

THE WEB-BASED STUDY GUIDES IN ENGLISH – A KEY TO SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONALISATION

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Abstract: The scarce academic offer in English available on many universities' webpages comes to contradict their internationalisation strategy which views first and foremost the increase in the number of international students (either exchange or full-degree). The main goal of this paper is to raise awareness of the direct relation between the two by providing facts and numbers from several European universities. Furthermore, the objective is to bring to light a critical dimension of the translations from Romanian into English of the *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* degrees and course descriptions available on the Romanian universities' webpages. The outputs are meant to highlight the importance of both the Study Guides in English and the specialized translations of these academic texts.

Keywords: international students, degree and course descriptions, specialized translation, academic texts

1. Introduction

Increasing the number of international students, either exchange for a semester or an entire academic year, or full-degree, is one of the main objectives of European universities nowadays, stated most often in their internationalisation strategy. The running of international academic exchange and mobility projects, the participation at study fairs, the update of the curricula, of the teaching and assessment methods, the improvement of the universities' websites (equally in terms of web design and quality of contents), the availability of website information in English (and other foreign languages), the increase in the number of courses/modules/whole study degrees taught in English, to give just a few examples, are current undertakings of universities which aim at making them more visible and attractive to international students. Starting from the well-known premise that the communication and provision of information, mostly in English, is crucial for international students when preparing their stay at a university abroad (Altbach and Knight 2007, 303), I intend to analyse, from a quantitative point of view, the impact of such information on universities themselves.

In the second part of this paper, my objective is to examine, from a qualitative viewpoint, the translations from Romanian into English of the *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* degrees and course descriptions available on the Romanian universities' webpages. The purpose of this part is to raise awareness regarding the importance of promoting quality and specialized translations of degree and course descriptions to potential candidates.

2. Are the web-based study guides in English a source of boosting the number of international students?

In order to appreciate whether the existence of degree and course descriptions in English on universities' webpages is one of the factors which attracts international students, a brief questionnaire was set up and sent to several universities of long-standing tradition of education and research in Europe. The questionnaire comprises five questions regarding the name of the university, the total number of students enrolled in the academic year 2015-2016, the number of exchange international students, the number of full-degree international students in the same academic year, as well as the link(s) of the university degree/course descriptions in English. The figures provided by the universities themselves gave me the opportunity to establish a hierarchy according to the number of international students hosted during one academic year, which was then confronted with the information related to provision of the degree and course descriptions in English on the universities' websites, to check the relation, if any, between the two.

The twenty-three respondents are European universities, all members of the Coimbra Groupⁱ and/or Utrecht Networkⁱⁱ, associations of universities of high international standard. They are multidisciplinary universities of different sizes: small-size universities of up to 15.000 students (3), medium-size universities of between 15.000 and 25.000 students (3); large-size universities of between 25.000 and 50.000 students (11) and extra-large-size universities of over 50.000 students (5); located in eighteen different countries: Austria (1), the Czech Republic (1), Denmark (1), Estonia (1), France (1), Germany (2), Greece (1), Italy (2), Latvia (1), the Netherlands (2), Poland (1), Portugal (1), Romania (1), Slovenia (1), Spain (3), Sweden (1), Turkey (1) and the United Kingdom (1).

The analysis of the webpages displaying the degree and course descriptions in English revealed that the situation is far from being homogeneous. Leaving aside the University of Edinburgh for which the first language/mother tongue is English, eleven out of the twenty-two remaining universities (half of respondents) offer both accurate degree descriptions including plenty of useful information (e.g. profile of the degree programmes, key learning outcomes, occupational profile(s) of graduates, specific admission requirements, total length of studies, total number of credits), and detailed course descriptions in English (e.g. course title, course code, number of ECTS credits, name of course holder, prerequisites, course description, aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, assessment criteria and methods, bibliography), according to the requirements stated in the ECTS Users' Guideⁱⁱⁱ. It is the case of the University of Coimbra, University of Graz, Leiden University, University of Göttingen, Lund University, Aarhus University, University of Padova, University of Ljubljana, University of Bologna, Utrecht University and University of Latvia. Most of these universities also provide a course finder engine, which makes it even easier for a potential international student to look for the course(s) or the programme(s) he/she might be interested in.

