

Translator Training in Jamaica: Modest Output for a New Outlook

Doreen Preston

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Article abstract

This article gives a brief overview of translator training in Jamaica and presents the principal characteristics of the M.A. programme currently offered at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

TRANSLATOR TRAINING IN JAMAICA: MODEST OUTPUT FOR A NEW OUTLOOK

Résumé

L'auteur fait un bref historique de la formation du traducteur en Jamaïque et présente les grandes lignes du programme de maîtrise actuellement offert à la University of the West Indies au campus de Mona en Jamaïque.

Abstract

This article gives a brief overview of translator training in Jamaica and presents the principal characteristics of the M.A. programme currently offered at the Mona campus of the University of the West Indies in Jamaica.

Given the geographical location of Jamaica just off the coast of Central America with close neighbours, Cuba and the Dominican Republic, given the steady flow of trade between Jamaica and South American countries such as Panama and Colombia as well as the emerging tourist market with Cuba and other countries of the region, and finally, its political classification within the United Nations as a member of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, translation activity within this small nation of approximately 2 million inhabitants has been fairly lively for several decades.

Until 1987, the teaching of translation in Jamaica was undertaken by well-intentioned, private language institutions offering professional training as this was perceived at the time. Resources available then were fully utilized, but since instructors were not always themselves translators or translation teachers, a great deal of confidence was placed in the natural language ability of the students in order to ensure the success of these translation programmes. Oftentimes, however, mastery of the source or target language, or both, by students was lacking, and the courses became no more than advanced language courses.

In 1987, the Spanish Department of the University of the West Indies (UWI) introduced a Postgraduate Diploma in Translation with a purely practical content. In the general phasing-out of diploma courses at the University, this gave way, in 1993, to a Master's in Translation, spearheaded by the Department of French. The design of the new programme is similar to that of the *DESS de traduction* offered by the *École supérieure d'interprètes et de traducteurs (ESIT)* at the

Université de Paris III, France, while some aspects correspond to current Canadian approaches to the teaching of translation. However, modifications and adaptations have been made to reflect the uniqueness of the Caribbean context and the relatively small size of translation classes.

The main objective of the programme — reducing extra-regional dependence on translation and interpretation services — is being met through the adoption of a serious professional attitude. This new approach is also helping to erase any negative image of the profession that early training methods may have created. The translation professors, some of whom have been trained on both sides of the Atlantic (Geneva, London, Montreal, Paris), have a sound knowledge of the theoretical and practical bases upon which to build a translation programme that meets the highest international standards.

The Master's in Translation is a part-time programme lasting six semesters, which includes two years of instruction followed by nine months for the preparation of a 10 000-word thesis on a theoretical aspect of translation. The working languages are French, Spanish and English; admission to the programme is based on a B+ average in French and a B in Spanish at the undergraduate level. Consideration is also given to alternate or additional qualifications such as extended stays abroad in either a French- or a Spanish-speaking country. Additionally a diagnostic test is to be introduced to assess the general level of entrants who may have obtained their qualifications many years prior to seeking admission to the programme. The first group of students is nearing the end of their training which contains a healthy mixture of theory and practice in areas such as linguistic theory, interpretative theory, general translation, literary translation, legal translation, institutional translation, economic translation and technical translation.

So far, the Mona campus (Jamaica) of the University of the West Indies (there are other campuses in Trinidad, Barbados and the Bahamas) is the only one offering a Postgraduate Programme in Translation designed to meet the needs of the profession. While translation is a component of language courses in French and Spanish on all campuses, at the undergraduate level emphasis is placed on the use of translation as a pedagogical tool to increase language proficiency.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of translation and the vast wealth of knowledge which students of this discipline are required to possess, available

resources within the University are utilized as fully as possible. For example, lecturers in literature within the departments of French and Spanish are called upon to sensitize translation students to the literary culture of countries whose languages they translate from and into. The departments of Government and Economics offer courses such as Regional and International Institutions and Micro and Macro Economics, which form an integral part of translation students' course loads. The overall value of these inter-departmental components is undeniable.

In keeping with the desire for international collaboration, links have been established with universities in Canada, France and the U.K. which have a strong translation tradition in an effort to promote cooperation and exchange at the faculty and student levels. In 1994 and 1997, two groups of students spent a semester at the *Université de Paris VII* where they read courses in Translation Methodology, Machine Translation, Linguistics, Civilisation, Economic and Legal Translations. It is expected that this extra-mural component will, with the help of the collaborating institutions, become an integral bi-annual part of the Master's in Translation at UWI.

This is yet another professionally-oriented programme designed to keep the Caribbean in the forefront of current developments in translation. Its timeliness has been hailed by the university and broader community, and judging from the latest batch of well-qualified applicants, its longevity is guaranteed.

DOREEN PRESTON

University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica