

## CONTEXT FOR DESIGNING A MA PROGRAMME IN NORWEGIAN LITERARY AND NON-LITERARY TRANSLATIONS AT BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

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**ABSTRACT.** *Context for Designing a MA programme in Norwegian Literary and Non-Literary Translations at Babeș-Bolyai University.* This study aims to explore the degree of motivation of current BA students and alumni as concerns their enrolment for a pilot MA-programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations at Babeș-Bolyai University (BBU). Details are provided regarding the context for designing such a unique master's programme and the academic perspectives, as well as job opportunities that can be envisaged. A total of 147 respondents were included in this study and selected using convenience sampling. A structured questionnaire comprising open-ended and closed questions items was formulated in Romanian and sent online to respondents via Google

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forms. The study concludes that 95.2% of the respondents would be interested in enrolling for this pilot MA programme Norwegian literary and non-literary translations and thus, further consolidate their skills in Norwegian acquired during the BA programme in Norwegian language and literature.

**Keywords:** *Norwegian language, master's programme, literary and non-literary translations, graduate education, Babeș-Bolyai University.*

**REZUMAT:** *Contextul dezvoltării unui program masteral în domeniul traducerilor ficționale și non-ficționale, în limba norvegiană, la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai.* Acest studiu își propune să exploreze gradul de motivație al actualilor studenți și al absolvenților specializării *Limbă și literatură norvegiană* în ceea ce privește interesul pentru înscrierea acestora la un program pilot de master în domeniul traducerilor ficționale și nonficționale la Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai (UBB). Sunt oferite detalii cu privire la contextul proiectării unui astfel de program masteral și al perspectivelor academice, precum și al oportunităților de muncă ce pot fi avute în vedere. Un total de 147 de respondenți au fost incluși în acest studiu și au fost selectați utilizând eșantionarea de comoditate. Un chestionar structurat cuprinzând itemi cu întrebări deschise și închise a fost formulat în limba română și trimis online către respondenți prin intermediul aplicației formulare Google. Studiul concluzionează faptul că 95,2% dintre respondenți ar fi interesați să se înscrie la acest program masteral desfășurat în limba norvegiană în domeniul traducerilor ficționale și nonficționale. Acest demers va susține consolidarea competențelor lingvistice în limba norvegiană dobândite în timpul programului de licență – Limbă și literatura norvegiană.

**Cuvinte cheie:** *limba norvegiană, program masterat, traduceri ficționale, traduceri nonficționale, învățământ superior, Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai.*

## Introduction

A primary pillar of the Bologna Declaration (1999) incorporated within the Romanian educational system referred to the reform according to which a complete study programme at university level would comprise three years of bachelor studies, followed by two years of master studies, and concluding with three years of doctoral studies. The undergraduate Norwegian language and literature study programme established at BBU in 1991 is not followed by a master's programme. Still, BA graduates have the opportunity to enrol for PhD studies in Norwegian. Therefore, this paper intends to close this missing link, discuss the context of a demand analysis, and highlight the interest of both

current and former students as regards their enrolment for a MA programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations.

The field of literary translations from Norwegian into Romanian has flourished and much of this development is grounded in the establishment of the BA programme in Norwegian language and literature. According to a survey that aimed to identify the number of translations of Norwegian literature into Romanian that were issued in the last 25 years (Golban, forthcoming), it is indicated that over 173<sup>7</sup> titles have been published. Out of this number, 42 volumes (Golban, forthcoming), were translated directly from Norwegian by alumni of the Norwegian language and literature BA programme. Five additional translations from Norwegian are also connected to the founder of the Norwegian programme.

As a direct consequence of the growing demand of literary translations from Norwegian and with the intent to connect various knowledge domains, we have explored the potential that such a master specialization would bring in order to provide graduate education to a growing number of graduate students that reached a peak of 355 enrolled students in the academic year 2018-2019 (Tomescu Baciu et al., 2019).<sup>8</sup>

As in other similar studies conducted in Romania with the purpose to investigate pilot programmes in higher education (Grindei et al. 2013; VasIU et al. 2012), this paper highlights the opinions of BA students and alumni as regards their motivation to enrol for an independent MA programme fully conducted in Norwegian.

