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the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication

TRAINING FOR A TRANSCULTURAL WORLD

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Foreword

This issue asked for contributions focussing on research, models, strategies, and also practical exercises which either break new ground on classic linguacultural divides, or are able to reach beyond static, stereotypical 'cultural differences' and make some headway in improving communication and mutual understanding in an increasingly transcultural and virtual world. As we had such a response, boosted through the active contribution of SIETAR Europe papers given at Krakow "Interculturalism Ahead: Transition to a Virtual World?" (September 2011), instead of our usual 5-6 papers we have 10 but, sadly perhaps, no interview this year.

The first papers in this issue offer specific frameworks or models, all of which move us on from the static cultural-difference models, and chart how the transcultural turn is developing; while those on university training and translation give us a stark reality check. Though there is some light, and much investment in training, especially through foreign study, the picture regarding student perception of the training and of 'the Other', along with actual professional translation highlights the fact that there is still some way to go before we can talk of a real 'transcultural turn' in practice.

We hear much about EU supported initiatives in education and training. In particular there is FREPA a Council of Europe 'Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures' (Daryai-Hansen & Schröder-Sura) and INCA, the "Intercultural Competence Assessment" suite of tools (Cano). From the business world we have a fusion of cultural dimensions with the Reiss Life motives (Konigorski), rhizomatic (rather than tree diagram thinking) embodied in the analogy with the Mobius strip (Hale); WorldWork's 'International Profiler' (IP) and International Preference indicator' (IPI) (Ewington & Hill) along with a more communication focussed enhancement (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler).

Areas of perception of cultural difference include a German-American study of Facebook (Reeves), the intercultural benefits of EU supported 'Applied Language Europe' (ALE) European university study exchange

(Morón-Martín) and the 'Mobility in Higher Education' project (Cano). With regard specifically to translation and transculturality there is a discussion on the use of corpora and travel insurance texts (Peruzzo and Durán-Muñoz) and a case study on the translation of film titles.

David Katan
Cinzia Spinzi

“Transtaining Interculturators” or Training Communication Experts in Today’s Transcultural World

Marián Morón-Martín

Abstract

In an interconnected world, it is a recognised fact that exchanges – of products, services, people, expertise and knowledge, to name but a few – are needed. In the European Union, created to facilitate such exchanges and communication, mobility has proven to be a guarantee for the future of the Union and a key element behind the reform of the European higher education system. In the training of communication and translation experts, mobility is also considered to play a fundamental role, bringing about not only linguistic gains, but also other competencies necessary for successfully operating in transcultural and multilingual communication events. However, as Noreiko mused in 1990, much of the push to encourage mobility may, in fact, stem from unfounded assumptions and a generally vague understanding of the matter. In light of the changing structures and names of higher education degree programs within the convergence process, the complete integration of Erasmus as part of the university student experience, the flexibility of the labour market, the development of transcultural societies and the rapid changes of current political and economic realities, this paper attempts to address the role translation and language trainees view their transnational experiences as playing in their future integration into the labour market and open society, in general, as experts in intercultural communication. Using a mixed-methods approach and online research tools, the study analyses the value of transcultural training and the long-term effects of mobility, while also considering their impact on the personal, academic and professional development of trainees, as perceived by the trainees themselves. The paper summarizes key findings and challenges traditional research methods in translation studies.

1. Introduction

In today’s society, it seems that the explanation of any social or economic phenomenon requires a look at migrations and moving markets. Indeed, such movements of people and information are intrinsic to the nature of a

globalised world. These same themes of mobility and intercultural interaction also apply and play a key role in European higher education (which can also be considered a culture-bound socioeconomic reality) today. However, much has changed from the days when providing a framework for mobile European students was the primary concern.

In this paper, student mobility is understood as a learning opportunity, namely one of transnational and transcultural training: no longer subject to their own national academic traditions, but rather confronted with new rules, systems and challenges, students may deepen their learning experience far beyond a purely academic scope (Sowden 2003). In the training of translators, interpreters and experts in international communication where the knowledge of other cultures, value systems and traditions is key, student mobility takes on additional importance, a point readily recognized in translation and language studies (Coleman 1996; Byram 1997; Kelly 2005). Moreover, and as stressed by Snell-Hornby (in Intercultural Studies Group, 2012), the status of the profession varies across different countries. Translation studies itself has no common, unified approach; and various perspectives exist regarding the training of translators across different European institutions of higher education. As neither the Bologna Process (Bologna) nor the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) seem to have helped overcome these divergences, mobile students have found themselves additionally challenged by the need to face cultural gaps in their training process.

