

Mira Kadric (Vienna)

Court Interpreter Training in a European Context

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Abstract

Today, there is a growing demand in Europe for translation and interpretation services in those languages for which, until now, there was no training offered. This, of course, meant that there were no professional translators and interpreters. The same situation can be seen in the field of court interpretation. This is one of the reasons why the European Commission has been working on the quality of translation and interpretation in courts and other authorities of the EU member states for several years. This paper presents a pilot training scheme for remedying this unsatisfactory situation and also investigates its didactic potential. Above all, it explores the question of whether it is possible to meet the increasing demand for qualified translators and interpreters by introducing alternative methods of training.

1 The EU sets minimum standards for procedural safeguards

The work undertaken by the Commission in this area deals with criminal proceedings in the EU member states. The Commission first carried out an extensive consultation process, the results of which were included in the proposal for a Council framework decision on certain procedural rights in criminal proceedings throughout the European Union.¹ The work of the Commission originates from the presidency conclusions of the Tampere European Council (15 and 16 October, 1999), which, among other things, formulate the mutual recognition of court decisions as a goal of legal policy at European level. However, it has proved very difficult to achieve the mutual recognition of court decisions. The examination of specific cases has shown that the EU member states have doubts as to whether the examined foreign decisions were made within a high-quality procedure. Hence, the Commission has assumed for years that the establishment of minimum standards for court procedures is an indispensable prerequisite for the full mutual recognition of court decisions. As regards criminal proceedings, this means that the rights of suspects and defendants should be harmonized within the EU, since a uniform protection level for suspects and defendants would make the application of the principle of mutual recognition much easier. The program of measures to implement the principle of mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters from 15 January 2001 stipulates that the extent of the mutual recognition is linked with the existence and the contents of particular parameters that are decisive for the efficiency of the

¹ Cf. COM(2004)328 final:
http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/doc_centre/criminal/procedural/doc/com328_28042004_en.pdf

criminal proceedings. According to the Council and the Commission these parameters contain mechanisms for the legal protection of suspects as well as the prescribed common minimum standards.

As professional mobility, tourism, migration and refugee movements are reaching new heights, the number of foreign defendants is also increasing in all the member states. The Commission is thus working on common minimum standards and putting the emphasis on the appropriate protection of foreign suspects and defendants. Organized crime is also increasingly spreading across the borders.

In February 2003 the Commission presented a Green Paper on Procedural Safeguards for Suspects and Defendants in Criminal Proceedings.² The aim of the Commission is to harmonize the rights of suspects and defendants on the basis of already existing international agreements (European Convention on Human Rights, Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union). The Commission's primary goal is to establish minimum standards. The legal basis of the proposal is article 31 of the Treaty on European Union in the version of the Treaty of Nice, which includes common action in the field of judicial cooperation regarding criminal cases. According to the Commission, the proposal for a framework decision represents the necessary addition to the measures regarding mutual recognition, whose aim is to improve the efficiency of criminal prosecution. The procedural rights determined in the proposal for a framework decision can be divided into five areas:

1. the right to (free) legal advice
2. the right to the interpretation and translation of important documents
3. the right of persons who are not capable of understanding or following the proceedings to receive appropriate attention
4. the right to communicate, *inter alia*, with consular authorities in the case of foreign suspects,
5. the right to information.

The right to interpretation and translation of important documents, which is dealt with in chapter 2, regards all the stages of a proceeding, including meetings with the legal adviser. The text of the proposal determines expressly that the right to make use of the services of an interpreter free of charge also applies to persons with a hearing disorder or a speech defect. This means that this right also encompasses sign language interpretation. As regards the right to free translations, the draft determines that the responsible authority decides which documents have to be translated. However, the legal adviser of the suspect has the right to demand the translation of further documents (article 7, clause 2 of the draft).³

Additionally, the draft prescribes expressly the consultation of *sufficiently qualified* translators and interpreters. Article 9 of the draft also contains a real innovation in this field – the use of audio and video recordings in all proceedings in which translators and interpreters have to be called in. In case of dispute, the parties would receive a copy of the recording. Otherwise, the recording would only be used for checking whether the interpretation has been carried out correctly. The Commission has thus clearly advocated an up-to-date interpretation of article 6, paragraph 3 lit e ECHR (Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms), which, up to now, has not been enforced in the practice of criminal

² Cf. COM(2003)75 final from 19 February 2003.

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2003/com2003_0075en01.pdf

³ For Austria and for Germany the issue of the amount of interpretations and translations is very relevant because Austria and Germany have already been convicted in this context before the European Court of Human Rights (case Kamasinski vs. Austria, verdict of the European Court of Human Rights from 19 December 1989; case Öztürk vs. Federal Republic of Germany, verdict of the European Court of Human Rights from 21 February 1984).

law in the EU member states. The recognition by the Commission that there is not a sufficient number of qualified court interpreters and translators for the various languages (parameter 37 of the explanatory memorandum) reflects everyday court experience in all member states. The Commission mentions in the explanatory memorandum its aim to search for solutions which would ensure that every member state had enough qualified translators and interpreters.

Court practice in Europe confirms the opinion of the Commission that there is not a sufficient number of qualified interpreters for several languages. Universities provide qualified training only for the more dominant languages and an extremely small number of other ones. In Austria, for example, there is no training at all for a number of languages that are very important in court. Thus, the list of sworn in and certified court interpreters contains people who are not at all or only insufficiently qualified for working with these languages. The situation is not very different in other member states. This needs to be remedied in two ways. First, as the Commission proposes, it has to be ensured that interpretations and translations are checked within the proceeding. Second, the training of court interpreters in Europe will have to be improved and standardized.

