

VI International Forum on Teacher Education

## Professional Preferences of Translators/Interpreters-to-be: Survey Results

Elena Yu. Makeeva\* (a), Marina A. Kulinich (b), Ekaterina V. Savitskaya (c)

(a), (b), (c) Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education, Samara, (Russia),  
helenmckey2205@gmail.com

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### Abstract

In the former Soviet Union translators/interpreters-to-be were trained only in a few field-specific linguistic (and in a couple of military institutions. Later, in XXI, Russia signed the Bologna Declaration, Russian institutes and universities got an opportunity to choose what they teach, were allowed to provide commercial services and many introduced both short-term training courses for translators/interpreters and long-term BA / MA translator training programs as the social demand for translators increased.

This paper discusses various ways and means of translator/interpreter training both in Russia and abroad together with those practiced in Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education. The paper also presents the results of regular anonymous questionnaires among the students dealing with links between our teaching and students' views in order to facilitate both students' professional training and to make the curriculum more adaptive to the present-day situation on the job market.

The results showed that though most students' views on their future profession are rather vague, most of them are not disappointed in the profession chosen. Bachelors' and masters' attitudes and assessments, however, differ as senior students have more experience and can critically evaluate their future career perspectives. Master students value their university and practical experience more than bachelor students, they know more of the situation in the job market and are ready to face the challenges of this profession.

The authors conclude that the existing BA / MA programs need changes considering both students' and their potential employers' interests and demands.

*Keywords:* translator training, interpreter training, translation, translation studies translation practice, higher education.

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Published by Kazan federal university and peer-reviewed under responsibility of IFTE-2020 (VI International Forum on Teacher Education)

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\* Corresponding author. E-mail: helenmckey2205@gmail.com

## **Introduction**

Translator/interpreter training in the former Soviet Union was the privilege of seven higher education establishments: beside Moscow Institute of Foreign Languages (now Moscow Linguistic University where the translation program dates from 1930), there were institutes in Nizhniy Novgorod, Pyatigorsk, Irkutsk, Minsk (Belorussia), Kiev (Ukraine), Military Institute of Foreign languages. The number of students enrolled was small, competition to enter translation departments was enormous. Female students were not admitted because male graduates had military training in addition to professional training and could be sent abroad to take part in military operations. It was but natural that the output was highly qualified translators/interpreters employed in international and trade organizations.

In line with the Bologna Declaration, in 2003 the Russian Federation adopted a two-tier graduation system combining a Bachelor's degree (four years) and a postgraduate Master's degree (two years) which replaced the traditional system in early 2010s (Telegina & Schwengel, 2012). Russian institutes and universities got an opportunity to choose what they teach and introduced both short-term training courses for translators/interpreters and long-term BA / MA translator training programs as the social demand for translators increased. Nowadays translator training is to a great extent integrated into independent foreign language faculties with about 150 institutes and university in Russia train translators, both as Bachelors / Masters of Linguistics and the so-called 'Translators in the Sphere of Professional Communication'. Most of them do it on the commercial basis charging tuition fee, one of the consequences being no entrance competition which accounts for low linguistic competence of students entering this program. Naturally, these institutions (with rare exceptions) lack experience in teaching translation but labor under delusion that any person who is a qualified professor of English/German/French can provide professional training in the field of translation/interpretation. That is why it is expedient to elaborate methodological ground for this training. To name but one example, there is common misconception that subjects taught both at Foreign Languages Department and a Translation Department (General Linguistics, Lexicology, Stylistics, etc.) may and should be taught in the same way. But teacher of a foreign language and translator being two different professions, they should be trained differently both in the practical course of a foreign language and the theory of it (Sdobnikov, 2017).

Even though the SSUSSE Department of Foreign Languages now offers advanced, multidisciplinary and technological training in translation, long-term BA / MA translator training programs are a relatively new line of work. Launching the undergraduate program in Linguistics in 2011 was the starting point for translator / interpreter training (Kulinich, Savitskaya, & Makeeva, 2018). A curriculum was preliminarily drawn up, including basic theoretical and practical disciplines, as well as various types of practices, the

most important of them being “on-the-job training”. In September 2011, two groups of students began their professional training within the new four-year program “Translation and Translation Studies”. The main objective of the program was to introduce the students to the field of translation studies and cover linguistic approaches to translation. Today six generations of students have already got BA degrees in translation and the Department continues to train students in the field.

The university current program is designed to help the students explore different approaches to translation and develop an understanding of the links between theory and practice. In addition to basic linguistic disciplines, such as General Linguistics, Stylistics, Theoretical Grammar, History of the Language under Study, Translation Theory, the program also includes practice-oriented courses. The latter are divided into language and translation blocks.

The language block includes courses in Grammar and Phonetics, a practical course of verbal communication, a compulsory second foreign language course, a course in history and culture of English-speaking countries, communicative grammar and creative writing. The translation block is the core element of the entire program. It includes such courses as practical translation, interpretation and translation in the first and second foreign languages. In addition to the above-mentioned courses, the curriculum features some disciplines developed by our professors specifically for prospective translators / interpreters, among them Introduction to Intercultural Communication or IT in Linguistics. The courses focus coordinately on cultural differences, translation behaviors, different contexts where translation is practiced and on various aspects of professional translation work such as codes of ethics and up-to-date translation tools. Apart from classroom studies our students are supposed to present at least two term papers on General Linguistics and Translation Theory. They also have translation and undergraduate practices. This gives the students an opportunity to get some “on-the-job” experience and deepen their understanding of professional prospects. The program is concluded with oral and written exams and thesis presentation. The graduates are fluent speakers of at least two foreign languages, ready to organize cross-cultural communication in different spheres and exploit various types, techniques, and technologies of translation (Kulinich, Makeeva, & Savitskaya, 2019).

Having received a BA, the graduates can finish their studies and get a job, but SSUSSE offers an alternative – obtaining a MA degree within the program named “Theory and Practice of Translation in Intercultural Communication”. The program launched in 2013 provides postgraduates with an opportunity to explore recent innovations, both in terms of translation research and translation technologies.

With a focus on recent studies, students acquire a solid grounding in a wide range of theoretical disciplines and learn to apply their knowledge to a range of translation activities. The program is designed for graduates in translation, interpretation and some other specializations such as Foreign Language Teaching, Modern Languages, Economics, Computer Engineering with good knowledge of at least two foreign languages (English and German / English and French). The MA provides students with advanced knowledge in the field of Lexicology, Theoretical Grammar, Stylistics, World Culture Study, and Translation. They master modern technologies of translation, both in theory and practice, and develop skills in cross-cultural interaction. The main objective of the program is not only increasing theoretical knowledge in the field of Linguistics and Translation Theory but also enabling the post-graduates to reach an advanced level of professional training, so that they can meet the growing demands of the translator / interpreter job market.

### **Purpose and objectives of the study**

Teachers of translation are, or ought to be, always in search of what may be of some help in making students aware of the possible risks and benefits in their future jobs. Consequently, investigating links between our teaching and students' views is important in order to facilitate both students' professional training and to make the curriculum more adaptive to the present-day situation on the job market. Objectives of the study are getting answers to the following questions: What prospects the students see for themselves in the sphere of translation; How the training process relates to their professionalization; How translation competence is seen by students; What can teachers do to support the students in their career choice; Whether their current work/studies/practice meet their expectations.

### **Literature review**

Translator and interpreter training developed considerably during the last century (Pym, 2009). Pym (2014) discusses at length the long-term development and depth of translator training in Europe. The current large translation schools were created around the edges of a defeated Third Reich (some actually before that), international organizations (FIT, AIC, CIUTI) were founded in Europe and in French. About 43% of today's 500 or so university level translation schools are in Europe.

Research on translator and interpreter training has been increasing especially since the new millennium. Such a trend reflects the rapid increase of training programs both in Europe and Asia (Yan, Pan, & Wang, 2018; Pym & Torres-Simón, 2017). Though there is no shortage of papers dealing with teacher point of view on ways and means of teaching, teaching aids and assessing the results, research effort is still needed

in investigating training from the learners' perspective (as well as from the point of view of their potential employers) and some investigative work has already been done (Durban et al., 2003; Borissova, & Knyazheva, 2017; Malenova, 2018).

The last decades witnessed new areas of translation studies coming to the fore. The linguistic-oriented science of translation together with contrastive analysis of source texts and target texts gave way to theories centered around text types and text purpose, sociology of translation, new technologies that have given rise to audio-visual translation, localization and corpus-bases translation studies (Munday, 2008). To quote Jeremy Munday, the author of numerous books on translation Studies, "these studies has moved from the study of words to texts to sociocultural context to the workings, practices and 'habitus' of the translators themselves. Even the object of study, therefore, has shifted over time, from translation as primarily connected to language teaching and learning to the specific study of what happens in and around translation, translating and now translators (Munday, 2008). New courses of translation, theory of translation and translation studies are being introduced at university level all over the world. New approaches in an interdisciplinary perspective are from the literary to linguistic, from the cognitive to the cross-cultural, from the descriptive to the applied and to the psychoanalytical (Riccardi & Alessandra, 2002).

Translation Studies in Russia (and formerly in the Soviet Union) were traditionally linguistic-oriented. The titles of the books on the subject speak for themselves: Translation and linguistics (Schweizer, 1973), Theory and practice of translation (Retzker, 1974), Language and translation (Barkhudarov, 1975), Linguistic study of translation (Komissarov, 1990), to name but a few. Since 1961 to 1984 nineteen issues of papers collection Translation Notes (*Tetradi perevodchica*, 1963-1989) edited by the scholars mentioned above had been acquainting translator/interpreter community in this country with new dictionaries, new translations of poetry and prose from various languages into Russian and the challenges of translating Russian fiction into European languages.

The turn of the century witnessed appearance of two periodicals – "The World of Translation" and "Bridges" (Translators and Interpreters Journal). The philosophy of the latter periodical is reflected in the title – to build bridges between translation theory and practice, between translators/interpreters and clients, between various translation communities and concepts, between translator/interpreter training and real-life situations, between translation heritage and up-to-date issues. Rubrics of this journal include interviews with well-known professionals, history of translation, translating culture, hands-on experience of translators/interpreters. The latter is especially helpful for training would-be professionals (Visson, 2008; Orel, 2010; Melnikova, 2011; Buzadzhi, 2011; Sdobnikov, 2016). Of special interest in this field is the

book (Petrova, 2018) comprising articles on various issues presenting the author's thoughts on what and how students are to be trained for them to develop into professional translators and what prevents it.

There are also ongoing issues of Problems of Translation Theory, Practice and Methods of Teaching, Series "Language. Culture. Communication". Translator trainers can find here practical tips on developing student digital competence (Bozhankova, 2015), on using internet-resources (Kolotilkin, 2011), on preliminary translation analysis (Zavialov, 2005) and many others.

However, these contributions to translation/interpreter training focus mainly on the trainer point of view. We tried to approach the problem from another angle – that is, research into trainee's views on how they see some aspects of their future profession.

### **Methodology**

Experimental work has been carried out in Samara State University of Social Sciences and Education, the Faculty of Foreign Languages, for three years.

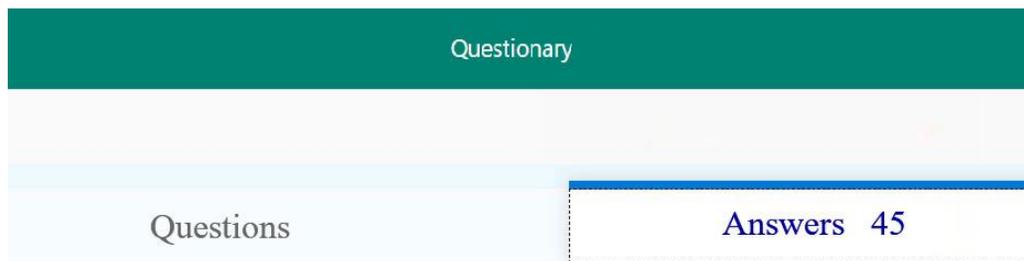
To analyze professional preferences of translators/interpreters-to-be the researchers offered an online anonymous questionnaire (in English) designed in Microsoft Forms (formerly Office Forms) which is an online survey creator, part of Office 365 officially used by SSUSSE. Microsoft Forms allows educators to easily create surveys and quizzes with automatic marking and graphing. The authors created two similar 21-question questionnaires / surveys for bachelor and master students to complete. This approach made it possible to compare bachelor and master students' preferences, assess changes and track trends in their attitudes. Some questions of the survey dealt with translation techniques and methods as well as with 'interpretation ethics' and models of interpreter behavior, so we do not take account of students' answers to these questions.

At the moment, 80 students responded and answered the questions of the survey. Among them there are 35 master students which is the total number of master graduates in the last three years and 45 out of 52 bachelor students. We further analyze and compare these student answers inserting some graphical representations and diagrams for descriptive reasons.

### **Results**

The first question in the survey was about the way the students got to know about the profession of translator/interpreter. The vast majority named the media as the main source of information about their career choice. Only a small percentage of respondents referred to family and friends.

The second question was about the benefits of being a translator/interpreter. The respondents could choose several options. The bachelor students' preferences were rather diverse. All the options were chosen by at least 45% of the students. This shows that the BA students are not quite sure what to expect from their future occupation. Nevertheless, almost all the students see communication as a positive side of their future profession, as 80% of them marked "a chance to meet interesting people", which makes this option the most popular (see Fig. 1).