Given these considerations, this paper aims to analyse the impact of transnational learning experiences on translation and interpretation (TI) and on foreign language students, focusing specifically on Applied Language Europe (ALE) participants¹. To be able to accurately reflect

¹ The ALE programme was the result of the collaboration of a set of European Institutions from the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, Germany and Spain, allowing students of Languages, Translation and/or Communication (depending on the home degree) to spend two study periods abroad, following an integrated curriculum and allowing the participants to obtain a double or triple award at the conclusion of their studies. For some time, the programme was at risk, especially after the implementation of the European structure system in the partner institutions. Now the ALE programme has been relaunched under the AEL denomination (Applied European Languages) thanks to the impulse from new partners, now coming from Belgium and Spain (Information updated on December 21st 2012). Our reference to TI/Communication/Language students here apply to those students (from the partner institutions) taking part in the ALE programme (the reference to ALE is kept in this article, as we base on the results gathered from participants before the inauguration of the programme's new stage as

upon the impact of transnational education experiences, the following set of questions has been established as a guide: (a) Is transnational² education a key to TI and ALE students becoming better professionals in their field? (b) When TI and ALE students are sent abroad to learn from their exchange, are the elements affecting this learning actually known? (c.i.) When a trainee *translator/intercultural expert* is sent abroad, does “something else” return following an *international* experience? (c.ii.) Or is it just “something different” that returns following a *transcultural* experience (assuming that different cultures do make contact when international or transnational education happens)? (c.iii.) Do we get “translators” as a result of international training opportunities? (c.iv.). Or do the elements somehow mix together to result in *interculturators (experts in intercultural communication)* from a *transtraining*³ (*transnational translation training*) experience? At play in these questions is nothing less than the overall perception of the profession, as well as its future visibility.

This study analyses the perceptions and reflections of a group of one hundred mobile undergraduate ALE students having benefitted from two periods of study stays outside their home institution as part of their translation/language training. Following a mixed-methods qualitative-quantitative approach, the paper attempts to reflect upon the questions from the point of view of students participating in transcultural learning programs, as well as to assess the new reality created by the harmonisation process under Bologna and the EHEA. To conclude, the study considers the effects that training for a transcultural world may have on translator training programmes in Spain.

AEL).

² Transcultural and transnational education are considered as two sides of the same coin: education is considered to be a culture-bound element; then when we deal with international or transnational academic experiences, we are dealing with transcultural experiences or opportunities for transcultural training.

³ These terms are the result of the combination of the elements and concepts that combine in the ALE experience: a component of **translator training**, **international** experience (developed in various countries), and **transcultural** education (as a result of their exposure to different institutions and academic traditions).

2. The European Union and Mobility in Higher Education: convergent structures within the Bologna Process framework

Unity is not a new paradigm in modern Europe. First united for defence and economic reasons, the current concept of the European Union (EU) is a result of an evolution owing to far-reaching reforms including the creation of European institutions, the single currency (2002), and the project to adopt a Constitution for Europe (concluding with the 2007 Treaty of Lisbon). Despite education having been on the EU agenda since its inception, it was not until the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 that specific courses of action were established to encourage cooperation across Member States while, at the same time, respecting their particular identities. EU efforts aimed at developing a European dimension of education, namely, promoting the mobility of students and teachers, the cooperation across institutions, the exchange of information and expertise, as well as the development of distance education. Since this initial stage, newer EU policies have been enacted to overcome obstacles to the completion of the original objectives, as well as to harmonise the different European systems of higher education. Created for this latter purpose, the EHEA is also the organism responsible for promoting the quality and competitiveness of European higher education.

