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**Translation Journal**



## **Essential Activities in Translator-Interpreter Training**

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### **Abstract**

The extremely fast pace of life, business and communications in our present world demands, more than ever before, the training of professionals in the field of translation and interpretation who are capable of successfully tackling a true mosaic of challenges in their linguistic and cultural endeavors, both in the field of *written translation* and in the field of interpreting or *oral translation*. It is not enough anymore to train a specialist by translating literary excerpts or hardly useful, outdated texts. It is of the essence to train specialists who can accurately translate and interpret in the fields of science and technology, health care, business, immigration, courts, media and other areas of great demand in today's fast-paced world. This article strives to illustrate what can be done in this respect, especially when it comes to training exercises and the creation of new translation-interpretation texts.

### **Introduction**

eleven semesters he was in charge of the Translation-Interpreting Program at the University of Nebraska, where he updated and significantly strengthened the T-I program, and also taught Spanish and French, among other subjects. He has taught graduate courses in several universities and has shared his expertise at numerous events and conferences. He has published a dictionary, two manuals and a book of chronicles, as well as a variety of articles on T-I training, methodology, English as a Second Language, Spanglish and so forth. Dr. González is a firm believer in adding Translation-Interpreting and cultural skills to the four "classic" ones in foreign language teaching: Understanding, Speaking, Reading and Writing.

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## **Brief Outlook of the Needs in T-I and the Response of Our Institutions of Higher Education**

In today's world, Translation and Interpretation (T-I) Studies have become a must. In Europe, for instance, these activities have been part and parcel of universities' offerings for centuries. However, it is in the past 60-70 years when a special emphasis was given to training specialists in these fields. The European Union has seen its membership increased to over 20 countries, with even more knocking at its door, and its Directorates for Translation and Interpretation have proved they were ready for the challenge<sup>1</sup>. The United States, in spite of its leadership in NAFTA and developing expansion of other Central and South American Free Trade Associations, are only now slowly recovering from decades of misconceptions (for instance, "everyone else must know English") and, to various extents, from having neglected productive foreign language studies and translators and interpreters' training.

For many years, and perhaps as a byproduct of behaviorism, T-I activities in the US were unofficially banned from language teaching and learning. If and when translation courses were scheduled in a few colleges and universities, they often consisted of a short "literary" translation offering, without any foundation on or practice of general translation in fields of increasing importance such as health services, the law, social services, or the movie industry.

As it happens today in the U.S., there are only a few universities and colleges that offer T-I training. Although this situation is starting to change for the better, so far there exist just a handful of specialized—and often very expensive—programs that cater to graduates, fully bilingual individuals or already practicing translators-interpreters, thus elegantly sidestepping the tough responsibility of training undergraduates in the T-I field. The quality of said programs is praiseworthy, but, due to their own established goals, tuition and requirements, their reach and scope are limited.

As a higher education professor, this author had the opportunity to teach T-I courses, together with an occasional Theory of Translation course, first at the College of Foreign Languages in Havana, Cuba for several years, then at the University of Havana, T-I specialty, and at the University of Guyana, South America. More experience in this field was gained at Moscow Linguistic University and as a Cuban international interpreter in the combination English-Spanish. In the U.S. this author has conducted T-I teaching at UNE, at UNCO and for several T-I organizations and events.

In the U.S., the University of Nebraska had the privilege and the challenge of offering a T-I program for over two decades. This program started by offering basic general translation, a bit of literary translation and a bit of interpretation from Spanish and French and into English. However, no translation or interpretation into the foreign language in question, or very little, was implemented for a while. As a result, the very few graduates from this program, with rare exceptions, could mostly translate and interpret into English, but not always the other way around. It became thus imperative to overhaul this program and bring it up to contemporary times, in order to meet the current needs for T-I in the U.S.

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## Meeting the Challenge

For eleven semesters and several summer courses -August 2001-December 2006-the UNE T-I program, also a B.A. major, grew into a full four semester course package. This included two Intensive Writing courses: Translation I and II English → Spanish and two Interpreting courses which covered Sight Translation, Consecutive-Bidirectional and Simultaneous Interpreting, both into English and into Spanish. Topics included the legal, medical, and social services fields. Some special independent study courses were also offered as Translation courses in the combination French-English by this author. Although T-I courses were aimed at undergraduate students, quite a few graduates of Spanish and native speakers of other languages took such courses to improve their knowledge and skills in combining and relating their native language or the *lingua franca*—English in most cases—and their first or second foreign language. A certificate used to be issued if the student passed all T-I courses with a grade of **B** or higher (it had been **C** before 2001) and translation-interpreting activities were encouraged and performed *in both directions*, that is, from English into Spanish or another foreign language and vice versa.