2. What specifically do you like about being a translator / interpreter?

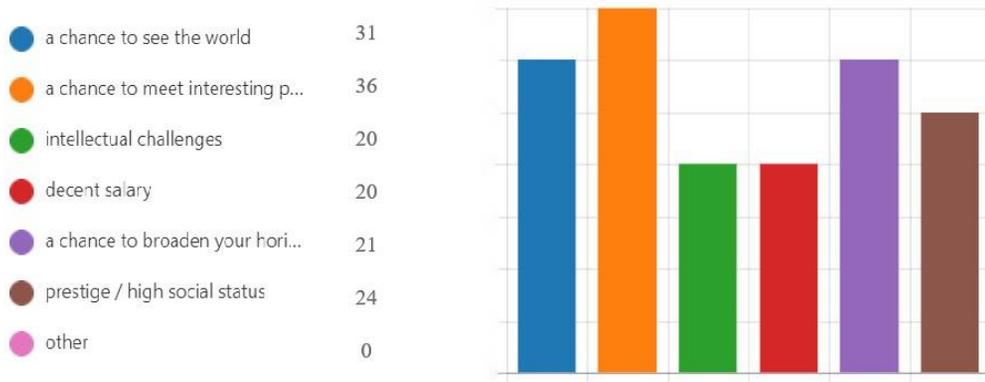
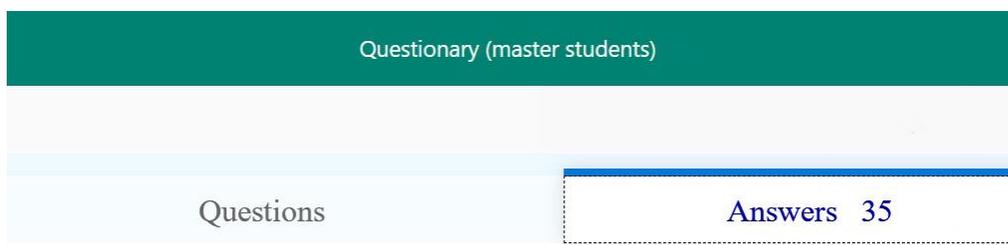


Figure 1. Bachelor Students' Preferences

Master students were more precise in their choices (see Fig. 2). "A chance to see the world", "a chance to meet interesting people" and "intellectual challenges" were named advantageous by 57% of the respondents. 74% of them opt for "a chance to broaden your horizons". This drives us to the conclusion that intercultural communication and self-development, which present an integral part of the profession, are MA students' priority. The answers to the second question also reveal a curious detail. None of the master students mentioned decent salary as a possible benefit, while 45% of bachelors had high expectations on this account. This discrepancy can be explained by the fact that many MA students had a chance to

scrutinize the job market and thus have a clear idea of salary rates in the field, whereas the BA students base their judgment mostly on their own image of the future profession.



2. What specifically do you like about being a translator / interpreter?

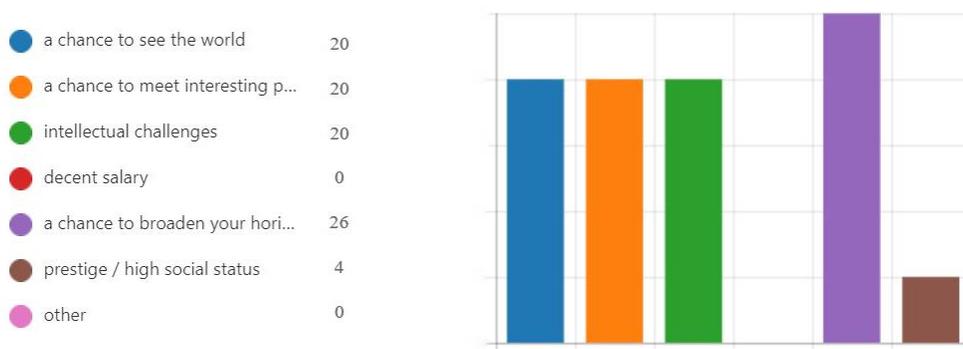


Figure 2. Master Students' Preferences

Question three of the survey was to show which professional features the students find important for translators/interpreters (see Fig. 3). Both the undergraduates and the postgraduates chose various features, such as erudition, open-mindedness, stress resistance. On the one hand, this demonstrates their willingness to accept diverse professional challenges; on the other hand, it points to their vague idea of the actual work of a translator/interpreter. However, the fact that 77% of the BA students and 85% of the masters name “high language proficiency” among the features characterizing a qualified translator indicates that all the students are conscious of importance and benefits of mastering a foreign language as well as their native one.