To sum up, one can say that the quality of interpretation and translation services and the training of interpreters and translators will have to be improved in the entire EU. This means that new educational facilities will have to be established in Europe in order to create common quality standards for court interpreters. The basis for such standards has already been established by three projects promoted by the EU.⁴ After the first suggestions regarding the linguistic standards, the selection of students for training, models for the implementation and some training material for the legal professions were introduced (cf. Hertog 2001 and 2003; Keijzer-Lambooy & Gasille 2005). Now it is the responsibility of the individual member states to adjust and further develop these results as well as to implement their national training and follow-up training systems.

Today, many public institutions, NGOs and other private groups in Europe are trying to train people with knowledge of foreign languages to work in court. Because of the great number of languages required, training is held in the respective national languages. The single target languages can only partly be dealt with.

Inspired by the initiatives of the European Commission and in consideration of the future requirements, this paper presents a pilot training scheme for remedying this unsatisfactory situation and also investigates its didactic potential. Above all, it explores the question of whether it is possible to meet the increasing demand for qualified translators and interpreters by introducing alternative methods of training.

2 Presentation and evaluation of cross-language training

The Austrian Association of Court Interpreters has regularly organized entry preparation seminars in the field of court interpretation for prospective court interpreters since September 2002. The first seminar, held in September 2002, focused on an “Introduction to interpretation techniques”. The seminars aim at persons who have had no training in the field of translation and interpretation, but who have a very good command of two languages and want to apply for the *List of Sworn and Certified Court Interpreters*.⁵

⁴ Grotius projects 98/GR/131, Grotius project 2001/GRP/01, and Agis project JAI/2003/AGIS/048.

⁵ Only those persons can be entered in the *List of Sworn and Certified Court Interpreters* who either have a university degree in translation or interpretation and two years experience in the field or those who have no such training but can prove that they have been translating or interpreting for at least five years. Only those who fulfill these requirements can take the examinations. If they pass the examination, they are entered in the List.

2.1 Target group

The two-day long “pilot seminar” held in September 2002 showed that there is enormous interest for this preparation course. The first course attracted even trained translators and interpreters, some of whom were already certified for court services. The reason why professional interpreters have been so interested is probably that interpretation studies at Austrian universities still do not place much emphasis on court interpreting. Seminars which took place later were attended by a mixture of people having a degree in translation or (more seldom) interpretation studies, in language studies or in law as well as persons with other professions who use their knowledge of foreign languages in their job and as interpreters for their families.⁶ Thus, the participants of the individual seminars had different interests and expectations and formed very heterogeneous groups.

The data⁷ presented in this work was obtained from the analysis of a total of nine seminars that took place during a period of two years (2002 until 2004). 132 people took part in the seminars. The seminars were held in German so that the individual working languages (altogether 27 languages) of the participants could only be taken into consideration to a limited extent. 21 people attended the “pilot seminar”. In the later seminars the average group size was 13. Of the 132 participants 116 (87,88%) were female and 16 (12,12%) were male.

An analysis of participants into those “having a translation or interpretation degree vs. those not having such a degree”, shows that among the 132 participants, 37 people (28%) had a degree and 95 people (72%) had no degree in translation or interpretation.

These results show how heterogeneous the groups were. Less than one third of the participants had a translation or interpretation degree.

During the seminar lessons I realized that, from a didactic point of view, the group could not be divided simply according to this criterion. It was much more fruitful to take the background knowledge of the participants into account. This made it possible to divide the participants according to their individual competences with relevance to court interpreting. Hence, it was best to distinguish between participants who possessed these competences vs. those not having relevant competences. In the analysis, translators, interpreters, philologists

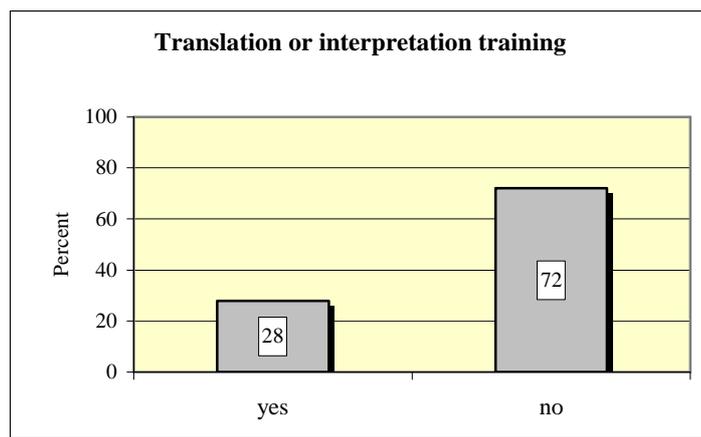


Diagram 1: Translation or interpretation training

⁶ The participants of the courses had different jobs, e.g. priest, registrar, nurse, embassy secretary, bookkeeper, restaurant owner – to name only a few.

⁷ I would like to thank Ira Stanic for checking the completeness and correctness of the analyzed figures.

