teaching Translation. A Student Translation Project. One of our major concerns is provision of information and resources to assist newcomers to the profession and enhance the abilities of established practitioners. Unfortunately, these materials are not always available in Russian. As a result, not all translator and interpreter trainers are able to take full advantage of them.

In an effort to improve the situation, we have decided to implement a series of student translation projects to make important texts in translation and interpreting teaching methodology available in Russian. The first step will be to translate Anthony Pym's selected articles in the framework of student projects supervised by members of the ATT and publish them in open access on our website citing the translator, editor and the source of the original texts.

Members of the ATT highly appreciate Anthony Pym's contribution to the advancement of translation studies and translation teaching methodology, including the use of translation technologies in translator training. Professor Pym has already granted us his kind permission to translate and publish the translations of his articles that are available in open access on the internet on the ATT website. He has also asked us to keep him informed of the progress and send him the final version of translated articles.

The selection process is now underway with over 40 applications already received from students from universities across Russia. The translation process will commence in July and will complete in August 2018.

XIII Conference on Translation and Interpreting as a Profession. The ATT was co-organizer of this webinar on 12 April 2018, together with Natalia Gavrilenko's School of Translation Didactics, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Reshetnev Siberian State University of Science and Technology and the UTR Section of Translation Studies and Translator and Interpreter Training [15].

It brought together university teachers and experts from Perm, Krasnoyarsk, Saint Petersburg, Moscow and Sofia. Videos of all presentations are available online on the

website of the School of Translation Didactics. Four members of the Steering Committee represented the ATT. They delivered reports and actively participated in discussions.

4 Is there a need for an association of translator and interpreter trainers in Bulgaria?

The successful establishment and development of an association of translator and interpreter trainers in Russia raises the question of whether such an association could be viable in Bulgaria. As shown above, memberships in the two professional organizations of translators and interpreters is not very high (approximately 200 members in the BTU and 60 in the AIT). In comparison, the Bulgarian English Teachers' Association (BETA), an IATEFL Affiliate, has about 100 members [16]. These figures raise doubts as to the possibility of attracting more than 15-20 members into an association of translator and interpreter trainers.

Another approach to consider is to establish a Bulgarian chapter of the ATA. This will require a thorough investigation of the legal provisions in Russia, especially with respect to membership fee payments from Bulgaria.

5 Conclusions

The discussion in this paper and the experience of the authors has clearly demonstrated the advantages and benefits of having independent national professional organizations of translator and interpreter trainers as an important foundation for creating a national community of translator and interpreter educators and trainers and advancing international cooperation. The Association of Translator and Interpreter Trainers in Russia has set out to build a network of teaching excellence. The first year of its existence has proved that we are on the right track.

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