Mobility within the EU Education system

With the Bologna and the Lisbon Strategy underway, the proliferation of European directives and legislation over the last decade has been tremendous. The success of education programmes is a fact, with Erasmus at the fore to the extent that the new education programme framework seems to have returned to basics under the title “Erasmus for all” (2014-2020). With the aims of providing a new impulse for greater unification, strengthened links and new initiatives – such as the Erasmus Master’s degree student loan guarantee scheme, Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances (European Commission 2012) – this new umbrella programme covers former Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) initiatives (Erasmus, Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius and Grundtvig), Youth in Action, as well as five additional international cooperation programmes (Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink and the programme for cooperation with industrialized countries).

Transcultural and transnational academic experiences, as conceived of by the EU, are key elements in the promotion of linguistic knowledge, the construction of a European identity (while, at the same time, fostering a respect for other EU countries' linguistic and cultural background) and the acquisition of the complex competences necessary for a new generation of European and global citizens.

Paradoxes of the EHEA: asymmetrical objectives, structures and institutions within the convergent scheme

As explained earlier, the EHEA was created to establish common, harmonised structures across EU higher education systems and remove administrative and academic barriers to this harmonisation. EU student mobility would therefore be promoted, inasmuch as students would be able to study abroad in other Member State institutions of higher learning within the common framework, while receiving full recognition for their work upon their return to their home institutions. The creation of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), the common "currency" across these institutions, has been a great step forward toward the realisation of this objective.

Despite these advances, however, the harmonization process has yet to fully come to fruition, with the incomplete nature of the project being easily noticeable upon inspection of bachelor's-master's degree structures across EU Member States. With many EU countries having selected a structure best suiting their national systems and closest (although not always) to their academic traditions, both 3+2 (three-year bachelor's and two-year master's degrees) and 4+1 (four-year bachelor's and one-year master's) structures have been created. Additional differences can also be detected in nationally-bound structures and institutions, despite great efforts made to incorporate teaching methods transmitting common values based on the European identity, respect for diversity and student-centred approaches. What is more, the reforms undertaken thus far appear have been quite superficial (ESIB report, 2007). The concerns expressed in the report *Bologna with Student Eyes (ibid)* from the European Students Union seem to have become reality, with education reforms differing to such an extent from one country to another that, paradoxically, differences across systems appear to have been strengthened rather than

eliminated. Even the necessity of tools such as the Eurydice⁴ database or the recent Eurypedia of national education systems seems to belie the large differences underneath the so-called common EU educational convergent system.

What seems certain is that, as Vaira notes:

There is evidence that following studies in one country, but also in a given institution (*Grande École*/university/technical institution; mainly academic or vocational or a mix of both) and study course, may translate in distinct experiences as perceived by participant students. Each national system and institution enjoys certain specific features, they are also immersed in a given university or higher education tradition, their internal management and languages of instruction may affect students' learning experiences.

According to the author, language of instruction is another variable to be taken into account. Thus, while most countries in Europe use their national language in the classroom, English is also frequently used in higher education institutions in Western European countries in order to overcome differences in light of Bologna, as well as to foster student mobility. As a final point, although it is commonly assumed that common systems have been developed for the training of professionals in particular fields, little in fact is known about the training instrument itself. As Calvo (2009) demonstrates, even the concept of *curriculum* is locally-bound.

For all the above, one might easily assume that even within the so-called convergent or unified system of higher education in the EU, a student's experience studying abroad at an EU Member State institution is, by definition, transcultural.

3. The ALE Programme: making the divergent converge

The ALE mobility programme was set up in the 1980s to integrate institutions⁵ offering training in translation or interpretation (TI), allowing

⁴ The EU database on information on and analysis of European Education systems and Policies.

⁵ The TI institutions involved are Fachhochschule Köln, Germany, and University of Granada, Spain), and institutions where Translation is not a major, but is included in the curricula (Thames Valley University, University of Northumbria at Newcastle, Liverpool John Moores University in the United Kingdom; Universität Passau, Germany; the

students to spend two periods of study outside their home institution with full recognition from participating institutions. It is an example of transcultural and transnational cooperation in an effort to overcome systemic divergences and encourage networking activities for students in either TI, Communication or Language (according to the specific degree major).

In Spain, translation training has traditionally included the following components: language learning; cultural (or area) studies; translation techniques (offered for a diversity of linguistic combinations and fields of specialisation); localisation, specialised software and computer-assisted techniques; general applied knowledge (necessary for specialised translation and interpreting); and interpreting (though master's-level training is required for full specialisation, some institutions include courses in consecutive/simultaneous interpreting, bilateral interpreting or interpretation techniques). These bachelor's-level training programs in Spain, however, have little correspondence to their supposed equivalents in other EU countries where emphasis is normally given to the applied language, modern language or communication studies traditions.

In the ALE programme, these distinct traditions coexist and converge under a joint curriculum that allows participants to obtain a double or triple undergraduate degree. ALE curriculum is agreed by the consortium and combines training in Languages, Translation and some compulsory courses in Law and Economics.

With full integration under the mobility programme, students have to pass a specific examination and (in most cases) an interview to enter the programme. They must then fulfil specific academic requirements and follow a study plan predetermined by partner institutions (including specialization in Law and Economics). Some students did not succeed in the completion of the course, though no data was stored by any of the institutions on this. This implies a return to the home degree and the student being unable to get the multiple degree awarded by ALE.

Subsequent sections of this paper present the experience of European students who, in participating in the ALE programme, were confronted with the differences between the focus on translation (TI-specific) in their degree studies and the applied/modern language focus (non-TI-specific) in their degree studies abroad.

4. Experimental Research: research methods for approaching transcultural educational experiences

The study gathered and analysed the responses of 108 subjects from all ALE partner institutions, 95 of whom being professionally active at the time of the survey. An electronic survey was designed and distributed using a non-probabilistic sampling method: the snowball sampling technique (e.g., Oppenheim 1992), due basically to the fact that subjects were distributed in seven different countries and, no ALE student mailing list was available.⁶ To respond to our research questions and research approach, we followed a mixed-methods approach (Grotjahn 1987; Hernández Sampieri et al. 2003; Brannen 2005). In this regard, Grotjahn's (1987) dynamic model was particularly instructive, as it allowed us to implement a non-experimental research, where qualitative and quantitative data could be gathered (as a result of the implementation of an online questionnaire consisting of open-ended and close-ended questions), which were analysed not only statistically but also from a qualitative and interpretative approach. This was extremely important in order to address survey subjects' perceptions of their own transcultural learning experiences (Nunan 1989; Fink 2002) Finally, the interpretative paradigm was adopted, inasmuch as the study had no desire to favour the generalization of results data (see Calvo 2009), but rather to qualitatively analyse results and respond to the research questions set.

The questionnaire was made available online⁷. It was designed in English (as this was the common language for all ALE participants), piloted with students from various institutions and having different mother tongues, and subject to the validation of a board of experts. The sample consisted in 50 subjects (46.3%) from the TI-specific institutions and (53.7%) from non-TI specific institutions and 58 subjects from non-TI specific institutions (53.7%), 108 in total. Most subjects were graduates at the time of the survey (95 subjects, 88% of the sample) and the rest were students completing their final degree essay, some combining this activity with some professional activities. They were mainly women (86.1%) with no significant divergences found in the TI and the non-TI groups in this respect. 85 subjects were actively working at the time of the

⁶ For more on this reasoning see Hernández Pina (1998: 30-31), Hernández Sampieri (2003: 327), Sierra (1998: 176-7) and Oppenheim (1992: 43).

⁷ At: <http://www.temcu.com/cuestionario/>

survey (this meaning 78.7% of the sample) with 23 subjects following studies (those already enrolled in the programme and completing their final essay, and 11 subjects who marked “study” as their occupation field, 6 of them following postgraduate courses). Data on the professional impact of the training experience was gathered from the responses given by the 85 subjects working at the time of the survey; they had on average a work life-span of 5.5 years (only two subjects stating more than 10 years of professional experience). Not all survey subjects end up completing the open-ended questions where they were questioned about their professional pathways after graduation: responses were collected from 50 subjects (46.3% of the sample) who provided details on their occupations (period, activity, country, etc.) and the main tasks and duties developed. Due to the subjective nature of these data, they were analyzed qualitatively. Despite that, closed-questions were also introduced using a Likert scale in order to collect data on their perceptions of their academic, personal and professional experiences for all survey subjects, which led to a statistical analysis.

