

Translation and computing in an academic setting

A Report on a visit to the University of Leeds



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While in England recently, I visited the University of Leeds MA programme in Applied Translation Studies. I was already acquainted with Robert Clark of the translation company Praetorius, and knew he had been lecturing at the university on computers and translation for some time. I was curious to see this up close, so I hopped on the train from Kings Cross for the 2-hour ride north to Leeds. Walking right into Bob's Wednesday class, I found that his earlier lectures on computers in translation had blossomed into a full-scale course of study for 52 students from the UK, Europe and Asia.

Of course, the past decade has seen a huge expansion in the worldwide demand for translation. The computer component in translating is increasingly more powerful and sophisticated, and at the same time, the academic discipline of translation studies has blossomed. These two phenomena have produced a wealth of new insights into the complexities of the translation process. And Leeds is doing something about it.

As a hybrid myself, combining the world of academia (theoretical linguistics) and the business of translating, I was quite impressed with the integration of the two in this programme. Having observed first-hand the reluctance of some language academics to allow into their departments anything that smacks of a business application, and on the other hand having witnessed the trepidation of many translators when required to interact with academics, I marvelled at the openness of both groups here. They have come together and their integration is a model to emulate. Especially considering the full-scale incorporation of the latest in computer-assisted translation skills.

The Leeds MA in Applied Translation Studies (MAATS) seeks to provide the student with both the theoretical base appropriate for an academic career in the discipline and the practical skills needed by a successful translator. One of the largest universities in the United Kingdom, with 4,000 post-graduate students, Leeds boasts a new language-specific Electronic Resources and Information Centre (ERIC). This is where the classes I attended were held. I watched and participated as two groups of stu-

dents, specialists in European languages in the first group and Asian languages in the other, each came to the ERIC laboratory for a two-hour session. This particular class meets once a week and is shepherded by Bob Clark through the mysteries of information technology (IT) for translators, machine translation and state-of-the-art terminology management and translation memory systems. Clark, the founder of the programme, with a relaxed and effective style of teaching befitting a native Californian (which he is), brings these students to a skill level which will be advantageous in gaining entry to the translation profession anywhere.

The six other instructors who roam among the students to help them implement what Bob is leading them through are a reassuring presence, and the atmosphere in the room is quite positive among students and faculty alike; a state not easy to achieve with speakers whose native languages range from Chinese to Portuguese, and who are busy on 26 computers. This large room also houses an impressive library with a wealth of conventional dictionaries and reference works surrounding a comfortable work area. MAATS students have full access to this facility, including the 43 computers on which they are able to improve their IT and computer-assisted translation skills.

The School of Modern Languages and Cultures, which runs the MAATS programme, includes thriving Departments of French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, East Asian Studies, Russian and Slavonic Studies, and Linguistics and Phonetics. The faculty of these departments make up the teaching team who work with Clark in the compulsory core module covering the translation technology that he teaches. The programme provides an impressive faculty/student ratio of seven instructors to every 26 students in each of two student groups for a total of 52 students. In addition to Bob Clark, the other directors are Mark Shuttleworth, Yip Po-Ching and Toshiko Ishizaki.

Admittance to the programme requires a good language-centred first degree or equivalent qualifications or experience. Translation into English is a compulsory component for all students, so non-native speakers of English must demonstrate advanced proficiency in the language. The degree awarded is an MA in Applied Translation Studies and is normally a one-year programme. Lectures, language seminars and IT classes run over two, 11-

week semesters, while the summer is normally devoted to producing two extended translations or an academic dissertation.

The MA provides training in advanced written translation into English from one or two of the following languages (subject to availability): Arabic, Bulgarian, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Additionally, training is offered from English into Bulgarian, Chinese, Greek and Japanese. Subject to demand, optional modules in consecutive interpreting are available in French, Italian and Portuguese. Unfortunately, training from English into the native language of the student is not usually available for other than the four languages mentioned above, reflecting the fact that the large majority of students in other language groups currently enrolled are native speakers of English. However, the programme seems to be attracting healthy numbers of native speakers of Spanish, so training in English to Spanish may soon be available.

Students also take a course in "Methods and Approaches to Translation", while options include modules on film translation and academic perspectives on translation. It is also possible to take up a new language, or to follow specialist courses in various relevant areas of linguistics, or in a wide range of subjects where an understanding of them may be of use in a student's professional translation career. It was exciting to interact during the laboratory with the students from several different countries and with the faculty who included one member each from the United States, Scotland, England, Japan, Mainland China and Spain. One wonders how many other programmes are out there with such broad coverage of the skills needed in our profession.

For more information on this most modern and complete programme for translators, e-mail: maats@leeds.ac.uk or visit their website at <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/sml/maats/brochure.html>. ■