During the period of time mentioned above, this program also benefited from the fact that the professor in charge of the T-I program had ample experience as a conference interpreter, as a translator and is also a Certified Federal Court Interpreter and has a background that includes degrees in two non-US universities, both of which had excellent T-I programs<sup>2</sup>. The combination of teaching methods, foreign language specialization, and theoretical and practical knowledge of both translation and interpretation enabled the UNE program to offer a mosaic of training exercises aimed at meeting the actual needs of our present-day society and its markets. Until the time the professor in charge of T-I at UNE left, classes in both T-I courses and in many other related Spanish courses (Intermediate and Advanced Spanish, Advanced Grammar and Composition, etc.) saw their ranks swell significantly. From a handful of aspiring translators and interpreters in courses before 2001, classes more than doubled and even tripled in number.

The T-I program, likewise, constituted an appeal for quite a few "bilinguals" and the very few "ambilinguals" (Catford, 1965)<sup>3</sup> that lived, studied and worked in Nebraska and other states. This very fact posed new challenges and set new demands for said program. In it, an important component emerged: an exercise manual comprising various types of linguistic, cultural and T-I activities, many of them appearing for the first time in materials related to T-I training. This manual harmonically combined the need for translating-interpreting *real-life* short and medium-size texts with the use of contemporary, up-to-date longer texts in practically all fields of human endeavor, even with the inclusion of short literary excerpts during the advanced stage of Translation II.

## An Exercise Manual with a New Outlook on Exercises:

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by Andrew Park and Ann Sherwin

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Katrin Herget, Holger Proschwitz

### Expansion and Semantic Groups; Code Switching; *Spanglish*; Cultural and General; Vulgarities; Business and Ads; Lexical and Grammatical Comparisons; Generic Texts.

Part of the professor's above-mentioned background and expertise found its way into a special manual for the training of translators and interpreters, first published in 2003, then twice in 2004 and again in 2005. This manual is already in use in several colleges and universities, and private companies and training specialists in the U.S. and abroad have shown their interest in it (González, 2003, 2004, 2005).

Among its many types of exercises, the Manual offers, perhaps for the first time together in a textbook, some of the following:

- **Expansion and Semantic Groups**

: A type of exercise in which the trainee needs to first define, then amplify an idea expressed in a given language *in that same language*; offer possible contextual synonyms, relate the idea/term/expression to others in similar contexts, then proceed to translate the original idea into another language. This type of exercise also refers to hyponyms and hyperonyms or *hipónimos* and *hiperónimos* (Baker, 2001 and López & Minett, 2001). The objective of this type of exercise is to broaden the translator-interpreter's perspectives, expand his active and passive vocabulary and contribute to a solid mastery of both languages in contact.

#### Examples

:

*Boxeo* → *pugilismo* → *narices chatas, árbitro, cuadrilátero, la campana,*

*KO, TKO* → *Boxing, ring, referee, bell, knockout, technical KO, etc.*

*El árbol* → *la ceiba, la palma, el pino, el abedul, el sauce, etc*

.

*Automóvil* →

*auto, coche, carro, máquina, vehículo automotor, etc.*

- **Code Switching**

: Where more than one language appears in the same mini-text, mimicking the speech of bilingual people in many parts of the U.S. and in circles of bilinguals and partial bilinguals in other countries as well. The students' work consists of unifying the ideas in one language or the other, then translating-interpreting the whole new mini-text<sup>4</sup>. The objective here is to

**Translation of Advertising**

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by Zhao Ning

**Arts and Entertainment**

- [The Contact Between Cultures and the Role of Translation and the Mass Media](#)

by Juan José Martínez-Sierra, Ph.D.

**Book Review**

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by Robert Paquin, Ph.D.

- [Review of "The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary" by Robert Alter](#)

by Alexandra Glynn

**Chinese**

- [An Integrated Approach to the Translation of Special Terms with Special Reference to Chinese term \*lüse shipin\* \(green food\)](#)

by Zhu Yubin

familiarize students with this peculiar—and frequent—speech phenomenon, not too well known or understood in areas outside big urban centers.