## 3. Name the features characterizing a professional qualified translator / interpreter.

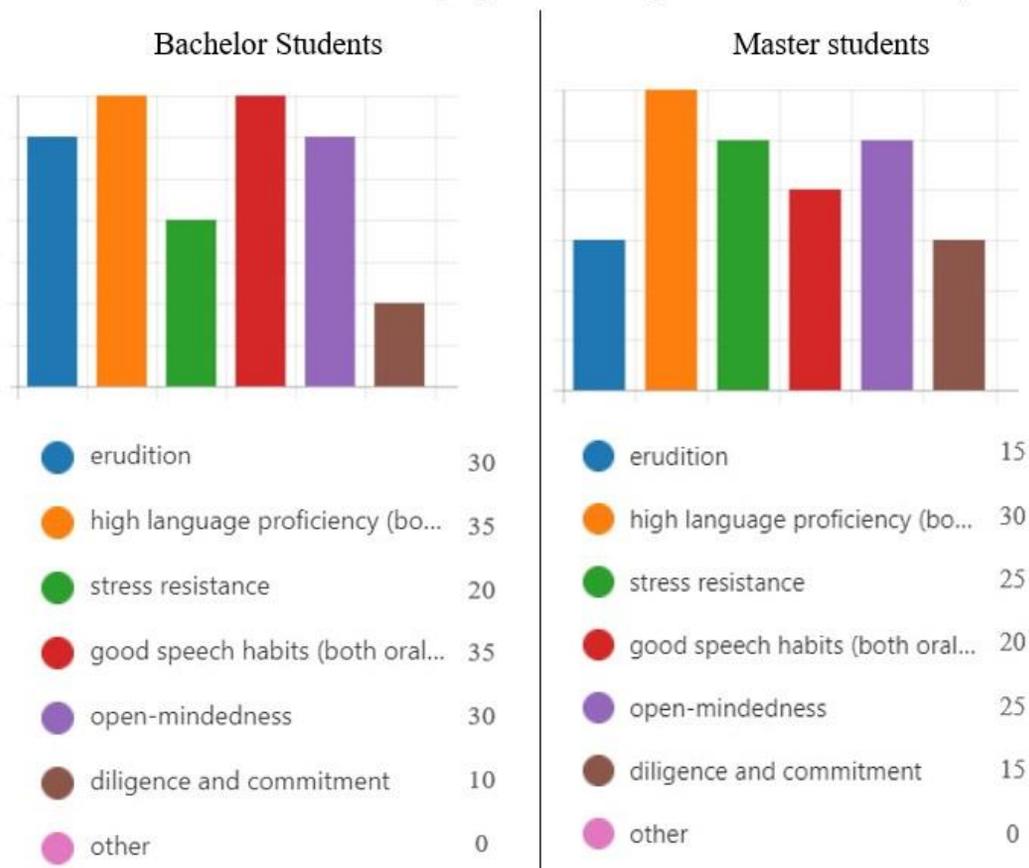


Figure 3. Translator / interpreter professional qualities as seen by bachelor vs. master students

The answers to the fourth question seem much alike (see Fig. 4). Most of both BA and MA students find “native-foreign” way of translation more demanding. That is understandable, “foreign-native” way of translation is considered by the students to be facile as the target language is their mother tongue. However, as practice shows, this is a misconception. Today native language proficiency of the best part of the students leaves much to be desired. So, both ways of translation might prove to be a hitch. Another result worth mentioning here is the discrepancy between the number of MA and BA students for whom the way of translation “makes no difference”. 40% of the BA respondents and only 25% of the masters chose this option. This illustrates the different level of “on-the-job” experience, which is even better displayed by the answers to question nine (see Fig. 5).

## 4. Which way of translation is easier for you?

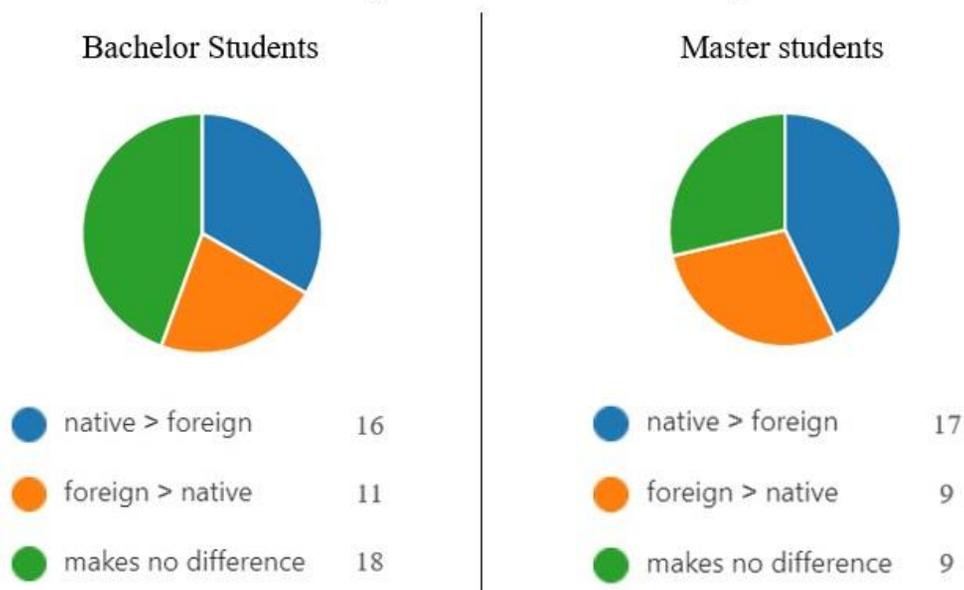


Figure 4. Translation abilities assessment as seen by bachelor vs. master students

In Question 5 student were asked what type of translation seemed the most challenging (in their estimation). Bachelor students' answers proved that different students experienced difficulties with different types of translation. It means that these students do not feel sure when they leave their classroom and work with any but educational texts. The majority of master students (almost 60%) marked technical translation as the most challenging which seems just natural for humanities degree students with neither real life experiences no technical background knowledge of any kind.

