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Russia's foreign language market and some innovative aspects of the university curricula

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Abstract

Basing herself on the local statistics, the author draws an outline of the current state of things in the Russian foreign language (FL) and translation/interpreting (T/I) job market. In particular, she focuses on the issue of compatibility of the market and business demands for the FL and T/I graduates with the respective degree programmes at the Russian institutions of higher learning. Her findings bring up a patchy picture of the state of things in tertiary education (e.g. the out-of-date curricula, the old-fashioned courses, etc. at some institutions, and the dynamic, progressive and innovative developments at other schools). It is on the latter that she focuses primarily. Her case study is the MBA programme in FL/TL, and Business, which was designed at the RSUH institute for the in-service continuing education.

Keywords: tertiary education, curriculum, in-service target audience, entrepreneurship, start-ups in education, lingvobusiness

‘What has your college done to stimulate great manufacturers to endow it? Have you taken a leading part in the invention of the implements of war? How far have your students succeeded in business as capitalists?’

Virginia Woolf¹

1 The general overview

While thinking over my proposal during the summer vacation, I intended to draw an outline of the current state of things in the Russian foreign language (FL) and translation/interpreting (T/I) job market. I planned to dig up the statistical data and go into the particulars of a patchy picture of the state of things in tertiary education in Russia. I toyed with the idea of decrying the out-of-date curricula, pin-pointing at the old-fashioned courses, etc. at some institutions, and contrasting them to the dynamic, progressive and innovative developments at other schools. However I gave it all up the moment I recollected the Hellenic Institute had been set up in Moscow a couple of years ago. Given that precious chance of receiving information from the horse's mouth, the Greek scholars hardly need any other source but this. Then I decided to focus on what seems to me a most challenging development in Russian university life today. I mean the burning issue of compatibility of the market and business demands for the FL and T/I graduates with the respective degree programmes at the Russian institutions of higher learning. These are the buzzwords in the current academic discourse in Russia: the real-life skills, the job market, the graduates' competences, the links between the two, work placement, project assessment, etc.

¹ Woolf, 1978:38.

To prove it, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation is considering the recent proposal to tighten up the links between the tertiary curricula and the needs of Russian economy. The proposal came from the head (the Chancellor) of the St. Petersburg State University. (It was in the Russian news in early October 2015). The proposal aims at the close involvement of employers, or companies HR department managers in co-supervising the undergraduates' theses in a respective field of studies and economy/business. Also, the proposal suggests that employers of companies HR department managers are involved practically in validating the students' performances at the state finals, and at the public presentations of the graduates' theses. The idea looks to be reasonable. The closer the involvement of employers in the training of future specialists, the bigger chances for the graduates to get the jobs, the more chances for the employers to recruit the well-qualified personnel. Last but not least there is a strong possibility that the undergraduates shall get some work experience while studying.

The reader will say this is all pretty well known, and s/he will be right. The bond between tertiary education and business goes back in history, namely, to the eighteenth century. It is then that the link was shaped between science, research, and the investments into University education which were made by those working for industry, trade, etc. The European system of education has smoothly run along this track for quite a long time. As for the former Soviet/communist regime, it used to deploy its own modification of the system in the 1960s and 1980s. I mean the system of recruiting the graduates for specific needs of the economy, civil service, military projects, etc. Whichever way you look at the bond between tertiary education and business, it serves as a means to raise the monetary status of educational institutions, and to provide the economy with fresh ideas, new technologies and well-qualified personnel. This system is open to intellectual criticism. To limit myself to one reference alone, see *Three Guineas* (1938) by Virginia Woolf. (Woolf, 1978:37-39, 83) A quick aside, - Woolf wrote this essay on the brink of the Second World War, in the full awareness of the impending doom. I find this reference to be particularly relevant here and now, for the literary source for Woolf's writing *Three Guineas* was *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes, a famous Old Greek playwright.

Back to the main point of this article, though. There are two aspects of the current Russian policy of linking up tertiary education and business, which make it worth pursuing in the case of Foreign Language (FL) and Translation and Interpreting (T/I). First, the FL and T/I market is a stable one in Russia, and, second, many graduates of the BA and MA programmes in FL and T/I work as free-lancers. Given the fact that many of them are women, they enjoy working from home. Two examples will suffice. Martin, a student from Bulgaria, enrolled at the MA programme in T/I a year ago. Upon exploring the job market, he grew enthusiastic about the employment prospects. 'There are the jobs for those like myself!' he exclaimed. Anna, a student from Canada, is in her second year of MA studies, working free-lance as a translator of video games from Russian into English. Being a young woman with a family, she finds it to be particularly rewarding to be able to work free-lance from home.

There is a "but" though. Such students as Martin and Anna, Katya and Sasha, can do better than this. For they are young and enterprising. Moreover, their numbers grow. Last summer of 2015 the Department for Translation Studies and Translation and Interpreting (TSIT) received 80 applications for 6 state budget placements. The competition rate was 13,3 applications for 1 placement. This puts my colleagues and myself into thinking about implementing the MBA programme we designed several years ago specifically for enterprising in the fields of FL and T/I.

2 The description of the programme in question

The exact definition of the educational programme is Master of Business Administration in Language Business – MBA in Lingvobusiness.

I think I have to elucidate the meaning of the odd-sounding coining – LINGVOBUSINESS. Actually many people asked me what it means, and I said, well, nobody knows. (Reinhold, 2011)

2.1 The concept

LINGVOBUSINESS is a Russian compound noun in English transliteration, meaning *entrepreneurship* in the field of translation/interpreting/foreign languages.

The programme is focused on developing a student's competence to work in the international business environment, helping him/her to get rid of language and culture hurdles, and educating him/her as a civilized business partner, promoting an ambitious self-starter to go *entrepreneur-ing / enterprising*.

“You will never be a success story as a manager if you limit your negotiations with local partners to the international airport area. Go ahead, immerse yourself in a foreign environment, experience a language and a culture shock, bump into the local business – it is then you become an efficient manager”².

2.2 The mission

The mission is fluency of communication. The main objective is training a manager of modern type, who is a civilized business partner and a competitor, who is competent in international business ethic both professional and corporate, who is skilled in cross-cultural and transnational communication; who acquired survival skills in a foreign, other than native business environment.

2.3 The target audience

This comprises the non-professional groups and the professional groups of trainees.

The *non-professional* group are the specialists who graduated from the institutes of higher learning. These embrace the top-high managers who do not speak or write English, and the administrators of medium range, including the IT managers, sales managers, marketing managers, the managers working for the advert and tourist agencies, and companies: the managers working for various economy organizations and enterprises, whose workload includes the drawing up of annual and quarterly reports, paperwork in English etc.

The *professional* group are specialists in foreign languages, translation and interpreting who graduated from the institutes of higher learning and have been qualified as such, who are motivated to update their language and IT competences, as well as willing to get new management skills and competence in international business, management, advert marketing

² From the Presidential Address, IALB (International Association for Language and Business) Conference, Brussels, November 2006.

within the framework of a company; these are the managers of computer firms, the managers of in-service centres (e.g. continuing education, the Third Age courses, etc), school teachers of foreign languages, teachers of translation theory and practice, the graduates of the schools of foreign languages, and so on.

3 The programme modules

MBA in Lingvobusiness is a two-module programme. Module 1 is on ‘Setting up a Translation Company in the Business Information Environment’. Module 2 is on ‘The Management of a Translation Company’.

The parameters of each module of the MBA programme in Lingvobusiness are as follows: the 80-hour course (the academic hour is 45 min); 8 hours per week; weekend (Saturday) training sessions.

Each module is tailored to meet the expectations of the in-service trainees.

The duration is 10 weeks.

The form of application of the professional competences and skills acquired by the students at the end of module 1 is a project of setting up a translation company or courses on upgrading the translators’ skills in processing foreign-language information.

The field of applying the professional competences and skills acquired by the students at the end of module 2 is the legal, ethical, economic, social and other conditions of the company’s activities both at the national and international levels.

