Eppure… A Reply to Federica Scarpa's Reply

Anthony Pym
Intercultural Studies Group
Universitat Rovira i Virgili
Tarragona, Spain

Federica Scarpa's (2006) comments on my "ten recurrent naiveties" are both flattering (did the text merit so much attention?) and useful (was it open to so many interpretations?). Thus I swallow pride and redress, in search of what will hopefully be broad agreement.

An initial context: We work at a time when European universities are attempting to reorganize their programs in line with the Bologna Process. This basically means dividing our translator education programs into two: a BA level and an MA level (to choose between several available terms). Bevies of experts are arising to tell us how this should be done. And they all seem to know everything, about translation, about professions, about markets, and especially about teaching. That is the context in which I have sought to return to a few fundamental questions. Many of those experts simply want to repackage the programs that already exist. For example, a five-year program in Spain can now be cut in two: a four-year BA for all, and a one-year MA for those who want it. The same courses are merely being relabeled. There is a lot wrong with that way of proceeding. *Far more must be done to adjust to specialized markets at the MA level.* On that very fundamental point, and in this very particular context, I suspect that Professor Scarpa and I are very much in agreement. And that is the only point that really has to be made here.

The rest are perhaps semantic issues, to which we now turn. Let us go back to the original propositions in question.

1. "Training has to be in universities"

Sorry about that. The proposition I really wanted to attack was, "*All* training has to be in universities". We would agree, I hope, that much training takes place informally, in company training programs, through work placements, on-the-real-job, or simple trial-and-error in the market. We might also agree that such non-university training is a good thing, a useful and necessary addition to what can be done in the academy. We both recognize this, so there is no real debate.

Professor Scarpa does however raise some interesting issues on the back of that one. She claims that "[o]nly non-profit-oriented institutions such as universities can afford the *time* necessary for 'proper' translator training, by which I mean training translators

in the fundamental language-related and intercultural competencies which can be transferred to different translating situations." Strong stuff.

Problems: The universities that I know of are all looking for profits of one kind or another. Since 2000 I have been organizing a Masters program in Translation and Localization that only continues today because it makes money year after year. The Bologna process is being used in Spain to get students to pay a lot more for anything at MA level. Worse, some universities have closed translator-training programs (and more particularly interpreter-training programs) precisely because they are labor-intensive and time-consuming (the clearest example was Deakin University in Melbourne, Australia). One is no longer so sure that money is the only difference between the academy and the market.

So what is the difference? In some of the postgraduate courses I organize, the teachers are market-based professionals, the tools they teach come straight from the market, the students are mostly market-based professionals seeking to extend their skills, the fees we charge are at the going market rate, or slightly higher, everything is available online, and the students pay by credit card. All the university provides is a shoddy physical setting and an official stamp of approval, a cachet of presumed quality. All we sell, as a university, is that image. We are in the business of exchanging symbolic capital (our prestige, our image) for economic capital (students' money), as Bourdieu would put it. And that is a market operation.

What is our symbolic capital? It has a lot to do with strange presumptions of economic non-profitability. It benefits enormously from having old buildings, fancy job names, snazzy robes for special occasions, and occasional helpings of professorial arrogance. Yet that image also suggests we are interested in substantial long-term knowledge, in frames far wider than an immediate *savoir-faire* for immediate employment. In the terms used by Kiraly, we are engaged in educating people ("translator education") as well as the narrower concept of "translator training", inasmuch as the difference can be maintained. That symbolic capital, handed down across the centuries, is as old as our humanist institutions. To sell that capital, we do not necessarily have to believe in it. I suspect Professor Scarpa does actually believe in, and defend, our vocational non-profitability. Many others do not, and there are historical reasons why not.

In an age of information-based economies, few of our social theorists would see universities as standing somehow outside of the market. No matter how non-profit-making on paper, the European university system is being called on to play a key role in adjusting to new economic criteria. We are an essential part of what is called the EU's "Lisbon goal", to become the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010. In many respects, our millenial non-profit humanism is standing in the way of that goal.

Professor Scarpa does not want to stand in the way. Her position implies, I suspect, that we should be serving our wider society rather than a narrow professional market. Education, rather than training, as she says. Help to people, rather than skills for profit. But what that means is very hard to pin down. She mentions some "fundamental language-related and intercultural competencies" that must be more than mere words. In another age one might have spoken of the basic need for rhetoric, as the set of communication skills that underlay all else. Venerable professors would make students

learn the great texts of the past, presumed to contain the secrets of transversal competence. Our methods are now different. Yet is this "proper training" not operating in the place it always did? Is this not just classical humanism cast in technical terms, in a state (the Italian state) that might still be prepared to pay for the symbolic capital thus generated?

As long as such beliefs are possible, as long as those images can open both the public purse and exchanges with the market, then there is no reason not to use them. We should look and sound like professors who know what is best for our entire societies. We will thus continue to be humored and paid. And while we talk about the nobility of those "fundamental competencies" ("proper training" indeed), our students will find space in their lives to experiment with ideas and relations, developing competencies that are far more vital and improper than the abstract schemata that keep us employed.

To be even clearer: I do not believe that people like Scarpa and Pym have any special insight that allows us to identify and delimit "proper training", but if that illusion of knowledge and control helps us gain time and space for any kind of training, then so much the better. Let us use it.

To maintain this image, we should distinguish quite radically between the BA and MA levels. The BA level is where basic competencies can be developed and students can breathe. The MA level should be very much in touch with professional training, without any pretence that our millennial magic enables us to do anything better than the market-based professionals.

A very minor point *en passant*, before leaving the many issues raised by Professor Scarpa on this topic: I believe one Spanish academic was involved in the recent development of the "CEN standard" for translation services. I have no idea why she should have been invited, or what specific insight she might have had. Ideally she would have presented statistics on the sociological of the European translation market. But I somehow doubt it.

2. "There is one huge job market for translators"

Professor Scarpa agrees that we confront a fragmenting job market. She then asks if this means that our training programs should be similarly fragmented. I think she says that training should *not* be fragmented, basically because this image called "proper training" is not fragmented (but how would anyone know?, how could this be tested?).

I think the solution here is the same as above. Use and manipulate the myth of "proper training" for the BA level. Then use MA and short postgraduate programs to address specific skills needed in specific niches. There is no need to choose between these two options. Bologna allows us to do both.

The important point is that the MA programs should be strategically diversified, in accordance with the diversity of available teacher skills and student employment. There should be no question of the one institution offering courses in all market niches, or even trying to do so. Students should be able to choose from a wide range of specialized MA programs from across Europe: one institution might specialize in conference interpreting (my term "translation" includes interpreting), another in subtitling, another

in legal translation in a specific language pair, and so on. One university cannot do everything. But a Europe of moving students can. This is precisely where we need to be closer to the professional market, and far more flexible than our traditions.

Professor Scarpa nevertheless paints a market that is not entirely fragmented. She sees a world where "good translators" can learn to do everything (thanks to "proper training") and are always in demand, while the rest of the market "is swamped by non-professionals who have received no proper training".

We all have anecdotal evidence that something like this is going on. Some people are simply good communicators; they can turn their hand to any number of translation-related jobs, and then to better-paid non-translation jobs. Others get stuck at phrase level, forever. But does this difference ensue only from universities? Have all the good communicators received nothing but "proper training"? There is no rule. Surely at this point Professor Scarpa picks up a long-standing social difference and uses it to somehow imply that the market is bad ("flooded"), it could be better ("good translators" are in short supply), and more university years ("proper training") will make the market better.

That view might be justified in Italy. The BA in *Mediazione linguistica* seems to me to be well-founded and coherent in its aims, particularly in its aim not to produce professional translators and interpreters in just three years. It seems well suited to the symbolic virtues of what Scarpa calls "proper training". Then again, the program has not been going long enough for its effects on the actual market to become clear.

In Spain, on the other hand, universities have been handing out four-year or five-year degrees in "translation and interpreting" (both terms) since 1992. Lots of universities, to lots of students. In 1994 I estimated that there were about 7000 students attending translation programs in Spanish universities. Dorothy Kelly in Granada suggest the number might now be double that. The explosion of translation programs was not due to any overwhelming social demand for translators. It had more to do with the internal need to deploy teachers of languages-other-than-English, and to offer students something that looked vocational.

What effect has all that "proper training" had on the market? The only difference is that all the "non-professionals" that swamp the low-tech segments now have a pretty degree on their wall. The degree programs have contributed to a clear deprofessionalization of the most traditional segments. And none of the pompous *catedráticos* that pretend to rule the academic roost has expressed any sense of responsibility to that market, at least as far as can be gathered from their main publications. After all, to do so would mean shooting themselves in their institutional foot (fewer students would mean less power for academics). Hence my relative pessimism about facile claims to "proper training", and my sincere hope that Italy can avoid the deprofessionalization we have witnessed in Spain.

(At several periods of my life I have moved from the academy to the professional marketplace, seeking the relative justice of relations where blithe incompetence is not economically rewarded. Economic markets do have some ethical virtues.)

3. Who should be trained?

Here Professor Scarpa and I agree totally: We should be training people to communicate, and only then to translate in any specialized way. This implies that BAs are general, and MAs should be highly specialized.

4. What kind of training programme should be offered?

Again, no disagreement is on the horizon. I have no problem with the lists of things to be learnt. Except that they have to be adapted to a wide range of situations. And except that they are lists. In this case, the things Scarpa lists are nebulous enough to be harmless.

I particularly liked the following: "…skills such as summarising, gisting and sight translation can be very useful to translator training, especially for getting rid of a word-for-word type approach and achieving an end product that is a text in its own right." This means placing oral work prior to written translation (I prefer role-play encounters rather than sight translation, but the key thing is orality.) That is, versions of interpreting should come at the beginning, not just at the end. One day we must seriously look for the origins of that idea (some attribute it to Vermeer, or to Snell-Hornby; I think I mentioned it in the early 1990s, but who cares?).

A more general argument is also necessary here, albeit not in any way directed at Professor Scarpa:

A strange technocratic malady has somehow attached itself to the Bologna Process. As I design programs and courses, I am being obliged to fabricate long lists of the knowledges (sic), skills and attitudes that we are supposed to convey. The lists ideally break down to give the objectives of each course and then each lesson. Big tables of such lists show all the things that students should have done and acquired at the end of their (formal and informal) education. An educational expert facing the big table of all these things should be able to spot and regulate any gaps or repetitions. Everything will run smoothly, on the vast seamless production line of education, right across Europe.

It gets worse: I have been filling in questionnaires, going through endless compilations of skills and attitudes in an attempt to prioritize them for a particular program (at the end of two hours the only thing we agreed on was the irrelevance of learning Latin in order to learn English).

It is everywhere: My two-year old son was supposed to be producing two-word sentences by 20 months. So says the list. And this mode of control will be with him for the next twenty years or so, in formal education, then beyond, given the need for life-long learning. He will be subject to cradle-to-grave comparisons with lists.

And it gets frightening: One EU project envisages a system where prospective employers type in the competencies and skills they are seeking, and a huge data base produces a list of job seekers who have acquired the required concoction. Like ordering a car.

It is a Stalinist dream. Now that we know centrally planned economies do not work, we are introducing centralized planning into education. No market; no negotiation; no

student-centered learning; no initial needs analysis with the people sitting in front of you; no inspiration; not much fun.

Beyond the bureaucrat's dream, this mode of planning should probably shake us out of some lethargy. It should make us work out exact relations with market requirements. It might even make us go out and see what those requirements are.

The only trouble is that academic bureaucrats like ourselves are usually quite good at drawing up lists, then justifying them as "proper training". It is one of our competencies, skills or aptitudes. We are also quite good at doing all the planning on paper, then forgetting about it in practice.

So be it.

5. "Trainees should all work into the same language"

Professor Scarpa likes the idea of tandem learning, of having different directionalities in the one classroom: "It is impossible to disagree", she says. Then she claims this is not possible in "the Italian system".