The results could be expected: all the MA students have some "on-the-job" experience, they got it either during their university years (translation practice is a part of the BA curriculum) or simply working in this capacity. Thirty-one respondents out of thirty-five (89%) had a chance to work with foreigners in Russia, and four students acted as business interpreters. As for BA students, 55% of them have no working experience at all, 13% interpreted for Russians abroad, evidently while travelling, and 13% worked as interpreters for foreign tourists. Such situation is understandable; obtaining a Master's degree is a step in pursuing a career which one has already begun building, so experience is crucial.

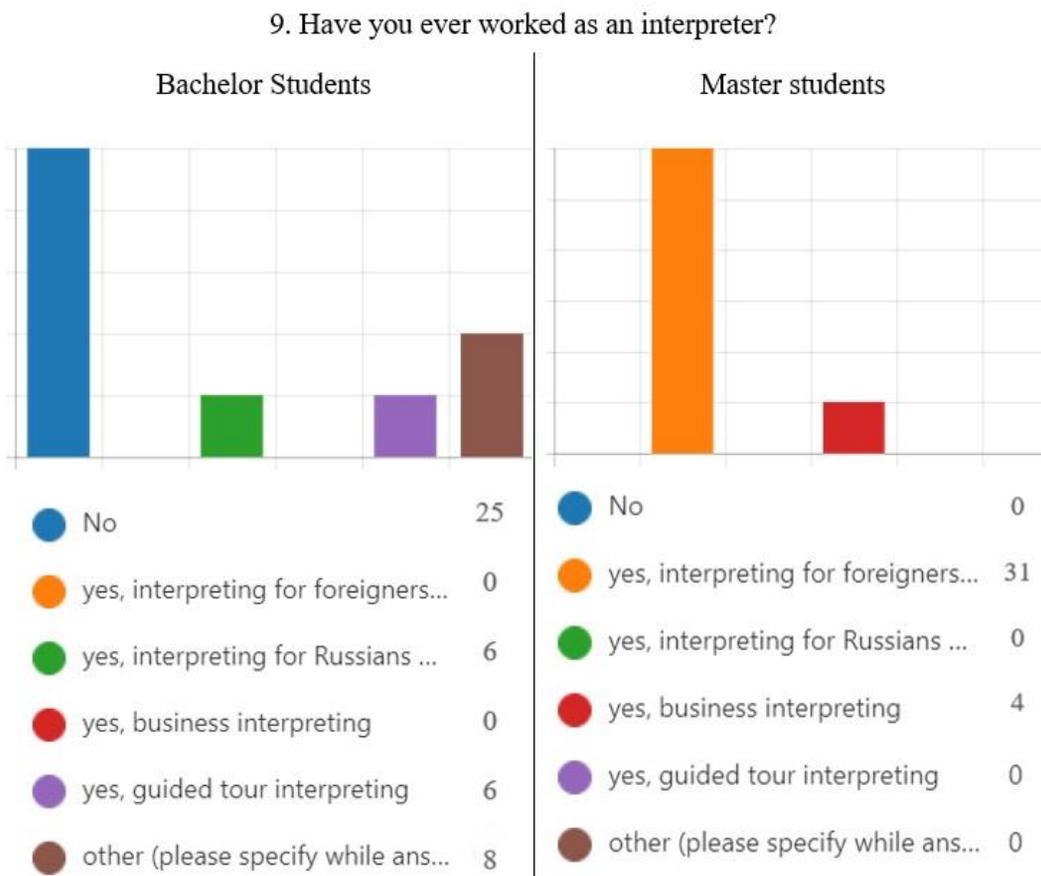


Figure 5. Students' practical experience

Students' career plans have always been important for the teaching staff of the Department. So, question eleven of the survey presents an interesting picture of the students' possible choices (see Fig. 6). 49% of the BA students are going to be translators and only 3% intend to work as interpreters. Oral expression is more challenging to transfer into another language; interpretation demands not only a high level of language proficiency but also stress-resistance, quick-wittedness, cultural awareness. Contrary to expectations 38% of bachelors wish to change their domain and find a job not connected with foreign languages. The number is impressive, though it may be attributed to lack of experience.

The MA students as the chart illustrates show similar results (see Fig. 6). 48% of the respondents plan to translate either in business or in legal sphere; none of them see interpretation as a career perspective; 26% would prefer to teach rather than translate; 26% are looking for another field of activity. The results demonstrate that not all the students have made their minds about the future regardless of their potential degree.