5. Principal Results: the impact of transcultural learning experiences of ALE students

Transnational mobility has become a core component in the training of language, communications and translation students, with numerous studies highlighting its value (Coleman 2007; Churchill & DuFon 2006). While most of these studies seem to agree that linguistic gains represent the most significant result of academic mobility and transnational experiences (Coleman 2007; Morón 2009), and while European policies and objectives themselves have focused on linguistic gains as a principal consequence of transnational exposure (Teichler & Maiworm 1997; Teichler 2001; Teichler & Jahr 2001), there nevertheless seems to be overall agreement that no generalizations can be made (Coleman *ibid.*; Churchill & DuFon *ibid.*). In fact, little is known about the factors that foster improved language skills or the specific competencies associated with language immersion in a foreign country. It is important to note, however, that the subject’s pre-immersion linguistic background, the learning context in the host country and the actual time students spend practising the foreign language outside the classroom appear to be key in assessing linguistic gains resulting from transnational learning experiences (Coleman 1995;

Churchill & Dufon 2006: 5; Segalowitz & Freed 2004).

A different focus to the benefits of transnational learning experiences, however, is presented by Parker & Rouxville (1995b: 10):

Learning about a language and a culture, whether from 'home' or in a foreign country, is challenging and satisfying in itself. However, the ability to interact in another culture and to acquire communicative competence in another language involves a transformation and restructuring of the self. The exposure to 'foreign' ways of working, thinking, behaving, being, is an experience fraught with danger. When even the way of using time and space are 'foreign', the learner feels the outsider, the alien. Language is an important component but far from being the only one.

As evidenced here, a shift can be seen in mobility literature to results that go beyond mere linguistic development and, instead, centre on the changes stemming from the transcultural encounters and processes of self-discovery that take place. Among these changes, this latter group of studies often focuses on cultural and intercultural knowledge, personal and interpersonal competences, as well as interdisciplinary and professional skills (Parker & Rouxville 1995b: 12; Convey 1995; Dueñas-Tancred & Weber 1995; Coleman & Parker 1992, 2001; Coleman 2000; Allison & Hintze 1995). In Noreiko (1995: 195-196), a call is made to clarify the reasons (assumedly related to potential gains) why students are sent to study abroad, in the process shedding light on the very little actually known about the gains made by mobile students during their time abroad (Noreiko, *ibid*):

Evaluation of individuals' experiences of the year abroad and the benefits they have thence derived demands we stop to ask ourselves why we send them to do whatever it is we send them to do. We throw them in the water: is the intention simply that they get wet? Or clean? Are we hoping for some kind of rebirth? Should they drink, or swim? There is surely more to success than simply avoiding drowning and returning at the end of the year.

6. Analysis of Results

As the literature on the impact of transcultural and multilingual experiences also demonstrates, most ALE participants surveyed felt satisfied with their international experience. Having benefitted from two foreign study stays, there is a more significant feeling of satisfaction among ALE students regarding their second study stay. This difference in satisfaction may be the result of students' fuller integration into the local culture of the host university. Generally speaking, students appear to have faced greater difficulties during their first study stay outside their home institution, despite their motivation and their willingness to actively participate in the exchange. Also, the students' second study stay seems to have helped them set greater challenges for themselves in their academic and personal spheres, regardless of any other international experience, stays abroad or the fact that some had bi-national parents. Additionally, students demonstrated some hesitation when evaluating their professional development.

93% of subjects surveyed considered their expectations fulfilled, however only 70.1% were satisfied with their professional developments (as compared to figures detected when assessing their satisfaction with their personal [96.3%] or academic [86.1%] development). This general assessment led to open-ended questions where subjects were asked to mention specific gains/competences related to these different levels (personal, academic, professional). In the analysis developed, we saw that 85.2% of the sample described personal competences associated to their training experiences, and 82.4% described academic gains, while only 40% described specific professional gains associated to the training received. In fact, sources of dissatisfaction found were also linked to their expectations (not fulfilled) on the professional impact of the experience, with subjects describing the need for greater specialization, especially in TI training, and a more professional approach of the curricula, closer to market needs.

Among the developments observed by study subjects surveyed, 40% noted a greater multicultural awareness/appreciation and respect for cultural diversity, 35.2% observed greater abilities to work independently, 35.1% mentioned a greater ability to adapt to new/foreign circumstances, and 25.9% spoke of improved general interpersonal abilities.

Academically, linguistic gains are the clearest result from the survey, with 67% of subjects having noted specific developments, a fact likely due to having pursued studies in the foreign language. Having generally been

students' strongest motivation to participate in transcultural experiences abroad, the linguistic gains observed by the students were evaluated as having met their expectations. That said, such a positive assessment cannot be said to exist for TI-specific skills, with only around 25% of the subjects surveyed noting any TI-specific gains when directed to think about the academic results of their experience. As a result of the qualitative analysis performed, it may be concluded that students did not seem to positively value their gains in this area, having solely commented on certain *thematic content* covered during their study experiences. In fact, subjects from TI-specific partner institutions even expressed some feelings of frustration when analysing the TI-specific skills learned and seem to have accorded little value to the learning experiences gained outside their home institutions. On the other hand, subjects coming from non-TI-specific institutions appear to have valued the opportunity to gain knowledge about translation.

As Translation is not a major for most of the partner institutions, the ALE subjects were probably more aware of the value of TI training; this was also considered as an important added-value specialisation for the labour market, which the non-TI subjects did not consider. All in all, subjects' overall assessment of their academic experiences seems to have been determined by the academic tradition of their home institution

It is also worth special note that in answer to the question on "the most significant academic gains", TI-specific subjects mentioned 'cultural competences' (40%) much more in their assessment than non-TI subjects (only 15.5%). In general, it appears that the subjects' transnational and intercultural exposure make them more aware of their cultural learning gains, favouring the *perception of success*, evident in their personal assessment of their experience. In any case, it seems that non-TI subjects have a more vague perception of their learning with regard to cultural or interpersonal competences if compared to TI subjects. According to the results analysed, it might be concluded that, despite that fact that intercultural, interpersonal and international experience generally translates into positive development of linguistic and cultural competences, this does not necessarily imply a greater development of translation-specific skills.

On average, students perceived the greatest gains resulting from their study stays in the personal sphere. As a result of living abroad, they had to integrate themselves into a new and different learning environment, associate with individuals from diverse cultures and academic backgrounds, as well as follow the specific academic requirements in the

ALE programme. From the open-ended replies, the students appear to have noticed gains in transferable skills, with linguistic gains at the fore. They appreciated the opportunity to have learned from diversity, with a tendency to identify gains such as attitudes of tolerance and respect towards others; ability to adapt to new surroundings; sensitivity to diversity and intercultural awareness; open-mindedness allowing them to see beyond their local environments and appreciate the global world; a concomitant appreciation of themselves and their local cultures and values; an appreciation of complexity; and an interest or love for other cultures.

Under the category of other interpersonal skills gained or improved, subjects mentioned not only competences, but personal circumstances that have influenced their academic and personal development. Here, friendship networks appear to have played a key role (see De Federico de la Rúa, 2005).

7. What Is Gained in Translator Training from Exchanges?

Despite subjects' generally vague notion regarding their TI-specific competences, the study results seem to indicate that their intercultural learning experience positively impacted their awareness of their cultural and social role as professional translators and experts in international communication. With regard to their experience, ALE mobile students may be said as having a tri-dimensional cultural experience that comprises not only the local academic/cultural system and local subjects of their host institution, but also, and more surprisingly, a new group of *cultural subjects*, namely, Erasmus students. Both while in their local communities or while abroad, it seems that social groups and networks were formed between the ALE participants, shunning the Erasmus students. ALE subjects developed their own identity and undervalued the Erasmus mobility experiences (96.3% of the sample believed ALE experience differs to that of Erasmus students, 94.4% believe this is positive for them and 9 out of 10 respondents believe their training experience abroad has been more valuable than that of any mobile students from their home degree).

The reasons behind these feelings are found in the fact that ALE participants, as compared to Erasmus students, follow a compulsory programme of studies and they are subject to certain academic requirements both at home and at the partners institutions. This aspect

was much appreciated by our survey respondents believing they favoured their fuller integration in local communities, which would further foster their personal and academic gains. Furthermore, the ALE participants also valued negatively and even complained about the conditions under which Erasmus stays develop (an open curriculum, less strict academic requirements in order to get full recognition of studies developed, among others). Finally, the participants seemed to form a vision of themselves, as compared with their local, non-mobile colleagues, in which they reported greater linguistic and cultural training (22% of the sample), a more complete education resulting from two study periods abroad (12%) and greater opportunities and benefits (11.1%).