First point: We help make the systems, for better or for worse.

Second point: In a Europe of mobility, of student movements and e-learning, the systems should no longer be national. Tandem learning can work precisely because it is one way of opening up ogres like the Italian system (or the Spanish one, for that matter).

We are supposed to be creating a European Higher Education Area, aren't we?

6. "Translation is not language learning"

This is another "either/or" trap. I was arguing against the blunt proposition that translating has nothing to do with language competence. My purpose was not to argue that the two sides are identical. My point should be won if there is significant common ground between the two.

Scarpa is very clear here: "Unlike Pym (2005: 5), I believe that translation *is* something entirely different from language learning because both the context and the objectives are different."

Entirely? On the political level, looking at where and how translators are to be trained in our tertiary institutions, the contexts and objectives certainly can be very different. We do not want to do our training in Modern Language departments, if we can help it. I would much rather be in a faculty of Communication Studies, alongside marketing, journalism and media studies. But that is politics. It does not concern what actually happens when one learns a language.

We all like to tell how translation was once used only to check if a language lesson had been learnt. Yes, that was once the case. But no longer. Second-language acquisition has come a long way since then, especially in the field of English. It is a major international industry, moving a lot of money. It also has numerous concepts (especially

interlanguage and various risk-reduction strategies) that might be of real use in Translation Studies, as might a few research methodologies (notably the various modes of action research). Bad politics could be cutting off a lot of potentially fruitful exchange.

Other angles are available. When we revise our students' work, what percentage of observed mistakes actually concern translation and nothing but translation? In Krings' 1986 study, translation competence accounted for only 6.5% of the observed errors. Our students still have a lot of language learning to do.

Professor Scarpa must know this. After all, she includes "reading skills", "writing skills" and "intercultural communication" as things that should be taught in non-specialized translator training programs. As far as specialized programs are concerned, she envisages work in "science, technology, law and economics", which surely involves learning the languages of those areas (linguistics is no longer just the study of *langue*). Is all of this really so far removed from general language learning? When Christiane Nord (2003) mentions the ability to produce and analyze texts, is that ability not what all students should learn when they are trained in foreign languages? And if there is a specifically intercultural competence, one that involves juggling the norms of different systems, has the prime place of such competence not always been the mind of the foreign-language learner? Only a very narrow concept of language learning could pretend to place it in an entirely different category.

If the politics do not suit, try finesse. My colleagues at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (and perhaps elsewhere) have been admitting that translators do need language learning, but of a special kind suited only to translators. I have no idea how such an argument can be justified, but it would seem to assume that translation involves an independent context and objectives, as if cross-cultural communication knew nothing about language learning, pidgins, creoles, interlanguage, code-switching and multilingual conversations, alongside translation. In reality the only independence our academic politicians gain, and seek to defend, is an independent building for themselves.

I once tried to formalize the relationship between translation errors and language errors, in order to reinforce the political divisions (Pym 1992). I proposed that language errors were fundamentally a question of being right or wrong. Translation errors, on the other hand, were always "right, but…", or "wrong, but…". That is, the factors and norms were so complex that, in the case of translation, the ideal of correctness must be replaced by the practice of discussion (in order to teach and learn).

I no longer pursue that idea. In many areas of language learning, especially with respect to text and discourse skills (yes, the noble tradition of rhetoric), there is no simple right vs. wrong. In language, complexity can be found wherever you want to look.

We should learn to accept that a lot of our training has a great deal to do with language learning. I am secretly pained to see that our Masters in Translation and Localization in Tarragona now has about 40% of its content in technical writing, revising and editing. The students are learning how to write good technical language (and thus how to revise the outputs of translation memories). I would like to see more translation in our translation program. But I must admit that the quality of the students' work has increased enormously ever since we started insisting they learn how to write.

7. "Theories don't help trainees"

Professor Scarpa says, "Unlike Pym (2005: 6), I believe that all theories can indeed be expected to be of direct use to trainees and better theories are not necessarily those developed via professional knowledge."