**Examples**

:

- I was traveling north *cuando el mueble se quebró y. . .* → *Iba con rumbo norte/hacia el norte cuando el coche/carro/auto se rompió y. . .* → I was traveling north when my car broke down and. . .
- I called you back *por lo del rufero*, but. . . → *Te regresé la llamada por lo del techero, pero...* → I called you back about the roofer, but...<sup>5</sup>

- **Spanglish**

:

An unavoidable reality in present-day society. The idea here is to have students become aware of such reality, understand this language variant and be able to translate-interpret it, both intra- and inter-linguistically, i.e., within the same language and between two languages (Child, 1992). Interestingly enough, many students, while affirming that they "do not speak Spanglish," they engage in conversations where Spanglish is used all the time! This author is neither for nor against *Spanglish*, but it should be acknowledged and learned by anyone who wants to become a reasonably good translator-interpreter since it *exists and is used* and thus must be susceptible of being translated or interpreted (González, "*Spanglish*: To Be. . ." 2006; "A Reality. . .", May 2005; "*Spanglish*: ¿Aborrecerlo. . ." March 2005).

**Examples:**

- *El trabaja en una pompa y su hermano es rufero*  
→ *El trabaja en una gasolinera y su hermano es techero/reparador de techos* → He works at a gas station and his brother is a roofer
- *Mi concuño trabaja de carpetero, pero cuando coja el dough del army se va pa'l college*  
→ *Mi concuño trabaja de alfombrista/ poniendo alfombras, pero cuando reciba/coja el dinero del ejército se va a estudiar a la universidad/ a la educación superior* → My sister-in-law's husband works as a carpet layer, but when he receives the army money he will go to college.
- *Antes de ir al mol voy a fulear/filear el carro*  
→ Before going to the mall, I am going to fill up the tank (car gas tank).
- *Llámame pa'tras. . . /Regrésame/devuélveme la llamada*  
(call me back)

- **Cultural and General**

### Cultural Aspects of Translation

- [Hindrances in Arabic-English Intercultural Translation](#)  
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- [Unique Korean Cultural Concepts in Interpersonal Relations](#)  
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### Literary Translation

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by Yi-ping Wu and Yu-ching Chang

- [A Study of Persian Translations of Narrative Style: A case study of Virginia Woolf's \*The Waves\*](#)  
by Somaye Delzendehrooy

### Translators' Tools

- [Technology and the Fine Arts](#)  
by Jost Zetzsche
- [Generating a Corpus-Based Metalanguage: The Iqbo Language Example](#)

:

Here the type of training does not consist solely of performing the transfer from one language into the other, but of *understanding* two or more cultural, folkloric, linguistic and social approaches to the same or similar reality. This author posits that this kind of activity is unfortunately neglected in our foreign language teaching or at least not given its due attention. On many occasions, it also influences the choice of equivalents. It is an incontestable fact that in all Spanish-speaking countries Spanish is the common language, but it would be naïve to affirm that there is only one variant of Spanish per country. In a small country like Cuba, for example, at least two variants are common—Eastern and Western—and there is probably another sub-variant in the westernmost tip of the island: *Pinareño*, pronounced "*pieaño*" by some people from that area, called Pinar del Río<sup>6</sup>.

### Examples:

- *Mientras la hermana mayor se aliviaba, Lucía celebraba su quinceañera* → *aliviarse: dar a luz, parir, en algunos grupos de hispanos; quinceañera*  
: *el paso de niña a mujer de la muchacha que cumple los 15 años; puede consistir de múltiples actividades, tales como la misa de acción de gracias, el cambio de zapatos sin tacón a los de tacón, un baile con diferentes grados de complejidad y vistosidad y, en casi todos los países hispanos donde se celebra, la fiesta de "los quince" o simplemente "la quinceañera"* → to give birth (not to get healed or cured) → Sweet Sixteen, but this is just a pale equivalent of *quinceañera*, and needs a cultural explanation like the one above. If possible, even the various differences in different countries, like in Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, etc.
  - *Todo eso le pasó por ser martes 13.*  
El *martes 13: supuesto día de mala suerte* (bad luck day in Spanish with its counterpart Friday 13 in English → . . . Friday 13)
  - *Biscocho, pastel, cake, torta, tarta* →  
A few variants of *cake* in Spanish countries
  - *Espeuelos, gafas, lentes* →  
Some of the variants in Spanish for *eyeglasses*
  - *Autobús, ómnibus, guagua, bus, camión* →  
Some equivalent variants of *bus*
- **Vulgarities /profanities**  
: Exercises including such terms always appear marked with an asterisk to warn the reader/trainee. They start appearing in the Intermediate section and are usually mingled with regular vocabulary. Some reasons for including these speech realizations are the following: Although this type of terminology may not be the

by Enoch Ajunwa

 [Translators' Emporium](#)

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 [Web Surfing for Fun and Profit](#)

by Cathy Flick, Ph.D.