It is worth particular mention that the subjects evaluated these points differently according to their local educational environment, with subjects from TI-specific institutions emphasising opportunities to deepen their linguistic and cultural knowledge (an indicator of their awareness of the importance of these elements in translator training), and non-TI-specific subjects seeming to appreciate international experiences for their own sake. Subjects seem to have returned from their experiences believing they had widened their professional profiles, while at the same time also demanding more specialized training in their fields of knowledge at their home institution (applying particularly to TI students).

Professional pathways subsequently pursued by ALE subjects include not only those of translators, but also those of intercultural communication specialists in, for example, international trade, tourism, international entrepreneurial activities (see, for example, University of Granada employability report [ANECA 2006] for TI students). In this regard, the international and curricular approach of the ALE programme introduces some interesting opportunities that are worth analysing. It is important to note, however, that these subjects also report “missing” translation, showing that their identities as translation professionals were not developed as much as they could be, inasmuch as their regular professional work did not bring them into constant contact with translation tasks on a daily basis.

From the results of the survey, while it can be concluded that participants believe their intercultural experiences benefit their training, this belief is nevertheless more of a long-term consideration. In other words, the subjects seemed to recognise their intercultural experience as having been an important opportunity to enhance their overall training

experience, yet at the same time they had trouble verbalising specific learning gains (see Leggot & Spapleford 2004).

It seems that mobile participants find it difficult to conceptually connect the intercultural and interpersonal competences resulting from their international learning experience to their TI or communication-specific competences, despite the value given to intercultural competence in Communication, Language and Translation studies (see Byram 1997; Kelly 2002; 2005).

What seems to emerge from the subjects' experience, however, is that cultural stereotypes vanish in their views of the other. There is no trace of superficiality in any of the responses of the 108 students, which is in stark contrast to what Byram. (1992) suggests in their research on the intercultural awareness of mobile participants. Moreover, it seems that, in part thanks to their personal and cultural gains, participants felt more confident and keen about entering the labour market. Employability competences described included linguistic skills (44.4% of the sample mentioned them) in both qualitative (level of knowledge) and quantitative (number of languages studied) terms, flexibility and adaptation to new and foreign environments (25%) and cultural awareness (10.2%). Translation competences were not considered to be among the key employability skills highlighted by respondents, non-TI students nevertheless seemed to appreciate them to a greater extent, inasmuch as a new professional field may have been revealed to them.

Also worth mentioning are the professional pathways of participants having enjoyed transcultural training involving various languages and academic disciplines, with many (around 47%) having continued their language, translation or ALE main discipline (Law and Economics) studies at a postgraduate level, and a similar percentage (around 42%) doing so outside the subjects' native country in or out of the ALE consortium, but most of them exploiting the academic opportunities offered by partner institutions. Yet the TI students tend to consider that ALE did not help them in getting to that post or complained about lack of specialization in TI.

The non-TI students, on the other hand, though more than satisfied with the experience, tended to focus on the problems of the TI requirements when in TI-specific institutions.

All in all, as stated before, when analysing their academic and professional pathways, perceptions seem to be determined by the field of study at the home institution, with little impact made by the transnational

experience gathered or foreign qualifications obtained.

Subjects also wrote about being professionally mobile, continuing to search for future professional development opportunities for enhancement regardless of their degree of satisfaction. Interestingly they also demonstrate an interest in solid careers. Most work in positions with an international focus, 75% of the respondent considered their occupations as “international”, often working and travelling abroad or using their foreign languages frequently, though translation accounted for less than 15% of the professionally active subjects surveyed, and International Trade accounted for 12.5%.

66% of the respondents were also firmly convinced that their ALE experience was valued by their current employers, due generally to their improved linguistic skills and other personal and professional competences acquired. However, their possession of a joint degree does not seem to be considered relevant by the job market. Only 30% (of the 85 subjects at work) believed their multiple degrees received any special consideration when assessing their applications for the job at the time of the survey, and 42% expressly denied this fact – though they were personally very satisfied with the status achieved. From the exchange experience, and despite the low value of TI training in the programme, one might hazard that ALE subjects do become *transcultural interculturators*, practitioners in the international arena, in particular where transcultural competence, linguistic and translation competencies are necessary. Likely jobs would be public relations, account executive officer, import-export manager, international projects manager, etc.