Easy to agree: If theories help, then that is a good thing. I was merely arguing against the blind knee-jerk reactions that see all theories as being useless. I wanted to indicate that there are several devious ways of being useful, to one's intellectual milieu as well as to translating translators.

Professor Scarpa raises several additional points. She mentions, for example, the inductive-deductive movements that Robinson (2003) sees as linking practice to theory. I agree very much. I have long argued (since the early 1980s, when I read Althusser) that theorizing is a part of all practice, translators are theorizing all the time, and that the solutions to theoretical problems are only found in practice.

At the same time, however, there are specific metalanguages that help us formalize practical theorizing. We can identify a solution, give it a name, cast it into language and make it known across the academy. We can make it of interest to other practices, from the most banal to the most arcane. This second kind of theory is the one that is mostly attacked, and the one I most was to defend. It is my own personal loyalty to the inheritance of humanism.

Professor Scarpa wants students to learn the professional languages of "science, technology, law and economics", but she seems not quite so keen on the professional language of Translation Studies.

But my practice gives me away: Our Masters course has very minimal theory. The only place I really teach theory is in our PhD program, which trains researchers rather than translators. That is the level I should really be defending here.

Professor Scarpa mentions Margaret Rogers' definition of "translation theory" as "the ability to consider the role of translation from an historical and social point of view and the capacity to express the motivations underlying translation choices". That sounds like verbalized decision making, or grounded ethical practice, and a good thing too. It can be excellent theorizing. But it would be hard for any formal discipline to accept this as a definition of theory.

Professor Scarpa concludes: "*And only turn to theories when they help you question institutional power*, or rather, when they help you learn how to improve your translation product and raise your professional status by giving you the cognitive and linguistic tools to defend your translation choices…"

The theories are only there to defend? That is, when you have already decided what you want to argue, or which way the heavens turn?

8. "Technology has changed nothing" vs. "Technology is helping us"

On this very fundamental issue, there is no debate. We simply have a lot more to discover. A lot is happening out there, and many of us in here cannot see it.

This last bit is for Galileo:

In the Aula Magna of Padova we looked up at you for some two days, as you looked up at the heavens. In fear of what is writ large beyond us? Or in contempt of what is said within these walls? Or in fear and contempt, at once?

Our positions are scarcely comparable, yet something of the flame remains:
The text is our source, and yet it moves.
The meaning is to be rendered, and yet it moves.
Translation is what it always was, and yet it moves.
The university produces knowledge, yet it too moves.

Our institutions live in considerable error, always. With respect to translation they believe, in their models and modules, that one has always translated the meaning of source texts, and since we know what all those terms mean and have always meant (text, meaning, translate), we can tell everyone how to do it. We can divide the world into competencies, then list, convey and assess them. If only things were not moving faster than that.

Our anti-institutions compound the error, placing all worth in the economic market, or in the gurus of quotidian practice, which no language can apparently fix long enough to convey.

One possible answer is to do as you do, to look outward from the academy, in fear and contempt, and perhaps also desire. Texts, meanings and translation also exist out there, where they move. And that gaze does not force is to abandon entirely the lessons learnt from the centuries.

References

Krings, Hans P. (1986) *Was in den Köpfen von Übersetzern vorgeht*, Tübingen: Gunter Narr.
Nord Christiane (2003) "Translating as a text-production activity". In Pym A., Fallada C., Biau J. R., Orenstein J. (eds) *Innovation and E-Learning in Translation*, Intercultural Studies Group, Tarragona, Universitat Rovira i Virgili, 23-26, http://isg.urv.es/publicity/isg/publications/innovation_2003/index.htm.
Pym, Anthony (1992) "Translation Error Analysis and the Interface with Language Teaching", *The Teaching of Translation,* Ed. Cay Dollerup & Anne Loddegaard, Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 279-288.

Pym, Anthony (2005) "Training translators – ten recurrent naiveties". *Translating Today* 2. 3-6.

Robinson Douglas (2003) *Becoming a Translator. An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation*, 2nd edition. London and New York: Routledge.