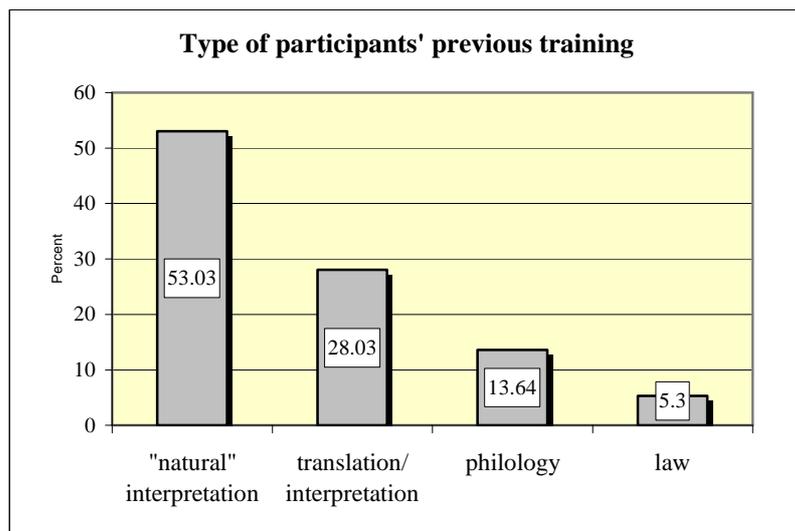


Diagram 2: Type of participants' previous training

and lawyers were classified as persons with existing competences in the field of court interpreting. They accounted for 47% of the participants, while those participants without competences relevant for court interpreting accounted for 53%.

Diagram 2 shows a comparison of the number of participants without relevant background knowledge and the number of those with background knowledge. The latter group is further divided into translators and interpreters, philologists and lawyers.

As regards the group of participants with a translation or interpretation degree, it was noticeable that translators outnumbered interpreters by far. They had excellent knowledge of their respective working languages as well as outstanding cultural and translation competences. However, they did not have a very high degree of competence in interpretation and were not very familiar with the legal system and terminology. Participants with a degree in language studies had excellent command of their respective foreign language as well as outstanding cultural competences, which are indispensable when working as a translator or interpreter. Some of them also had a fairly good degree of competence in translation. Lawyers had a very good command of their foreign languages, an excellent knowledge of the Austrian legal system as well as knowledge (as a rule contrastive) of the codes of procedure and legal terminology. Among the participants with no particular background knowledge, there were many with a very good command of their respective language, who worked as “natural” interpreters, above all in their families and at work. However, they did not name any training or practical experience which would be relevant for working court interpreters.

In addition to German as the common working language, the following 27 languages were represented in the seminars: Albanian, Arabic, Armenian, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Danish, English, French, Finnish, Greek, Hindi, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Latvian, Lithuanian, Persian, Polish, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Czech, Ukrainian and Urdu.⁸

⁸ The information about training and working languages was taken from the application forms. In the questionnaire a question about the training and the working languages was left out deliberately. Otherwise it would have been easy to identify the participants. If they had not remained anonymous, the participants might have answered the questionnaire less freely.

2.2 Course contents

In addition to the introduction to interpretation techniques, the two-day “pilot seminar” could only touch on some topics that are relevant for court interpreting and impart a degree of awareness regarding the complexity of the problems connected with court interpreting. In order to close this gap in training, two different types of seminar were later offered; the introduction to interpretation techniques was split into a “basic course” and an “advanced course”. According to their interests, the course participants could attend either both seminars or only one of the two. The aim of this division was, on the one hand, to be able to limit the subject areas more efficiently and, on the other, to make the rather heterogeneous groups of participants more homogeneous by grouping those participants together who had similar interests and background knowledge.

The two-day introduction course “Interpretation techniques: basic course” gave an overview of the court interpreters’ fields of work and the requirements connected with this work, as well as of the basic topics of translation. The following is an overview of the topics of the courses:

Topics included in the two-day basic course:

- Overview of the fields of work (court interpreting, police interpreting, asylum interpreting): requirements and competences
- Legal basis of court interpreting
- Principles of general communication
- Principles of institutional communication
- Professional conduct
- Note-taking – introduction
- Note-taking – exercise (German-German exercises)
- Introduction to whispered simultaneous interpreting

After putting the emphasis on the basic principles of court interpreting on the first day of the seminar, the aim of the second day was to introduce the participants to consecutive interpreting (with the use of note-taking) and whispered interpreting independently of their various working languages. The focus of attention was put on note-taking. In the course of the exercises the professional role of court interpreters was discussed, above all with regard to the power structure in the courtroom.

The two-day “advanced course” was partly based on the basic course, and partly had new contents.

Topics of the two-day advanced course:

- Introduction to document translation
- Translation exercises
- Sight translation
- Further lessons on note-taking with exercises
- Exercises and analysis of the work taking account of all the competences acquired during the seminar
- Mock trial presided over by a judge

Technical texts and topics formed the working basis of the “advanced course”. In the field of technical language, the emphasis was put on terms and abbreviations used in court practice. The participants were encouraged to work out a system which could be used in the various working languages. At this point, the respective foreign languages of the participants were also taken into account to some extent. The following aspects were trained, analysed and

discussed in particular detail: technical terminology and the expectations of the communication partners within the context of the different kinds of examination, language registers, working with defective texts or incomplete text contents, non-verbal communication, situational perspectives, explanations, role boundaries etc.

At the end of the seminar there was a mock trial presided over by a judge. This trial had a preset scenario based on authentic files. The seminar participants had the opportunity to practise the techniques that they had learned during the seminar in the form of role plays. This exercise was a particular challenge for the participants because they did not only practice all their newly acquired competences with each other but also tested them in a scenario that was very similar to an authentic trial. The cooperation of a real judge ensured a special dynamics, so that these exercises resembled authentic trials in almost every detail.