### **Brief history of Norwegian studies at Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania**

The undergraduate Norwegian language and literature study programme was established at BBU in 1991. With the opening up of the country after the fall of the Berlin wall, BBU responded positively to an initiative to create this undergraduate programme, one year after an optional Norwegian language course enjoyed great success among the students of the university. At the moment, this programme (Norwegian major and minor) is the only one of its kind accredited in Romania, and thus it attracts students from all over the country, with about up to 300 students in Norwegian language and literature benefitting also from a Nordic Studies Library, established in 1997 with the support of Nordic embassies in Romania.

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<sup>7</sup> These volumes were translated either directly from Norwegian, or through English, French and German.

<sup>8</sup> Graduates can also become sworn interpreters and translators. Candidates need to pass an official examination in various domains covering juridical sciences, literature, economics, medicine or pharmacology etc.

Supported by the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Norwegian Ambassadors in Bucharest, and important academic and cultural institutions in Norway,<sup>9</sup> the Norwegian language and literature Bachelor's programme in Cluj-Napoca gained visibility in the national and international academic environment, by organizing international workshops, publishing joint volumes, offering doctorates in co-tutoring, and by collaborating with Norwegian universities, through mobility programmes for students and professors (funded by EEA or Erasmus-grants) or by cooperating mainly with NORLA, with the international book fair in Cluj, with the Gaudeamus book fair, with several publishing houses, and even business enterprises.

A complete master's programme in Norwegian will link the two study levels already existing at BBU: the undergraduate – Norwegian language and literature specialization major and minor – and the doctoral programme that has been operating successfully since 2010. Published or finalized PhD theses on, for example, Lars Saabye Christensen, Jon Fosse, Jan Erik Vold, Karl Ove Knausgård, Bjørn Andreas Bull-Hansen and Siri Pettersen or on the phenomenon of the reception of Norwegian classics in Romanian literature, such as Knut Hamsun, represent some of them.

Literary translation competences were developed through three specific courses at the undergraduate level and at MA level by providing an optional module, within the MA programmes offered at the Faculty of Letters, in *Norwegian language, culture and literature*. Literary translation workshops in close cooperation and with the support of NORLA were organized for former and current students, contributing to the increase of the participants' interest for translations from Norwegian literature into Romanian. One assumed reason for the interest in literary translations is also the participants' opportunity to discuss their own translations with the writers attending the workshops and the presentations given by representatives from NORLA on the supporting translation programmes offered by the agency. The writers participating in the two workshops were later published in a Nordic collection of a publishing house in Cluj-Napoca.

Therefore, the existence of the only Bachelor's and doctoral programme in Romania comes in the support of creating a master's programme in Norwegian as a link between undergraduate and doctoral studies in Norwegian. It would also further strengthen the prestige of the Norwegian programme at BBU nationally, as students can choose to continue their studies in Romania, since over 64 % of 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students prefer to remain in Romania (Tomescu Baciu et.al., 2019: 264).

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<sup>9</sup> The Norwegian Agency for International Cooperation and Quality Enhancement in Higher Education (DIKU), the Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA), the Centre of Norwegian language teaching (SNU), the Centre for Ibsen studies (University of Oslo)

All these considerations led us to question and analyse the interest of BA students and alumni as concerns their enrolment for a complete, full time Master's programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translation.

### **Demand analysis**

The Bologna Declaration (1999) comprised various educational reforms intended to make higher education more compatible to the labour market, as well as to provide a standard for educational opportunities to students across Europe. In order to account for social and economic demands in the context of globalization, there has been observed a growing interest towards enrolling for higher education programmes (Welde, 2003), and in particular in the field of liberal arts and science education (Van Damme, 2016). In fact, the number of tertiary students worldwide doubled in size in just 20 years (Welde 2003), and, even after the financial crisis from 2008, a “growing demand for education, especially in vocational education and training and in tertiary education” (Van Damme & K. Kärkkäinen, 2011: 7) could be observed. In this line of thought, higher education can be perceived as a “tool for development” (Knight, 2007), and for creating opportunities to respond to the current demands and challenges of the labour market.