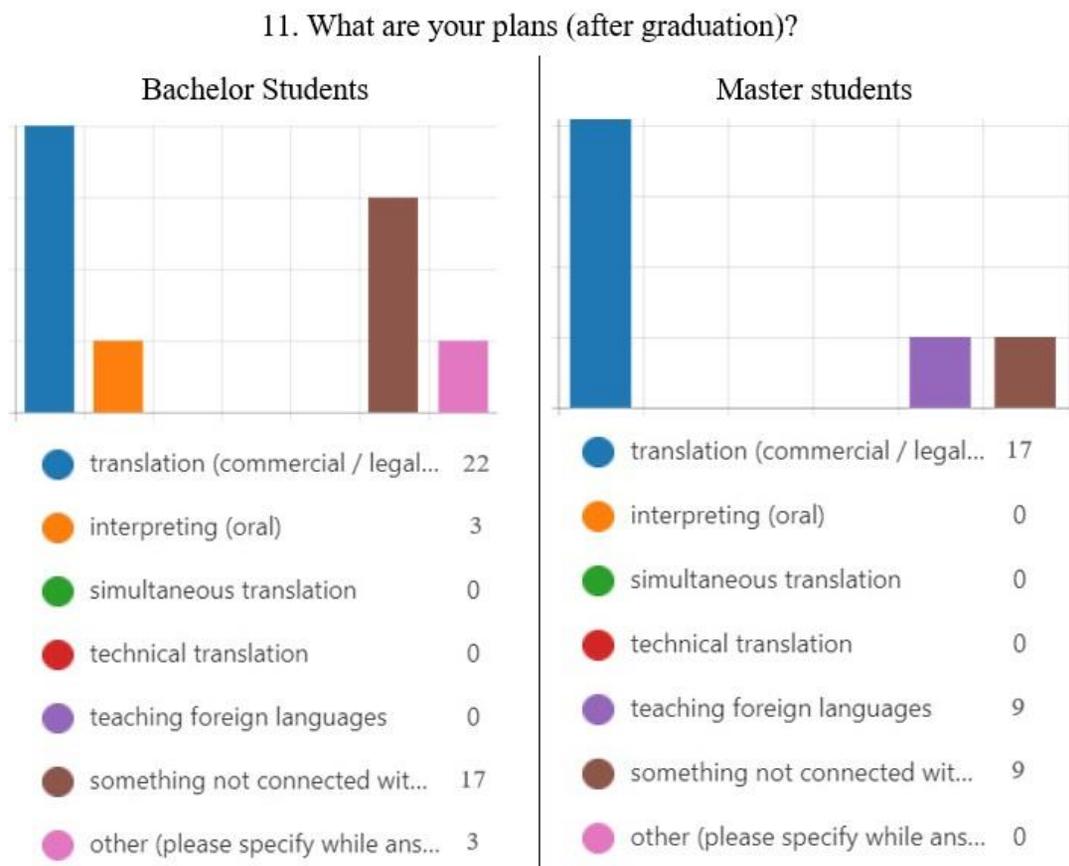


Figure 6. Students' career plans

Some questions of the survey (that is, Questions 15-19) focused on students' 'on-the-job training' experience or the so-called 'translation practice' which is now an essential part of both bachelors' and masters' curriculum. In SSUSSE, during their 'on-the-job training' younger students mostly translate practically oriented texts in the university translation laboratories and senior translators/interpreters-to-be are allotted to either translation agencies and companies (those working legally and thus not very numerous) or university international offices where students act as translators/interpreters and carry out all the tasks entrusted to them.

The similar BA and MA results speak for themselves (see Fig. 7). Only a third of the students changed their minds after 'on-the-job training'. It means that despite all the possible challenges of the profession the majority of potential translators/interpreters are ready to pursue their goals. Practice plays a vital role in the forming of a future professional for many reasons, not least of them a chance to reconsider one's career choice.

16. Have you changed your mind about the profession of a translator / interpreter after your 'on-the-job training'?

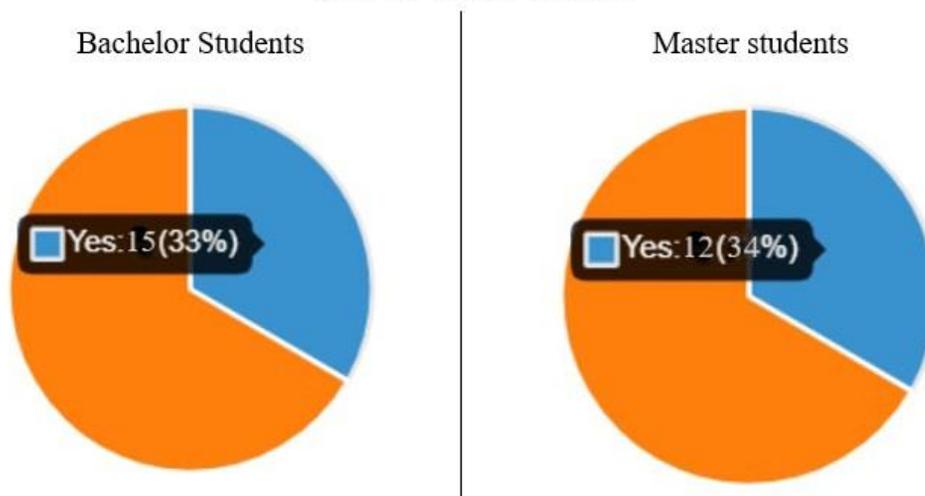


Figure 7. "On-the-job" training and its influence on students' career plans

Most respondents (82% of bachelor and 100% of master students) agree that 'on-the-job training' is vitally important and would undoubtedly be helpful in their forthcoming work. At the same time, the respondents give it a score of 6.11 (bachelor students) / 7,67 (master students) out of 10 which means there is much to improve here finding new ways of organizing this work as well as signing agreements with other organizations ready to train translators/interpreters-to-be.