3.1 On module 1 of the projected MBA in lingvobusiness

The student-oriented objectives are

- to acquire the system view and understanding of the interrelatedness of the business processes;
- to become competent in applying practically the general approaches to the description of a company’s business activities with the aim of shaping the business processes of his/her own agency;
- to become capable of designing a new business process;
- to become able to upgrade the business processes in his/her own translation company;
- to become capable of setting up one’s own translation company and/or courses of upgrading translators’ skills in processing foreign-language information (Kumar, 2010: 11-12);
- to be able to make a management decision about defining the model of the business processes in one’s own company under the conditions of global IT networking (Shevchuk, 2013: 177-205);
- to be competent enough to manage a company effectively;
- to be competitive in the local (Russian) and international market;

- to make a real manager in the field of lingvobusiness.

3.2 Module 1 curriculum outline

This is as follows:

- the current state of lingvobusiness in and outside Russia (the lecture-cum-seminar course);
- the integrated session: the description of a translation company, including inter/national organizations and enterprises;
- the parameters of translators' work in and outside Russia (Shakhova, 2012: 42-57);
- the management of intellectual property; copyright legislature in the field of translation;
- *entrepreneurship* in the translation and educational markets, and the setting up of a translation company;
- the linguistic and other challenges of designing a multi-language website of a newly set translation company.

3.3 The training methods

These are as follows:

- delivering mini-lectures,
- designing case studies,
- organizing the round-table /group discussions,
- arranging role play,
- integrated sessions (e.g. visiting a company)
- presenting the website content in the form of a project,
- reading and annotating reference books,
- using the Internet resources.

3.4 The finals assessment

This includes

- presenting a course paper on 'The integrated session: a company's placement';
- reading up for the finals in '*Entrepreneurship* in the translation and educational markets, and the setting up of a translation company';
- the finals in 'The linguistic and other challenges of designing a multi-language website of a newly set translation company' in the form of presenting a technical project of the web site content of a translation company to the Exam Board on Sponsoring the Innovative Projects.

3.5 Module 2 curriculum outline

Module 2 covers the following areas:

- working out and making decisions on managing a company;
- defining the marketing strategies of a company's development;
- defining the strategies of a company's development;
- team building and HR managing;
- project management;
- renovation management;
- advertisement management;
- information technologies in management;
- international lingvobusiness management;
- negotiation and presentation technologies.

3.6 The finals assessment

It includes

- presenting a course paper on 'The strategies of a company's development';
- taking exam in 'Working out and making decisions on managing a company';
- taking exam in 'The marketing strategies of a company'.

4 The major component of the projected programme in lingvobusiness

The crucial difference between the international profile of the MBA programme and the projected MBA in Lingvobusiness is the working language. It is Russian.

The main reasons for this unheard-of profile are two. First, according to statistics, 1,3 per cent of the adult population of Russia are fluent in foreign language, English in particular; second, the programme aims at a broad involvement of graduates willing to go *entrepreneur-ing*.

The course of Business English is the mandatory component of the MBA in Lingvobusiness.

The BE course, both full-time and part-time, is 150 academic hrs long throughout the whole period of study (see above).

To get enrolled at the BE course you need a BA diploma, both professional and non-professional (see above) and no less than two years of work experience.

The placement test is a must.

The placement test has the parameters of the Cambridge international certificate exam in Business English BEC.

The level (Vantage) corresponds to the FCE (First Certificate in English) in the system of Cambridge exams of the general profile, and to the level B2 in accordance with the European scale.

The aim of the placement test is to define the student's level of English, i.e. the beginner, the intermediate or the advanced level.

4.1 The general objective of the programme in BE and its levels

The main aim is to help a student acquire both linguistic as well as non-linguistic competence in Business English, as is adequate to the study visits to international business schools, partner universities, as well as to practical activities in various business environments.

4.1.1 The course in BE aims at competence in

- working with written and oral texts on economy and business;
- extracting the relevant information with the help of adequate scan reading strategies (getting the key facts, getting the general meaning, finding the concrete data, understating the sentence structure and the text as a whole);
- applying the adequate strategies while compiling the business texts in writing (e.g. formal/informal letters, e-letters, reports, papers, letters of reference);
- delivering the information in the form of a presentation or a paper as well as business communication.

4.1.2 The parameters of the course of Business English as part of the proposed programme

The course of Business English is based on the international exam for the MBA programme.