As indicated above, there is a constant need to improve and diversify opportunities for students enrolled for higher education programmes. Therefore, the missing link between BA and PhD studies in Norwegian at BBU needs to be accounted for and supplemented with a master's programme in Norwegian. Hence, this programme would offer alumni opportunities to engage in graduate education in Norwegian. To support this demand analysis, a study conducted on former alumni students of the Norwegian language and literature programme at BBU (Tomescu Baciu et al., forthcoming) concluded that 40% out of 123 respondents, chose to continue their graduate education in the field of humanities at the Faculty of Letters.

In addition, this master's programme could help students succeed in the labour market as it would offer a wide range of job opportunities such as: literary translator, authorized translator, employment in various cultural centres, research centres, literary publishing companies, multinational companies, etc.

Equally important is the fact that no other Master's programme in Norwegian is offered in Romania. A thorough review of MA programmes<sup>10</sup> in the field of translation studies or related to translations concluded that currently, in Romania, eleven universities offer sixteen master's programmes. Most of them are delivered in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese,

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education and Research, <https://www.edu.ro/institutii-invatamanant-superior>. Retrieved on June 15, 2020.

Catalan or Russian. Three of these universities are private universities, out of which two offer MA programmes in translation, in Hungarian. Considering the fact that Norwegian is taught at BA level only in Cluj-Napoca, such a master's programme is both required and necessary in order to cover the missing link in students' studies of Norwegian. Furthermore, in order to pursue a PhD in Norwegian language and literature, it is beneficial to earn a master's degree in the very same discipline, in order to have continuity in the study and research process.

### **Significance of the study**

The results of this research paper are significant as they would pave the way for the accreditation process of a MA programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations. In addition, the findings of this study indicate a very high percentage (95.2%) of respondents who would be interested to continue their master studies in Norwegian. Thus, given the high interest of students to enrol for such a master's programme, and that the number of students at BA level has steadily increased, the intake of students per year would not constitute an issue.

### **Research methodology**

This research aims to investigate the interest of both current Bachelor's students studying Norwegian (major or minor), and of alumni students as regards their motivation to continue their academic development by enrolling for a MA programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations. A survey research was conducted by using a questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting data. The questionnaire was validated in a previous research conducted by Associate Professor Elena Platon at BBU for another pilot master's programme (The Department of Language, Culture and Romanian Civilization). Still, two items have been adapted. The questionnaire comprised eight closed questions (multiple choice, check boxes or Likert scale) and two open questions. It was formulated in Romanian and sent to respondents via Google forms.

### **Participants**

A total of 147 respondents were included in this study and selected using convenience sampling. A link with an online questionnaire was sent not individually, but via faculty groups to both current students and alumni. Therefore, it was not possible to indicate a response rate as there was no control over how many students accessed the questionnaire, but did not want to submit it. The time limit for collecting the data was set for one week, in May 2020.

### Data analysis

The closed questions with pre-coded answers (multiple choice, checkboxes, Likert scale) were analysed in a quantitative manner using the functions provided by Google forms. The open-ended questions were investigated by using a coding process that identified within respondents' answers several clusters that developed into concepts.

### Analysis of results

The first three items in the questionnaire are linked to the profile of the respondents. For the first item ("*When will/did you graduate the BA in Norwegian language and literature?*"), the data analysis yielded 142 valid answers. The breakdown of respondents in terms of year of study/graduation rendered that 31% are 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, 22.5 % are 2<sup>nd</sup> year students, 19.7% are 1<sup>st</sup> year students and with lower percentage rates alumni (9.9% respondents who graduated in 2019, 7.7% respondents who graduated in 2018, and the remaining part those who graduated in 2017, 2016 and 2014).

