TRANSLATOR PROFILE OF LÁSZLÓ DEME

László Deme is one of the most respected translators and interpreters in Târgu Secuiesc and in the surrounding areas. As a translator, interpreter, former principal, vice-principal and German-Hungarian teacher at Nagy Mózes High School, he inspired not only his students but the whole community in his hometown. His professional work is strongly interlaced with his affection and devotion to German language and culture.

He was born on the 18th January, 1941 in Târgu Secuiesc, Romania. He attended Nagy Mózes High School, formerly called 10th Grade Pedagogical School, in his hometown and during his school years he learnt Hungarian, Romanian, Russian and German, the latter only in the last three years of high school. Back then, it was compulsory to complete the 10th grade, so he graduated at the age of 16. After graduation he applied to the Faculty of Law at the Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU) in Cluj-Napoca, but he didn’t manage to achieve the required results for admission. In 1963, thanks to the encouragement of his German teacher Margit Incze, he decided to study German and Hungarian language and philology at BBU, and by achieving outstanding results he was admitted to the Faculty of Literature. Margit Incze prepared him for the entrance exam.

*“Altogether they accepted 12 students, out of which 2 of us were native Hungarians, while the rest were native Germans. I didn’t mind it at all, on the contrary, I found it the best way of acquiring the German language. All our courses were held in German, and we talked German with our colleagues. We, Hungarians were striving to hang out with the Germans, but they formed a closed circle, which was impossible to get in to. In the end, some colleagues dropped out and 8 of us completed the degree.”*

Former BBU rector, Andrei Marga, supported German language teaching so much that he achieved introducing German language teaching as a native and foreign language in Romania. The aim of this program was to give the opportunity to learn German to the Hungarian and Romanian people – he said.

After he received his degree from BBU, he taught Hungarian Literature in Lunga for 2 years, then between 1970 and 1972 he was the vice-principal and teacher at the Agricultural School in Târgu Secuiesc; in 1975 he became the principal of Nagy Mózes High School and he kept this position until 2000. During the Ceușescu regime, the name and profile of the school changed a lot. Before 1990, its name was Industrial Secondary School and after the fall of communism, in January 1990, the school took the name of its founder; Nagy Mózes and became a theoretical institution of education in Hungarian language. In the meantime, Mr. Deme was a member of the German Teachers’ Association in Romania, and worked as a reviser and associate at the Goethe-Institut. As part of his profession, he attended several trainings held by the Friedtjov Nansen Institute and the Dr. Reinhold-Hagen-Stiftung Institution, among others. Every 2 years, he made regular visits to Göttingen, Bonn, Naumburg etc.

*“In those days, participating in the trainings organised by the German State was a great opportunity and privilege for us. In my opinion, the fact that they abolished the participation of those who were to retire in five years was an essential step, as the focus should be on the youth, and we cannot deprive them from this great opportunity.”*

He started his translating career in 1992 when he was assigned to translate qualifications and authorisations of vehicles purchased abroad. He later became a certified translator and interpreter registered on the list at the Romanian Ministry of Justice, which entitled him to provide authorised translation and interpreting services in Hungarian, Romanian and German. In Târgu Secuiesc, there has been no competition in this field neither for him nor his wife, Terézia Deme, an English teacher and translator. So they decided to establish their own translation agency and language school, which is flourishing even today as the demand for quality translation and interpreting services is on the rise.

*“I translate mostly legal and economic documents. For 27 years I was a school principal, so being up-to-date with legislations and regulations was my obligation, so to say. This might be the reason I chose this certain type of translation specialisation. I have never tried literary translation, not even prose translation*. *I strongly believe that being a literary translator requires talented writing skills. I translate mainly contracts and company formation documents on a daily basis. In the 90’s I was asked to translate the founding documents of the New Fashion textile manufacturing company from Romanian to German.”*

The Romanian Ministry of Justice has been among his clients since 1999. The Police Department, Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Court in Târgu Secuiesc have also been his clients since 2002, he worked as a simultaneous interpreter during trials until the 1st September, 2016. Once, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania requested his interpreting services but he refused the job.

*“At first I provided only translation services for the Court because I didn’t have proper interpreting experience. As time went by, I have deepened my knowledge and practiced as much as I could to combat the difficulties and challenges of court interpreting. It is fair to say that the EU harmonisation of law facilitates the work of legal and court translators and interpreters. Nowadays, I provide interpreting services only to the Police Department, considering how exhausting and overwhelming interpreting has been 4-5 days a week for 15 years. There are times when I have to interpret a lot, but sometimes they do not require my services. All in all, translating and interpreting for judicial authorities poses considerable challenges and entails huge responsibilities. Besides taking the oath, we cannot forget about our obligation of confidentiality and solidarity. [...] Which has been the most challenging working experience ever? I think interpreting for the German judicial authorities was the most challenging one so far.”*

Finally, we talked about the peculiarities and difficulties of the translation profession and I was given some really good and useful advice. He mentioned some literary and philosophical figures, whom he considers outstanding and inspiring at the same time, like Thomas Mann, Goethe, Brecht, Imre Kertész etc. He revealed some of his translating habits like he doesn’t use online vocabularies, except DUDEN, neither computer aided tools. The tasks of translators pointed out by him are: continuously developing their language skills, widening their perspective and striving for accuracy. Being familiar with literary language is not enough, translators must know the spoken, everyday language, should travel around the world, absorb cultures, meet as many people as possible and speak with them.

“*Speaking of translation, bear in mind that being proficient both in the target and source languages is compulsory. Professional translators and interpreters are equipped with a large set of idiomatic expressions, phrases and jargon and are able to use these properly within a short period of time. Sometimes, I wonder what translation is. Is it word-for-word language mediation or is it about giving the exact meaning back? One thing is for sure, the product of the translation and interpreting service cannot be perfect, however, we need to try our best to reduce the possibility of mistakes.”*

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