The specific aspect of the course consists in developing the so-called real-life skills. The latter define the trainer's approach and the teaching methods, the set of materials, and the process of study. The real-life skills are part and parcel of the course programme and the course-book.

4.2 The philosophy of the programme of Business English as part of the proposed programme in lingvobusiness

The background principle is the compatibility of the standards of Business English in the system of Cambridge exams with the TOEFL system³:

BEC Vantage = B2=FCE= 87-109 TOEFL;

BEC Higher =C1=CAE=110-120 TOEFL.

It takes 1 or 2 years to update the B2 level competence as C1 level competence. (Brook-Hart, 2007: 3).

³ www.ea.toefl.eu/toefl-sites/toefl-europe/about-the-toefl-test

4.2.1 The philosophy of the programme of Business English is as follows

- from the beginner's level towards the advanced level;
- from being afraid to make a mistake towards becoming confident;
- from the advanced level towards fluency in communication;
- from the Cambridge format to TOEFL.

4.2.2 The module themes

These list the following points:

- Theme 1. The company personnel policy. The training of a personnel. The description of functional commitments of the company personnel. Writing queries and job applications. Communicating via skype/e-mail/phone
- Theme 2. Marketing. The marketing of goods and services. Branding. Designing a new product. Participating in marketing and trading. Linking up and negotiating.
- Theme 3. Entrepreneurship. Setting up one's own business. Financing a newly set enterprise. Opening new markets. Presenting a business plan.
- Theme 4. Business trips. Hotels. Conferences. Reporting business trips and conferences. Corporate meetings.
- Theme 5. New technologies and innovations. Suggesting the changes in a company activities and new technologies. Internet resources. The attitude of the personnel to the innovations and the participation in renovating the company. Offshoring and outsourcing.
- Theme 6. Working with the clients. Attracting the clients. Communicating with the clients. Communicating with clients in writing. Business seminar.

4.2.3 The programme kit includes

- the course programme;
- the curriculum;
- the theme plan;
- the theme plan related to the aspects of BE learning;
- case studies;
- role play;
- the course book *BEC Vantage-Higher Business Benchmark. Upper-Intermediate-Advanced* by G. Brook-Hart⁴;

⁴ The course book consists of 24 units for classroom activities; every 4 units have a section on testing the student's competence in using words and grammar structure. There is a special section on acquiring the skill in doing tests. The course book is accompanied with 2 CDs, together with the transcripts. There is also a student's book, for independent work.

- handouts;
- reference books;
- methods guidelines for the students;
- materials for assessment (midterm assessment; standard BEC Vantage Test on all aspects of BE learning);
- finals assessment (standard BEC Higher Test on all aspects of BE learning).

4.2.4 The forms of assessment

Continuing assessment presupposes the student's regular attendance of classes, his/her active seminar work, and independent home assignments; team work assessment maps a student's involvement in project making, designing presentations, his/her participation in the brainstorming sessions and designing the case studies; midterm assessment comprises two tests, one on translating the terms, the other on testing the knowledge of words and grammar structures; the finals test is a standard BEC test.

Conclusion

To conclude, the programme in MBA Lingvobusiness has been designed, submitted to the RSUH University Council and validated by the latter. Now it is time to launch it.

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Modernism: Psychological Prose (1992); (as editor, translator and contributor) the first commented edition in Russian (2012) of the two-volume *The Common Reader* by Virginia Woolf, the first commented edition in Russian (2014) of *Night and Day* by V. Woolf, *The Good Soldier* by Ford M. Ford, *The Green Child* by Herbert Read, *Bid Me to Live* by H. D. (2004-2005); (as editor and co-translator) *Entwicklungslinien der Translationswissenschaft* by Erich Prunč (2015); (as editor and contributor) *From the History of Translation Reasoning* (2013), *The History of Translation in the Cross-cultural Perspective* (2012), *Woolf Across Cultures* (2004), (as contributor) *The Reception of D.H. Lawrence in Europe* (2007), and (as guest editor and contributor) *Perspectives: Russian Translation Studies* (1998); translations of Virginia Woolf's and T. S. Eliot's literary criticism (1983-2002), and the first Russian translation of *The Collected Stories* by Raymond Carver (2007).