As regards the second item that targeted professional status, more than two thirds of the respondents (~73%) answered that they are currently students, while almost a quarter of them (~22%) are employed or self-employed at the time when the questionnaire was conducted. In addition, the results indicate that 8% of the respondents are continuing their education after graduating the BA programme in Norwegian at BBU. Only 4% of the respondents answered that they are not students, nor self-employed or continuing their studies.

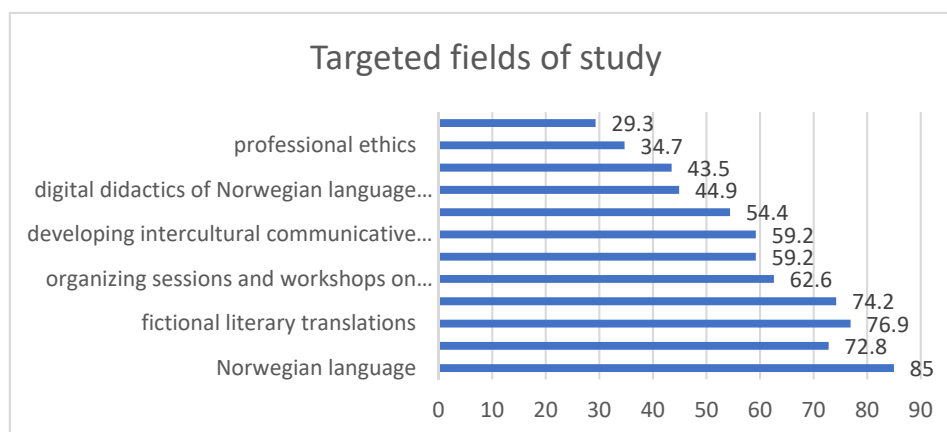
The total response percentage exceeds 100% for this particular item because the question used checkboxes to collect answers. Thus, the total number of answer choices selected for a question was greater than the number of respondents who answered. The rationale in doing so consisted in having a broader understanding of the options that current students and alumni have in terms of job and study opportunities. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of the respondents were currently enrolled students (107) could constitute an argument for the overwhelming interest in continuing their education by pursuing a master's programme in Norwegian.

The third item ("*Did you graduate from a master's programme?*") indicates that 96% of the respondents have not completed a master's programme, as compared to six of them who already hold a Master's degree. The fourth item ("*Would you be interested in pursuing a MA programme in Norwegian fictional and non-fictional literary translations?*") intended to investigate their interest in enrolling for a MA in Norwegian fictional and non-fictional literary translations. A percentage of 95,2% of the respondents provided a positive answer. By relating the third item to the fourth item, it renders almost the same high

percentages and this allows us to conclude that the 95.2% students who have not completed a master programme are willing (96%) and open for such a continuation of the BA studies.

Item number five (“*Do you consider that such a MA programme would be beneficial to your professional needs?*”) focused on the relevance of a master’s programme in Norwegian with regard to respondents’ careers and job opportunities. The answers revealed that the overwhelming majority (90%) consider the MA programme in Norwegian as important for their professional needs, out of whom 52% state that the programme is highly important, while 39% rate it as important. Nearly 7% declare themselves neutral on the matter, while only 3 of 147 respondents see the MA programme as less important for their professional needs.

Respondents were asked to rank their preferences as regards the disciplines of study that might be integrated in the master programme (“*What disciplines would you like to study especially within this MA programme?*”). The total response percentage exceeds 100% for this particular item because the question used checkboxes to collect answers. Findings indicate that the top five disciplines/academic skills preferred by the respondents target: studying the Norwegian language (85%), engage in fictional literary translations (76.9%), collaboration with publishing houses and cultural entities from Romania and from Norway which promote literary translations (74.2%), engage in non-fictional literary translations (72.8%), and organizing sessions and workshops on literary translations in collaboration with publishing houses (62.6%). Fig. no. 2 below indicates other areas of interest that respondents considered to be relevant in the MA programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations.



**Fig. 2.** Areas of interest in the master’s programme in Norwegian



As concerns their interest in enrolling for this MA programme in case there are offered only places with tuition fees, a considerable number of respondents (i.e. 81% comprising 32.7% highly interested and 48.3% interested) provided a positive answer.

In order to ascertain the demand analysis for such a master's programme in Norwegian, the next item in the questionnaire inquired respondents about the availability of a similar study programme. In total, 97.3% answered that they are not familiar with any other similar study programme in graduate education. With regard to the number of students that might enrol for such a programme, respondents were requested to indicate how many other acquaintances they know to be interested in such programme. Organized as a multiple-choice item with four pre-defined options, respondents conceded that 29.9% of them know one or two more persons, 29.9% of them are aware of three to five more persons who are interested, 35.5% of them have knowledge of more than five persons, while 4.8% do not know anyone who would be interested.

The last item consisted of an open-ended question that required from respondents different suggestions regarding piloting such a master's programme. It was not compulsory to submit an answer. Therefore, this item rendered only 43 answers that were grouped according to various recurring patterns that were interrelated. In this regard, we coded the answers into a couple of clusters: disciplines (language, fictional and non-fictional literary translations), academic skills (digital skills and text editing, problem solving) national and international cooperation (mobilities, institutional collaboration), employment (labour market, lifelong learning education), academic relevance (continuing education, unicity of the programme, prestige at national level). Respondents' answers covered the following clusters: a number of 61 suggestions regarding the disciplines that should be taught and incorporated (16 references to language learning, 11 to literature, 16 to practical teaching activities, 9 to fictional translation and 9 to non-fictional translations); a total of 11 references targeted digital skills and text editing (4 references) and developing problem-solving skills (7 references); a number of 13 references referred to encouraging institutional collaboration (both national and international), and opportunities for exchange mobility (3 references); 2 references were provided regarding employment opportunities in relation to the lifelong learning education that is provided during this master's programme; as regards academic relevance, 10 references regarded the opportunity of this pilot MA programme to support continuing education, 4 references focused on the unicity of the programme, while 6 references targeted the national prestige of the BA programme in Norwegian language and literature.

## Discussion

The interpretation of the findings yielded that there is a real interest from the respondents – the majority of whom are students enrolled in the BA programme Norwegian language and literature – to pursue a MA programme in Norwegian fictional and non-fictional literary translations in order to have continuity in their chosen field of study. Moreover, this interest is fuelled by the belief that such a master’s programme would be beneficial to their future careers, and one can notice high percentages in both cases, namely 95.2% are interested in a MA programme in Norwegian, while more than 90% consider it as useful in their professional life. The answers provided by the respondents show that they are interested in further studying the Norwegian language, as this is the discipline that 85% would choose to study.

At the moment, BA graduates of the Norwegian language and literature specialization are offered an optional course conducted in Norwegian (*Norwegian language, culture and literature*), as a part of the available MA programmes at the Faculty of Letters. Even if there is no bridge between BA and PhD studies in Norwegian, some alumni students have continued their path in the academia field by enrolling in a PhD programme in Norwegian available at the Doctoral School of Linguistics and Literary Studies at the Faculty of Letters since 2010. Thus, nine alumni have been granted a PhD in Norwegian language and literature or are currently PhD students. Thus, seeking for accreditation of a MA programme in literary and non-literary translations constitutes a new terrain that would comprise both fundamental and specialized knowledge in Norwegian language, literature and the field of translations.