Some universities provide complete descriptions of study programmes in English offering few unit course descriptions, as well as the lists of courses with their allocated number of credits (University of Granada, University of Thessaloniki and Jagiellonian University). Others provide mainly unit course descriptions in English (Masaryk University), while some universities only partially offer a mixture of degree and course

descriptions, either in English or in their national language (University of Barcelona, University of Poitiers, University of Tartu, University of Valencia, University of Iași, University of Würzburg and Boğaziçi University).

The following situation can thus be accounted for: the existence of degree descriptions in English, which provide students with the image of their long-term future educational background, in the case of some universities, could be in line with their objective to attract mostly full-degree international students. On the contrary, the provision of unit course rather than degree descriptions would switch the institutional focus on exchange international students, temporarily enrolled at the host university for a semester or an entire academic year at the most. In reality the figures received from some of the respondents prove quite the opposite.

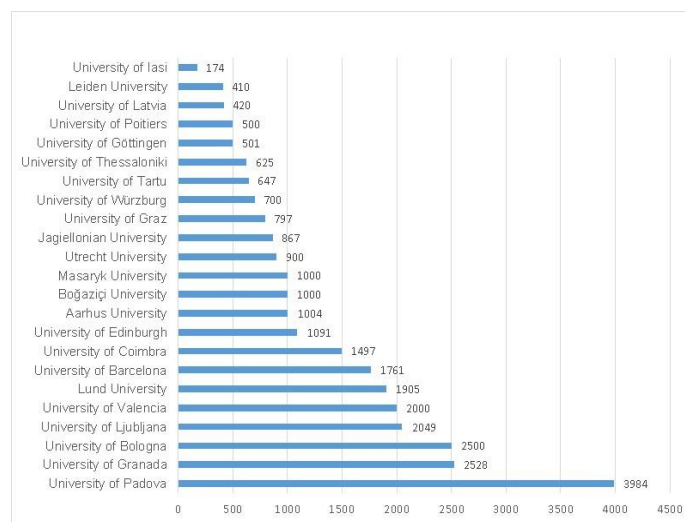


Figure 1. Number of *exchange* international students in 2015-2016

As Figure 1 indicates, the numerical achievements of the University of Granada, placed second among our respondents in terms of exchange students, are imposing compared to the quantity of information in English as to course descriptions available on its website.

If we analyse the gathered data from a percentage perspective, the findings will differ. Thus the second graphic (Figure 2) places Boğaziçi University on top of the whole range of universities whose webpages providing the degree and course descriptions in English have been analysed. In the academic year 2015-2016, 7.69% of the number of its enrolled students were exchange international students, which definitely represents quite a big ratio for a university with incomplete information in this respect on its website. Similarly, the Universities of Tartu, Granada, Valencia and Krakow/Jagiellonian enjoyed high percentages of exchange students (4.99%, 4.37%, 4% and 3,54% respectively) out of the total number of enrolled students, despite lacking information in terms of either degree programmes or unit course descriptions in English. As to the Universities of Padova, Coimbra, Ljubljana, Lund and Latvia, 3 to almost 7% of their enrolled students were exchange international students, in line with the completeness and accuracy of the degree and course descriptions in English found

on their webpages. On the other hand, contrary to the abundance of curricula information posted on its website in English as its native language, the University of Edinburgh counted its exchange students as being less than 3% of the total enrolled students. Furthermore, the percentages of exchange international students in the case of universities such as Bologna, Utrecht, Aarhus, Graz, Gottingen and Leiden are lower than expected considering, again, the existence of all the required information as to their degree and course descriptions in English.