2.3 Evaluation of the seminars

The objective of the evaluation of the seminars was to assess the usefulness and efficiency of cross-language courses in the field of interpreting. This assessment could not be carried out without questioning the participants about their evaluation of the competences they thought they had acquired individually. At first sight, it seemed that individual progress was made more difficult by the fact that the seminars had to satisfy different expectations and that they were held only in German, taking the specific working languages of the participants only partly into account. Hence, real monitoring of what had been learnt in the field of contrastive translation and interpretation was only possible in some individual cases.

After the two-day seminars, the participants were asked to fill in anonymous questionnaires. Questionnaires were handed out to all 132 participants and 130 were completed and returned. The objective of the evaluation of the questionnaires was to show whether the participants, with their different languages, had acquired new competences in the course of the seminar and whether they could use this knowledge in their jobs. It was also important to find out whether the participants thought they would be able to transfer this knowledge, acquired in German, to their individual working languages.

The following chapter contains the evaluation of those sections of the questionnaire that are relevant for finding out whether cross-language interpretation training is possible.

3 Responses and discussion of results

In order to facilitate classification and evaluation, the questionnaire was divided into three question groups: ‘theory’, ‘exercises’ and ‘individual knowledge acquisition and framework conditions’. The “theoretical” part of the questionnaire included the contents and the discussion of the following subject areas: overview of the fields of work, an outline of document translation, an outline of note-taking and professional code of ethics. The “practical” part focused on questions about the exercises including: note-taking, sight translation, whispered simultaneous interpreting, interpreting in a mock trial. The third group of questions was dedicated to the individual knowledge acquisition during the seminar as well as the general set-up and the quality of the trainer’s coaching of the group. For reasons of space, only the answers regarding the seminar contents are dealt with here. The answers regarding the general set-up and the coaching by the trainer were all very positive, but their details are not necessarily relevant for the present discussion.

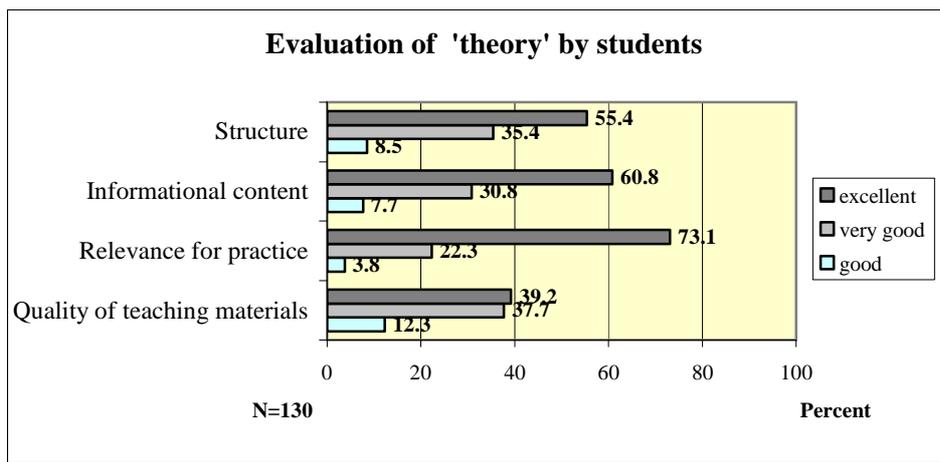


Diagram 3: Evaluation of 'theory' by students

3.1 Evaluation of the theoretical contents

As already mentioned, the assessment of the “theoretical” contents of the seminar includes all the topics on which the trainer had given lectures. In the following question the participants were asked to rate the quality of the theoretical part of the seminar according to the following grading scale: 1 = excellent, 2 = very good, 3 = good, 4 = satisfactory, 5 = not satisfactory. This question related to the criteria: structure, informational content, relevance for practice, quality of teaching materials.

The results of the evaluation show that the criteria ‘structure’, ‘informational content’ and ‘relevance for practice’ received very positive grades, while the assessment of the ‘teaching materials’ was not quite as good. The trainer used handouts, work sheets and documents in various languages and suggested sources for further reading. After the first seminars and analysing the first evaluations, the trainer changed and improved these materials and also replaced some material with new one. These measures achieved much better evaluations of the teaching materials in subsequent seminars. Tab. 1 shows that it was mostly the participants of the first three seminars who were somewhat unsatisfied with the quality of the teaching materials. In the later seminars the ratings were better.

Seminars	Teaching materials					Total
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Not satisf.	
1	4	8	6	3	0	21
2	3	5	3	3	0	14
3	5	6	1	4	1	17
4	8	2	1	0	0	11
5	6	4	2	1	0	13
6	6	8	0	1	0	15
7	7	4	1	1	0	13
8	5	7	1	0	0	13
9	7	5	1	0	0	13
Total	51	49	16	13	1	130