As regards respondents’ career perspectives and professional needs, it is useful to connect the answers to two other studies conducted by the same team at the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature at BBU. The first study, published in 2019, analysed the factors leading to the increase in the numbers of students pursuing a BA programme in Norwegian language and literature. It revealed that “over 80% of the respondents seem to be aware that they want to use Norwegian in a work-related context and that Norwegian gives them better perspectives in the labour market.”, the same opinion being reinforced by the answers to other items, as they showed that “about 80% of the students are aware that Norwegian, as a niche language, gives them the chance to get a better paid job” (p. 263). Furthermore, another analysis was conducted in 2020 to evaluate the alumni perceptions of their BA programme in Norwegian at BBU (Sanda Tomescu Baciu et al., *forthcoming*). The answers provided by 123 alumni have highlighted their choice to study Norwegian in the section dedicated to motivation, since their answers to item 4 and 7 of this

section reveal that 56,9% of them chose Norwegian as they wanted a better paid job, and 83% considered that Norwegian provided better career perspectives in a global world. In this line, it is relevant to point out the fact that the graduates who participated in the study regarding alumni perceptions of their BA programme in Norwegian at BBU (Sanda Tomescu Baciu et al., *forthcoming*) work mainly in education and research (30 references), IT (15 references), whilst translation and proofreading is the third popular field (11 references). This is a significant aspect that comes to support the necessity of a master's programme in translations for the students who graduate the BA programme in Norwegian at the Faculty of Letters of BBU.

In this context, the practical courses that will be included in the Norwegian Master's programme are very important and continue the academic path of our students. The MA students will have a broader knowledge of specific terminologies and a certain discipline and ethic related to work experience. They will be able to apply methods and tools that they acquired proficiency in during the BA studies, thus becoming better at their jobs. In the open question from our survey, we identified 16 references related to the students' wishes to practice the language both in written form and orally.

Literature is an important part of the MA studies and continues the academic path the students have chosen. That is why 28 references were related to interest in literature, fictional or non-fictional translations, in favour of cooperation with publishing houses and literary agencies, underlying the importance of such a master's programme. The students mentioned that they prefer a well-structured traineeship opportunity at a publishing house or an internship which can allow them to gain experience in the field<sup>11</sup>. Below is indicated a verbatim response:

“The collaboration with publishing houses seems to me absolutely essential to round the student's confidence in putting into practice what he assimilates on a theoretical level. For me, practice refers directly to the profession and the possibilities on the labour market”.

A good practice example to be followed is the experience of organizing literary translation workshops with Norwegian writers with the support of NORLA. These workshops resulted in published translations of the respective authors by our alumni.

In teaching foreign languages, we can use a large variety of exercises. Interactive lessons, dialogue, role-playing, group discussions or project presentations are just a few examples. The students will be given a wider perspective on that

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<sup>11</sup> Students have been involved in and benefitted from traineeships during the BA programme.

it means to be a translator, where the requirement of solid language knowledge is not sufficient, but must be completed by cultural and social perspectives. A total of 16 students have mentioned their interest in continuing the studies with linguistic based courses which is a *sine qua non* for this kind of MA programme. A verbatim response from an open-question is included below:

“I believe that it will be beneficial for any student who has studied Norwegian for three years to be able to continue his master's studies. It is important to create a programme that will develop the knowledge acquired during the university years [...]. Such a programme should be based more on Norwegian grammar as well as translations because these categories are useful for anyone and help you in the social and professional environment”.

References to digital competences (4) related to humanities are salient in today's globalized context and the current labour market. The creation of new job profiles, such as cross-language data consultant, speech analyst or language technician have made it clear that students' capacity to develop new competences and implement the knowledge gained during the BA or MA studies is highly valued and very useful.

### **Limitations**

This research has some limitations. Firstly, we consider the objectivity of the responses provided by the participants. Mathers, Fox & Hunn (2009) conclude that the respondents might agree with the statements only to please the researcher. Secondly, as regards the analysis on the open-questions, we need to have in mind that self-reported data can carry risks of miscommunication or confusion (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2009).

### **Conclusions**

The study investigated the degree of interest of graduate students in enrolling for a MA programme in Norwegian literary and non-literary translations. The results verify the value of our intention to build a bridge between the BA and the PhD programmes in Norwegian language and literature at BBU which have been the only existing one in Romania until now. Furthermore, the results also verify the respondents' interest in a master's programme in Norwegian in the first place, with a focus on fictional and non-fictional translations.

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