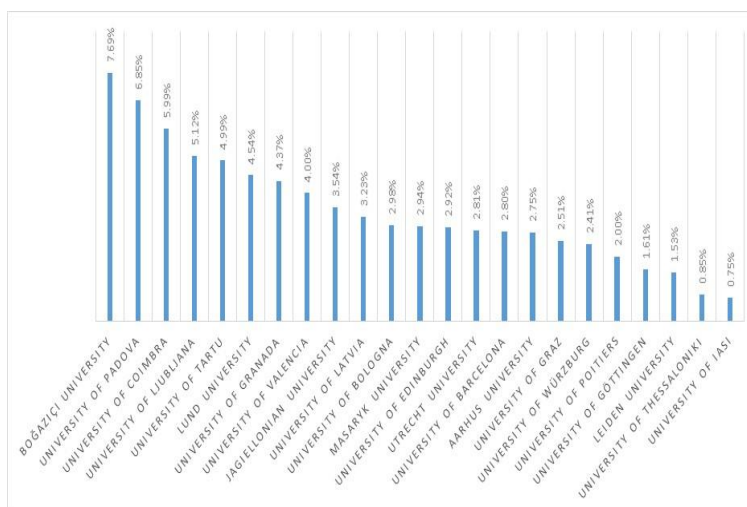


Figure 2. Percentage of exchange international students out of the total number of enrolled students

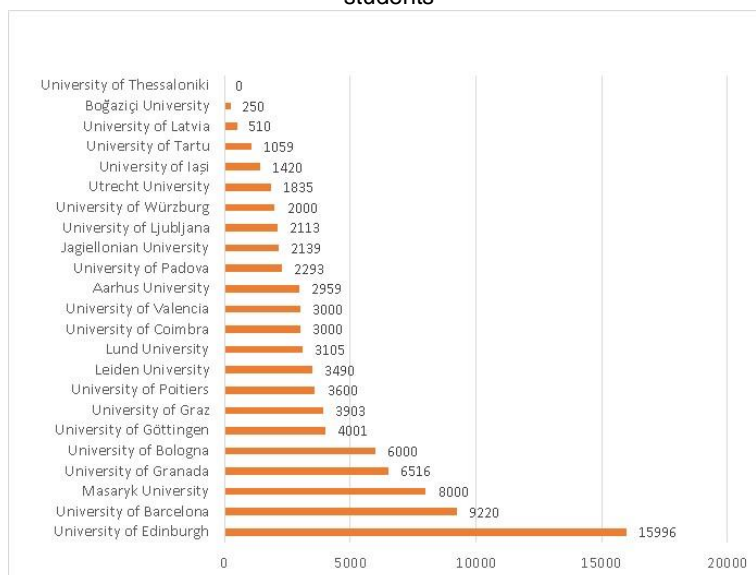


Figure 3. Number of full-degree international students in 2015-2016

Moving to the number of full-degree international students hosted by the above-mentioned universities (Figure 3), the University of Edinburgh comes first with an impressive number of 15,996 students, almost half of its enrolled students in 2015-2016. As to the universities which do not have English as their native language, the Universities of Barcelona, Masaryk and Granada proudly counted high numbers of full-degree international students, as shown in the chart above. The high number of international students who attended whole degrees in these universities which still have to make efforts to complete their curricula in English to be posted on their websites (University of Barcelona – almost ten thousand students, Masaryk University – eight thousand students, University of Granada – more than six thousand students) comes to contradict the necessity of having the degree and unit course descriptions in English, as recommended by the European Commission and as needed by the candidate students. One explanation however could be that international students following entire degrees of two or three years study in the national language of the hosting country (in some countries the preparatory year of linguistic training is mandatory, i.e. Romania) and make use of it afterwards, more than of English, the *lingua franca* of Europe.

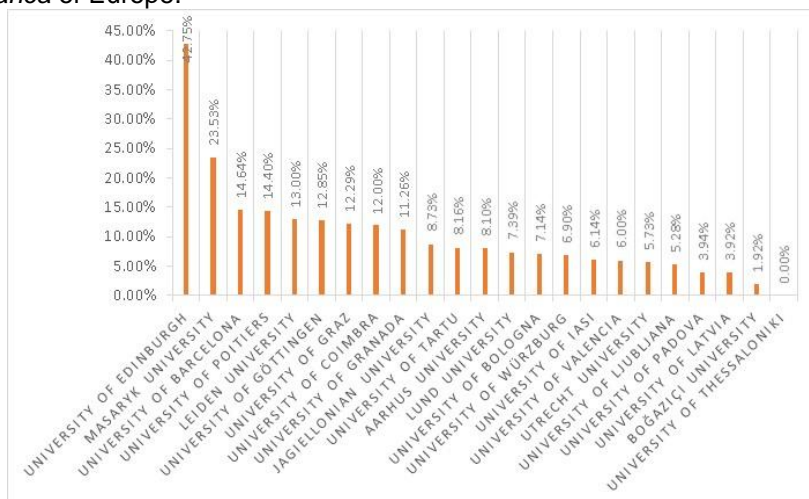


Figure 4. Percentage of *full-degree* international students out of the total number of enrolled students