Tab. 1: Quality of teaching materials

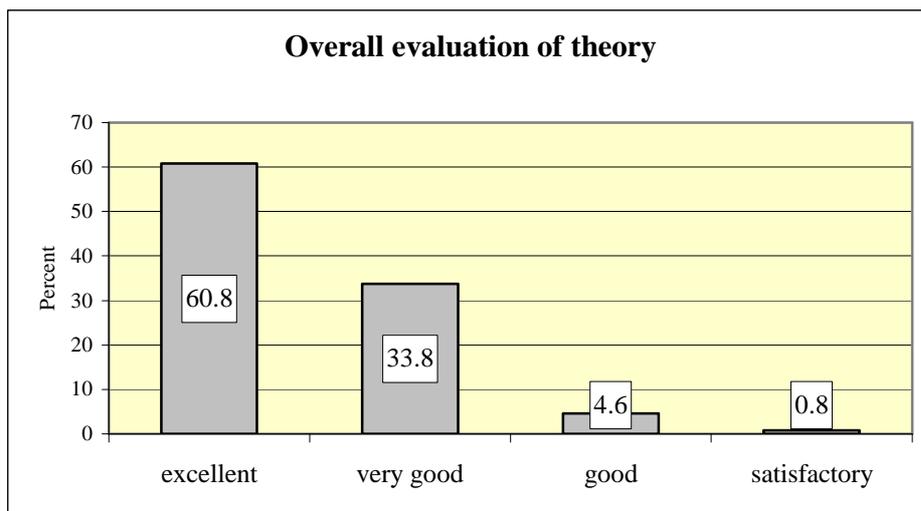


Diagram 4: Overall evaluation theory

From a didactic point of view it is important to note that the choice of teaching materials for cross-language courses plays an important role and is a very difficult task. In order to satisfy the various interests of all the course participants, with their different educational backgrounds and experience,⁹ special didactic competences and special experience on the part of the trainer are indispensable.

Diagram 4 shows the participants' evaluation of the entire "theory" section of the seminar according to the same scale as for the questions above:

3.2 Evaluation of the exercises

The question group about the "exercises" focuses on the applicability of the various techniques that were practised during the course, on the demands made on the participants and on the quality of cooperation among course participants. The opinions of the participants about the relevance of the exercises for their future career and the demands made on them are given below.

In the first question of this group, the course participants were asked to assess whether the contents of the exercises were, in their opinion, very important, relatively important or not important for working as a court interpreter. Another question asked the participants whether the demands made on them were too high, just right or too low. This question was important because of the differences in the participants' background knowledge. Its aim was to see whether the seminar succeeded in addressing the participants' individual needs and in making the appropriate individual demands on each participant. The next question dealt with the quality of the cooperation between the participants themselves. The evaluation of this question was very interesting given the heterogeneity of the group (different background knowledge, approaches and languages of the participants).

Diagrams 5, 6 and 7 show the results of the above listed questions:

⁹ The „natural“ interpreters often asked for ready-made solutions for the problems.

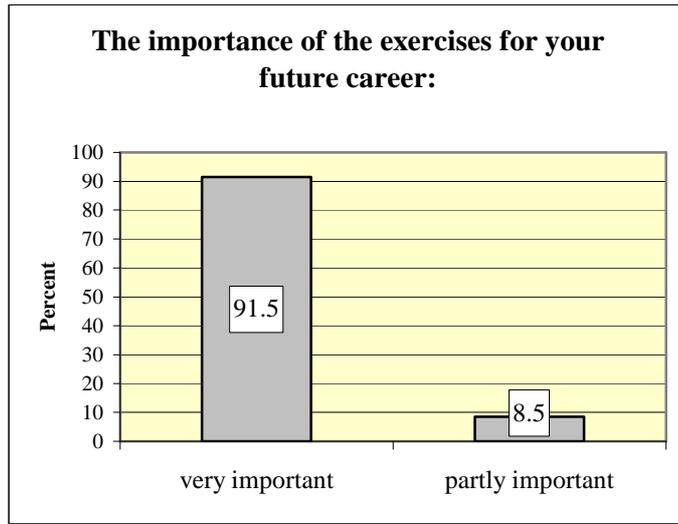


Diagram 5: Result of question 'The importance of the exercises for your future career'

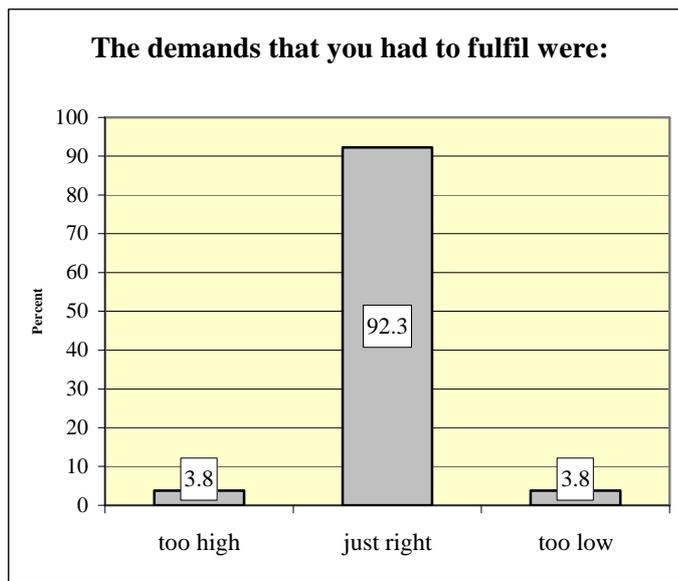


Diagram 6: Result of question 'The demands that you had to fulfill were'

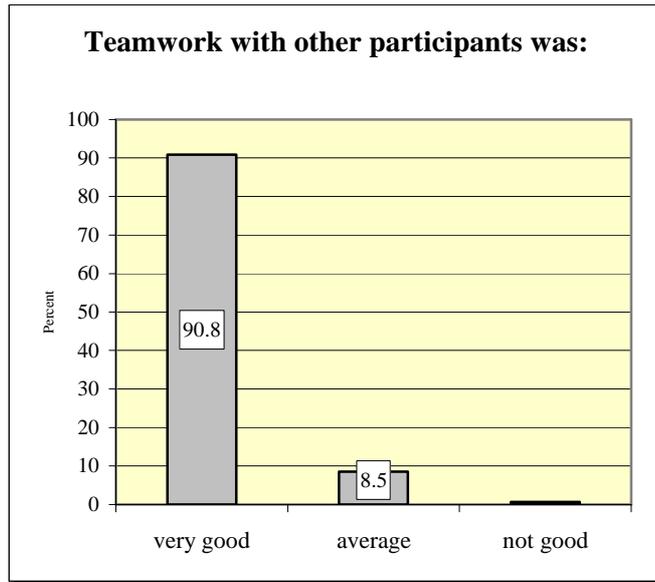


Diagram 7: Results of question 'Teamwork with other participants was'

As in the "theoretical" part of the questionnaire, the last question of this part also asked the participants to give an overall evaluation of the exercises. The participants had to rate the exercises according to the following grading scale: 1 = excellent, 2 = very good, 3 = good, 4 = satisfactory, 5 = not satisfactory. Diagram 8 shows the results.

The comparison of the individual seminars shows that the course participants were somewhat less satisfied with the first two seminars not only regarding the theory but also with regard to the exercises. Tab. 2 shows the results of the analysis in detail. There are grounds for supposing that, in this case as well, the reason for this gradual improvement in the participants' assessment is that, after having gained experience in the first seminars, the trainer could make appropriate improvements in the later seminars.

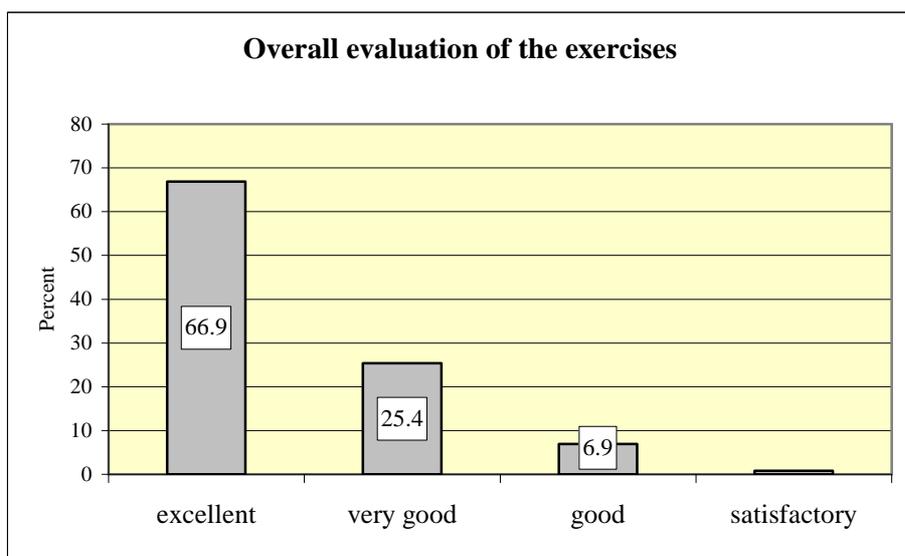


Diagram 8: Overall evaluation of the exercises

Seminars	Exercises – overall evaluation				Total
	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	
1	6	11	3	1	21
2	9	4	1	0	14
3	13	4	0	0	17
4	11	0	0	0	11
5	9	2	2	0	13
6	12	2	1	0	15
7	11	2	0	0	13
8	7	5	1	0	13
9	9	3	1	0	13
Total	87	33	9	1	130

Tab. 2: Exercises – overall evaluation

The result of the analysis of the answers regarding the exercises is very satisfactory. However, the cross-language training of practical interpreting remains a largely unexplored area (with the exception of note-taking). The testing of different methods of teaching achieved very good results within this context, but for establishing universally applicable methods a broader approach, longer periods of observation and evaluations are necessary.

3.3 Personal gain in knowledge

The third section of the questionnaire was dedicated to the analysis of the participants' personal gain in knowledge. This part of the questionnaire is of crucial significance for the entire analysis. Its aim was to find out how much the participants had profited from the seminar and, above all, which new competences they had really acquired and how satisfied they had been with the framework conditions, the working atmosphere and the trainer. In addition they were asked whether the seminar had lived up to their expectations.

The first question of this section was: "How much did you profit from the seminar?" The question contained the following five points which the participants had to assess with the ratings 'great profit', 'some profit' and 'no profit':

- The knowledge acquired in the seminar
- The transfer competence acquired in the seminar
- The behavioural competence acquired in the seminar
- The self-confidence acquired in the seminar
- Interchange and discussion with colleagues

The aim of the question regarding the newly acquired knowledge was to find out whether the large group of participants who had no background knowledge regarding court interpreting had learned a lot about this new subject matter. In addition, the aim of the seminar was also to impart new knowledge to those participants who already had competences in this field.

As regards transfer competence, participants had to assess how much they had profited from the transfer techniques taught during the seminar. Did they acquire new verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal means of expression? This part of the seminar dealt above all with verbal means of expression and with rendering them with the help of mnemonic aids.

Behavioural competence is closely connected with transfer competence. The rendering of para-verbal and non-verbal expressions during communication can have a great influence on the communicative situation. The seminar placed special emphasis on unconsciously expressed signals, which also play a great role in communication. As regards the analysis of behavioural competence, the seminar also focused on how the role of interpreters is understood by those who need interpretation services.

The next point of the question on the competences acquired in the seminar deals with the professional self-confidence acquired during the seminar. Customers who employ professional interpreters often try to monopolize the interpreters during the communicative situation. The aim of the seminar was to teach the participants by means of various exercises that interpreters have to define their role themselves, taking into account the objective of both communicating parties.

As the course participants had very different backgrounds, the question whether they had profited from the interchange and discussion with each other was very interesting. The aim of the question was to see whether the potentially negative circumstances that the members of the groups were heterogeneous, and often very different regarding their working languages and professional background had a positive or negative effect on the progress of the seminar. These differences could actually have brought about a very productive interchange and constructive discussions among participants.

Diagram 9 shows the participants' answers in a summarized form.

67.7% of the participants claimed to have "greatly profited" from the acquired knowledge in the seminar and 32.3% to have "partly profited". Thus, around two thirds of the participants thought that they had profited very much from the knowledge that they had acquired during the seminar. If we take into account that some participants (above all those with a degree in translation or interpretation) were already familiar with some of the subject matter taught during the seminar, these results can be seen as very satisfactory.

The lectures on transfer competence (note-taking and the exercises) were monolingual, that is German into German. Exercises with the individual working language(s) of the participants could mostly be carried out only once during one entire seminar. Another subject

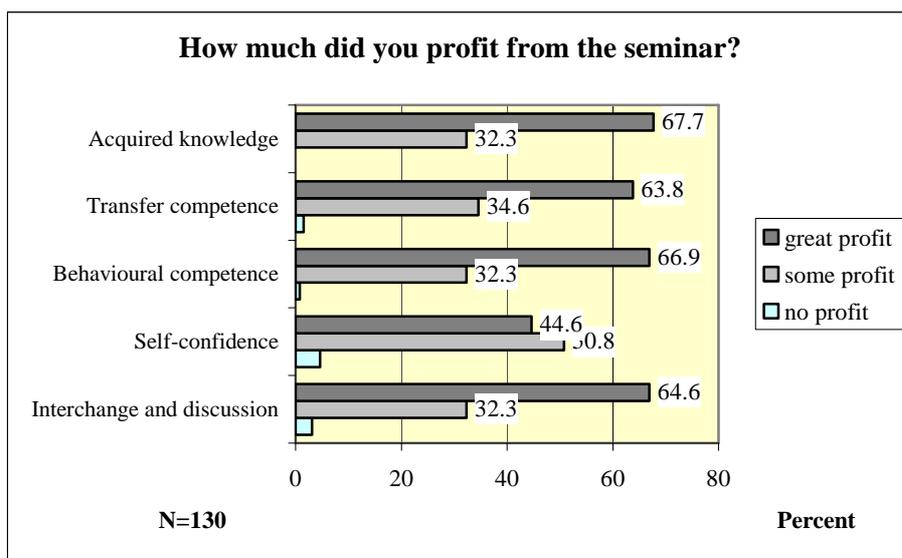


Diagram 9: Result of question 'How much did you profit from the seminar?'

matter of the lessons and the discussions was non-verbal means of communication like body-related means of expression and communication objects. 63.8% of the interviewees said that they had “greatly profited” from the newly acquired transfer competence. 34.6% had “partly profited” and two participants claimed not to have profited from this exercise.

The objectives regarding the role of interpreters are very different among communicating partners in public authorities, which on the one side are the parties and on the other the administrative representatives. Both sides expect the interpreters to be “loyal” to them in the sense that the interpreter should represent their individual objectives. Regarding this problem, we discussed and practiced situations during the seminar with the aim of dealing with the expectations of the communicating parties and their demands on the interpreters. In assessing the question on behavioural competence, 66.9% of the participants claimed to have “greatly profited”, 32.3% to have “partly profited” and one participant had ‘not profited’ from this part of the seminar.

44.6% out of the 130 participants who had filled in the questionnaire said they had “greatly profited” from their newly acquired self-confidence. A somewhat larger percentage of 50.8% of the participants claimed they had only “partly profited” and 4.6% thought that they had ‘not profited’ as regards this competence. As regards this issue of acquired self-confidence, it should be mentioned that during group discussions and exercises on the topic about the role, the tasks and the self-confidence of court interpreters, participants often had different opinions. Translators, interpreters, philologists and lawyers already had a specific image of this profession, while “natural” translators and interpreters were of the opinion that translating and interpreting was a service and that the client was the one who determined the tasks, the amount to be translated or interpreted and even the partiality towards one of the communicating parties. At the end of the discussions the “natural” translators and interpreters mostly admitted they had been quite unsure about this issue. Let us recall the distribution of participants according to their training: 47% of the participants were translators, interpreters, philologists or lawyers, while 53% were participants with a different educational background, who act as “natural” translators or interpreters. In analogy to these figures we could suppose that those 44.6% of course participants who had “greatly profited” from the self-confidence acquired during the seminar belonged to the group of ‘newcomers’. Those 50.8% who claimed to have only ‘partly profited’ or the 4.6% who had “not profited” at all could belong to the group of those participants who had already had training in the field of translation, interpretation, language studies or law.

64.6% of the participants had “greatly profited” from the interchange and discussion with their colleagues. 32.3% had “partly profited” and 3.1% had “not profited” at all. The overall evaluation of this point depended, of course, on how the groups were put together in the individual seminars. However, we can say that the course participants profited in the discussions from the heterogeneity of the groups.

The last question about the personal gain in knowledge is also of great importance for this study: “Can you apply the competences acquired in German during the seminar in your individual working language(s) without difficulty?” The participants could choose from three responses: “yes, very well”, “partly” and “not very well, because...”.

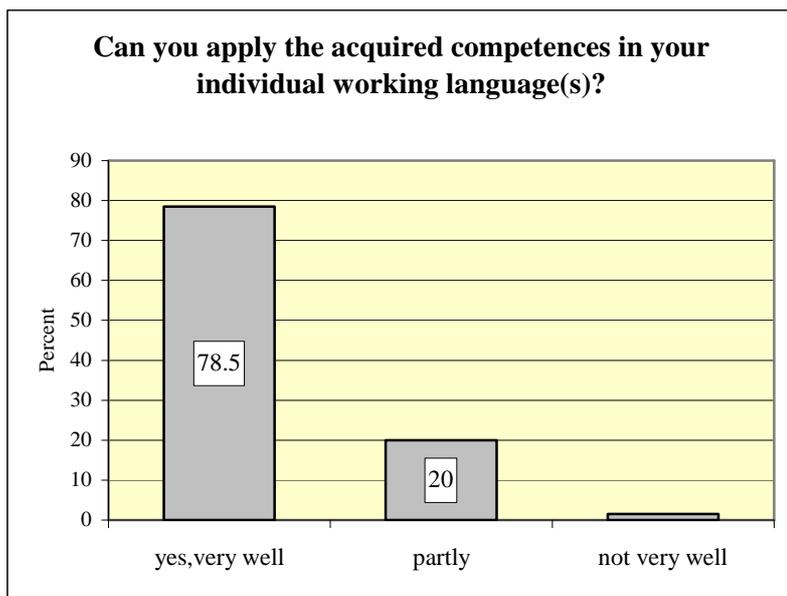


Diagram 10: Result of question 'Can you apply the acquired competences in your individual working language(s)?'

78.5% of the participants, which is the overwhelming majority, thought that they would be able to apply the acquired knowledge very well in their individual working language(s). 20% of the participants expected to be able to at least partly apply the new competences in their working language(s). Of course, these results have only a limited validity. The participants only recorded their personal view because most of them had no practical experience at the time they filled in the questionnaire. It would be very interesting to question the same group after a certain period as to whether they were really able to use the competences acquired during the seminar in actual practice. However, the impression of the participants immediately after the seminar is, of course, also important and shows very positive results.

4 Conclusions

To sum up we can say that the analysis of the questionnaires filled in by the 130 course participants allows the conclusion that successful cross-language training is indeed possible (cf. also Gertrud Hofer's description of similar projects in Switzerland). An assessment of whether cross-language teaching is more or less successful than language-specific teaching would require the organization of seminars for a specific language and the subsequent evaluation by means of the same questionnaire as used for this one.

The short seminars described above of course surely do not impart all the competences necessary for working as a court interpreter nor could they offer enough practice during their duration of only a few days. However, the main goal of these seminars was to make the participants aware of the complexity of court interpreting and encourage them to occupy themselves with this subject matter in the future as well. The aim of the seminars was also to motivate the participants to continue developing their competences. This means especially that, when participating in a communicative situation in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment, they should pay attention not only to linguistic but also to non-linguistic aspects of communication and act professionally and within the boundaries of their individual roles.

The examples from the study demonstrated that such alternative and cross-language training of court interpreting is not only possible but also very useful. There is evidence that many EU member states are already successfully organizing such training opportunities on a small scale. Unfortunately, we still lack the necessary networking among the various projects in this field. The Commission is in great need of qualified court interpreters and this demand could be met by cross-language training. This applies above all to the need for interpreters of languages of limited diffusion. There is already plenty of literature on the subject and a number of possibilities exist to build up networks as well as to introduce a more uniform training concept within the EU. It would be possible to work out a model which would take into account the minimum standards demanded by the Commission and encompasses the following issues: theoretical principles and problems of interpreting and legal translation, basic concepts of intercultural and trans-cultural communication, legal systems, language for special purposes and professional ethics as well as practice-oriented aspects like interpreting techniques and situational behaviour, note-taking and preliminary and introductory exercises for various working modes. This would also be very beneficial for the mobility and the cross-border work of translators and interpreters as well as trainers.¹⁰

The results of the three above-mentioned EU projects could form the basis for considerations about a common European framework of reference.¹¹ Such a framework of reference could encompass proficiency profiles and levels of competence for court interpreting and translating. Training courses in the respective majority or national language(s) could be offered in the various countries according to the profile established in this framework of reference. This would also bring a number of economic and practical advantages and more flexibility: students could complete parts of their training in various states and these courses would be counted for their studies at their home university; the cross-language training could, for example, be taken in the home country, the contrastive interpreting training, which involves active work in language pairs, in another country. The most important result of this would be a higher number of graduates as regards languages of limited diffusion that are only offered at a few locations. In addition, the urgent need for qualified interpreters would be met. The larger part of the language-independent training would be completed in the home country and the language-specific training at locations that concentrate on the respective language pairs.

The most important topics for a potential training framework for court interpreting have become apparent in recent years. What is still missing, however, is the unification of the overall framework as well as know-how concerning the didactic implementation of cross-language interpretation training. The training courses and methods which have already been tried and tested could well be put into practice on a larger scale. In order to achieve this, however, the exchange of experience and the elaboration of didactic methods are of crucial importance for developing concrete training measures. The coordination of basic training on a larger scale could also facilitate the adoption of standards for a recognized qualification. With a curriculum that would contribute to the fulfillment of the demands written down in the Green Paper we would indeed have a common European denominator.

¹⁰ The same approach could underlie a harmonized system of training for interpreter trainers: a standardized program for teacher training and preparatory courses for interpreter trainers could be developed and organized at a European level. For more information see Kadric, 2004.

¹¹ The Council of Europe, for example, has drawn up a Common European Framework of Reference for Languages to promote multilingualism in Europe. The Framework describes the competences necessary for communication, the related knowledge and skills and the situations and domains of communication.

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