As students' feedback is an integral part of modern education, teaching staff of the Department has always paid attention to the students' opinion on the whole program. However, as it is evident from Figure 8, the students are not yet ready to draw their educational route. 73% of bachelors and 77% of masters are not sure whether they would like to modify their curriculum in any way (see Fig. 8). It is no surprise that some of the disciplines might seem boring or irrelevant to the students. And even in that case only 26% of the BA and 11% of the MA respondents are positive about possible changes in the program.

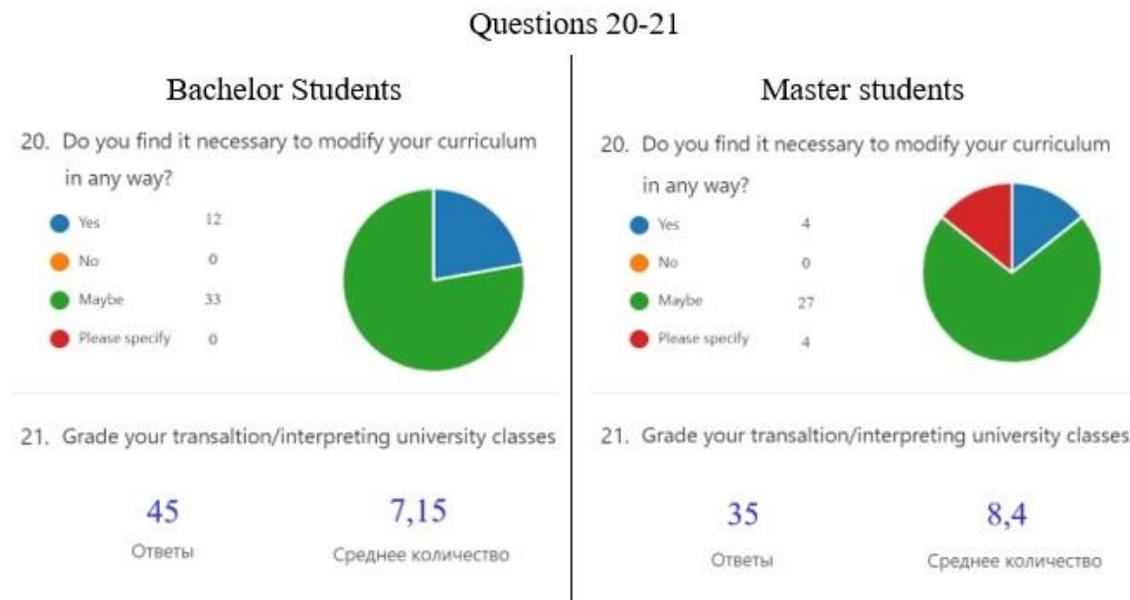


Figure 8. Program assessment

## Discussion

As the results of the survey show, student views on their future profession are rather vague. They draw their own picture of a successful translator/interpreter which is based mostly on the image created by the media. However, throughout the years of their training both BA and MA students have lots of opportunities to know all the attributes of their future occupation. Despite all the potential difficulties the majority of the students still want to work in the field.

Bachelors' and masters' attitudes and assessments differ which is only natural as senior students have more experience and can critically evaluate their future career perspectives. Master students value their university and practical experience more than bachelor students, they see the realities of the situation in the job market better and are ready to pursue their goals with their eyes open.

## Conclusion

Today, translators and interpreters offer their services worldwide, and it is important for them to make sure that they have received a proper theoretical and vocational training. It goes without saying that translation competences are most effectively developed at an academic institution and modern language faculties that

educate translators and interpreters-to-be need to adapt and develop their curricula so as to increase students' translation competence and skills.

We also assume that translator and interpreter education is a dynamic, interactive process between teachers and students which is influenced by many factors and challenges, especially as regards curriculum design. Now that we see what difficulties students encounter when they translate or interpret in real life and what they expect of their future jobs, we realize that the existing BA / MA programs need changes and other stakeholders interests (that is not only students' but their potential employers) should be taken into account when enhancing these programs.

Data obtained from the questionnaires may help reorient the existing training methods and develop specialized programs (for master students mostly) such as localization, technical writing, audio-visual translation and applied terminology, translation memories and databased machine translation, etc. At the same time, it is also important to keep the educational traditions alive and maintain the balance of theory and practice to provide translators and interpreters-to-be with all knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in their future careers.

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