Generally, the data viewed from the percentage standpoint (Figure 4) matches the information reflected in Figure 3, which shows the actual number of full-degree international students. However, one can note that the 8,000 international full-degree students hosted by Masaryk University (a very good provider of unit course descriptions in English) represent 23,53% of its total number of enrolled students, while the 9,220 international full-degree students enrolled at the University of Barcelona are less than 15% of its students. Similarly, the high number of 6,516 international full-degree students of the University of Granada represent only 11,26% of its enrolled students.

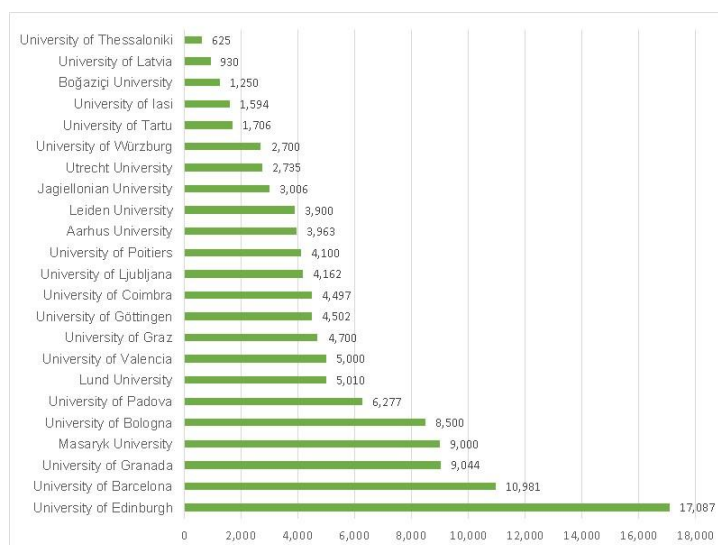


Figure 5. Total number of international students in 2015-2016

Overall the initial hypothesis that universities which still need to complete their website information about the academic offer in English (either course descriptions or academic degree descriptions) attract fewer international students has been proved correct to a large extent, as displayed in Figure 5 below. Universities such as Thessaloniki, Latvia, Boğaziçi, Iași and Tartu have a great potential to increase the number of incoming students should they further improve the offer of information required by international student candidates.

3. The specialized translations of course and academic degree descriptions as texts belonging to the academic institutional language

While the provision of translations into English of the study guides has proved to be an important element of higher education institutions' internationalisation strategy, the *quality* of these translations is the mirror of the universities themselves.

The second part of this study aims at exemplifying some of the translation quality issues pointed at above, by means of a short contrastive analysis between the Romanian and English versions of *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* degree and course descriptions available on Romanian universities' webpages.

Although the above-mentioned study programmes are offered, either at bachelor or at master level, by a large number of Romanian universities (in Cluj-Napoca, Galați, Sibiu, Bucharest, Suceava, Craiova, Timișoara, Târgu-Mureș, etc.), their degree and course descriptions in English are not available, for the time being, on their universities' webpages. The only *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* programmes whose unit course descriptions in Romanian and their translations into English could be identified on the Internet are those offered by *Alexandru Ioan Cuza* University of Iași. Even so, note should be made that the degree descriptions are not available in Romanian or in English.

Table 1 includes excerpts from the *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* unit course descriptions (Romanian and English versions), more specifically words, phrases and paragraphs from the Romanian version (column 1), the translation into English found on the university website (column 2) and the proposed translation appreciated as more appropriate in the given context (column 3).

	Romanian version	Existing English version	Suggested English version
Examples from <i>Translation Studies</i> course descriptions	studenții având posibilitatea să intervină, cu întrebări, <i>completări și comentarii</i> în timpul orelor de curs.	which allows students to ask questions and <i>to turn to account their own knowledge</i> during lectures	which allows students to ask questions and <i>add comments</i> during lectures
	Titularul <i>are în vedere o abordare interactivă</i> .	The lecturer <i>intends to observe an interactive methodology</i>	The lecturer <i>views an interactive approach</i> .
	Vor <i>citi studii critice</i> și vor scrie eseu.	They will <i>practice in critical reading</i> and <i>writing skills</i> .	They will <i>practise their critical reading and writing skills / read critical studies and write essays</i> .
Examples from <i>American Studies</i> course descriptions	Vor <i>învăța să-și exprime ideile în mod clar și să le sprijine prin eseuri bine încheiate</i> .	They will <i>practice in clear expression of ideas and support of those ideas through well-developed essays</i> .	They will <i>learn to express their ideas clearly and support them by writing coherent essays</i> .
	Ei <i>vor</i> explora unele dintre <i>problemele</i> -cheie cu care <i>ne confruntăm</i> într-o epocă dominată de <i>Mass Media</i> . <i>Cu alte cuvinte</i> , ei își <i>vor</i> dezvolta capacitatea de a gândi critic.	They explore some of the key <i>questions</i> facing <i>us</i> in a media age and develop their skills in critical thinking.	They <i>will</i> explore some of the key <i>issues which we are facing</i> in an age <i>dominated by mass media</i> . <i>In other words</i> , they <i>will</i> develop their <i>critical thinking skills</i> .

Table 1. Excerpts from the *Translation Studies* and *American Studies* unit course descriptions (Romanian and English versions)

The meaning of the phrase “to turn to account” used in the target text in the first example chosen above from the *Translation Studies* course descriptions does not convey the meaning of the words to be translated in the source text. Not only is it improperly used, but it skips over important information about the development of a class in translation studies: students are encouraged to discuss with the lecturer and add their comments, whenever they feel the need to do so. However, I agree to the omission of the term “completări” which does not bring anything more to this offer of information and is included in the term “comments” in the target language.

The second example comprises, in the target text, the term “to observe” which conveys the lecturer a position of spectator, rather than moderator or, if needed, initiator of discussions to be held in class.

The source text in the third example would allow the maintenance of the term “practise” in the target text (however spelled with and “s” if following the British convention in line with the rest of the text), while the preposition following it is not needed. Therefore, I would agree to the translation: “practise their critical reading and writing skills” as an alternative to “read critical studies and write essays”, which I find more explanatory for the description of the activities.

The first example extracted from a course description of the *American Studies* programme consists of a series of unfortunate choice of terms, where unnecessary prepositions were introduced, immediately following verbs, such as “support of” and again “practice in”. The term “well-developed” used before the noun essay would rather refer to its form, rather than to its contents, which is why the term “coherent” is preferred.

The last in this series of examples omits the translation of the future tense, of the term “mass” in the complex term “mass media”, of the phrase “cu alte cuvinte” in the second sentence, reverses the subject and the direct object, changing thus the meaning of the source text (“questions facing us” instead of “questions that we are facing”).

The few examples chosen above are meant to underline the importance of the specialized translations of these academic texts (Trosborg 1997, 7) which become public when posted on the universities’ webpages. Poor quality of the translation into English of the course and degree descriptions would inevitably have an impact on the image of the universities themselves, irrespective of the quality of the academic degrees themselves (Bernardini et al. 2016). Therefore, in order to convey the accurate contents of the degree and course descriptions offered by a higher education institution, consistent with the value of the education provided, the role of the specialized translator is essential (Costales 2012, 1) and should be treated as such, even if their name is not mentioned in the translated material.

References

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ⁱ The Coimbra Group is an association of long-established European multidisciplinary universities of high international standard. The Coimbra Group is committed to creating special academic and cultural ties in order to promote, for the benefit of its members, internationalisation, academic collaboration, excellence in learning and research, and service to society. It is also the purpose of the Group to influence European educational policy and to develop best practice through mutual exchange of experience. [<http://www.coimbra-group.eu>, accessed April 2017]

ⁱⁱ The Utrecht Network is a Europe-wide network of universities cooperating in internationalisation, committed to initiatives that strengthen the international profile of its member universities and the cohesion of the group. Through active participation, institutions are encouraged to initiate joint activities leading to further internationalisation of member institutions. Extensive experience gained at national and international level is shared in order to attain the highest quality in the management of European and international projects, exchanges, university services and organisation. [<http://www.utrecht-network.org/about-us>, accessed April 2017]

ⁱⁱⁱ *ECTS Users' Guide* is available at http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf [accessed April 2017]