8. Discussion of Results

By way of conclusion, it was surprising to see how much participants did not know about the specific competences associated with their language and translation degrees, especially when they discussed their intercultural skills, despite the theoretical positive impact of mobility in students’ training, as traditionally underscored. Furthermore, beyond linguistic gains, little agreement can be detected among students regarding the benefits associated with international transcultural training experiences. Attention ought to be paid to the study subjects’ belief that receiving classes in a foreign language was a crucial element in their language learning. The tendencies of some institutions of higher learning

to offer training in a lingua franca (most frequently English) may hinder this possibility for linguistic development, as well as the agenda of multilingualism advanced by the EU.

The literature on translation and translation competences stresses the value of cultural (intercultural/transcultural) competences in the training of translators and, furthermore, as an element of intrinsic value for any linguistic activity. However, the ALE participants had difficulty in describing cultural and translation competences as specific elements of their degree. For these reasons, it appears necessary to keep working on the identification of learning gains linked to mobility experiences in TI and language training. In a similar vein, when analysing the ALE academic experience, it was clear how little pre-posting training they had been given, particularly with regard to university life - which negatively affected their overall assessment of the academic experience (Sowden 2003).

The transcultural training leads students to consider the culture-bound nature of their role in society. For example, in Spain, as commented before, the fact of having an undergraduate degree in Translation and Interpreting, allows the students to think they can enter the profession just after graduation. However, in other countries, specialization at a masters level is needed or a specific qualification is then required (for example by external institutions or professional associations) in order to become a professional translator/interpreter. This fact of being exposed to different cultures, academic traditions, job markets, etc. together with the impact of their interdisciplinary training (languages, translation, law, economics) should therefore be better integrated when contemplating international joint/multiple degrees of the ALE kind.

Taking as a starting point that universities must respond to social and market demands, it might not come as a surprise to begin by questioning the assumption of a shared common point of departure. As commented earlier, great divergences are still found in the structures and foundations of the academic systems within the EHEA. However, divergences are also found in the position and status of a given profession (i.e., *asymmetrical professions*). In spite of the efforts of Bologna signatory countries to deal with regulatory professional degrees (e.g., medicine or dentistry), little attention has been given to the fact that other professional degree programs are conceived of differently in the educational/training context of Bologna, as is the case with translators/interpreters. So, effort should be made to create new comparative tools to help further understand the imbalances of the convergence process when analysing the experience of

undergraduate students following periods of study abroad. The recent *Status of the Translation profession in the European Union project* (Intercultural Studies Group 2012) should be taken into account here.

The academic impact of the linguistic gains associated with mobility (Sanz & Roldán 2007) and the professional trajectories followed by graduates resulting in part thanks to these developed competences are two areas of research that have not yet been fully developed. In fact, due to the various elements at play when analysing academic mobility experiences, EU research has not even been able yet to scientifically demonstrate, in quantitative terms, that mobility experiences have a positive and definite impact on the professional development of participating subjects (Teichler & Jahr 2001).

Although there are many studies on the impact of mobility and intercultural training experiences, much work remains to be done if the field is to go beyond the purely linguistic scope and offer an in-depth analysis of participating students' perceptions. In order to contribute to this aim, Toll (2000: 25-28) highlights the need to design specific activities to promote reflection on the implications of mobility for students' professional and personal development.

However, the nature of these skills (cultural, personal, intercultural, interpersonal, transferable and professional) may require a greater temporal scope to accurately assess their development. Once subjects are integrated into the labour market and possess a more mature and measured assessment of their experience, subjects might be able to reflect more precisely on the specific impact of their intercultural encounters.

Finally, the ALE experience should be taken seriously as a programme to be developed. Until very recently, its very existence was at risk as a direct result of the EU educational "harmonization" process and the problems associated with the very different BA-MA structures adopted by ALE partner institutions. However, in spite of this, EU students continue to be mobile, oftentimes enjoying one or more transcultural training experiences abroad. Even those who are not able to partake in such programs may have other opportunities thanks to virtual mobility programs - yet another unexplored area of research and possible trove of information on a whole new type of transcultural encounter.

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