 [Translators' On-Line Resources](#)

by Gabe Bokor

 [Translators' Best Websites](#)

by Gabe Bokor

 [Translators' Events](#)

 [Call for Papers and Editorial Policies](#)

rule in T-I work, it is certainly not the exception either. They happen more often than not in court and court-related proceedings such as trials, pre-trial interviews, jail interviews, psych-evaluations, depositions and so forth.

**Examples:**

- *¡Coño!, icarajo!*  
→ Damn it! (From a 911 call)
- *Ese pinche ladrón. . .* (From a 911 call)
- *¿Esa es la mierda que me va a dar el tipo éste?*  
→ That's the piece of shit this guy is gonna give me?! (At sentencing, Miami XI District Court)

It is pertinent to mention here that, on more than one occasion, this author was called to "urgently" replace an interpreter who simply "froze" when the defendant she was interpreting for in court suddenly started to use the kind of language illustrated above, at its worst. In those instances, the "freaked-out" interpreter had had little court experience. In a couple of cases, the interpreter had only served as one for religious conferences and events. They were good, fluent linguists in both English and Spanish, but had never handled this kind of vocabulary in front of an audience!

■ **Business, Ads and Related Texts**

:  
Where the translator-interpreter becomes aware of different approaches to "sell" as practiced by companies and enterprises within totally different linguistic frameworks.

**Examples:**

- These items are on a permanent sale → *Estos artículos son una/están en ganga permanente / siempre con el precio rebajado* (Mall stores).
- Our new restaurant will be quick-casual → *de/con servicio rápido e informal* (New West Coast-style restaurant ad).
- No pets, no smoking, no late-night parties... → *No se permite fumar, no se permiten mascotas ni fiestas tarde (en la noche)* (Rooms/Apartments for Rent in the Classified section, Mid West newspaper).

■ **Functional and Comparative Grammatical and Lexical Phenomena**

: Where the translator-interpreter has to constantly "travel" from one given structure or approach to reality in the Source Language into other structures or approaches in the Target Language through transpositions, modulations, adaptations, compensations and other techniques. This type of activity enables students to become aware that the same reality is often approached quite differently in different languages.

#### Examples:

- Passive Voice: Alterations are made here → *Se hacen arreglos de/se arregla ropa aquí*
- Uses of the Gerund: Smoking is dangerous → *(el) fumar es peligroso*
- Noun Adjuncts: washer, dryer hookup... → *conexión para lavadora y secadora...*
- . . . *mirando el ir y venir de la gente* →  
. . . watching people come and go
- I love black and white films → *Me encantan las películas en blanco y negro*
- *El niño está sucio de pies a cabeza*  
→ The kid/boy is dirty from head to toe
- *Ojos que no ven, corazón que no siente* →  
Out of sight, out of mind

#### ■ **Generic Texts**

: Texts consisting of job applications, immigration, health service and court forms (financial affidavits, marriage, juvenile court documents, etc.), especially in the combination English → Spanish, since this represents the greatest need in our communities.

All of the above, as well as other traditional exercises, is offered at three levels of competence: Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced, with in-between categories such as Beginner-Intermediate and Intermediate-Advanced. Some exercises are tailored for

translators, others for interpreters, but all can be very useful in developing the knowledge and skills any translator and interpreter should possess and display.

Whenever possible, students who major in T-I should also complete courses in Comparative Grammar, Spanish and Latin American Literature (and the equivalent in French) and other advanced courses that contribute to achieve a better all-around training. In some universities, a second specialty in a non-related field is recommended:

engineering, architecture, health services, or the like. Language courses offered in universities abroad where the foreign language here is their native language, are also an important component in T-I training with the aim to satisfy T-I students' need for a solid, diverse background in the foreign language(s) and cultures of their specialties.

The use of the *Exercise Manual for the Training of Translators and Interpreters* has yielded, among others, the following positive results:

- An easy-to-use material for both students and instructors, with explanations, exercises, mini-texts and hands-on, experience-based instruction, in a compact, one volume book
- Ready made exercises to be assigned as homework and research. This is of particular importance in the training of language specialists who are not living in the foreign language environment.
- Increased and improved students' motivation, retention and performance.
- Interest even among students who do not intend to become professional translators or interpreters. As it was the case in Nebraska, many students took translation and interpretation courses, especially the former, to improve their knowledge of the foreign language as well as to hone their skills in their main field of endeavors: nursing, teaching, criminal justice, social work, law enforcement, and others

A new manual, enriched by the experiences obtained from the one explained above, but solely focused on Medical Interpreting and Translating, has been published in 2006<sup>7</sup>.

Another of this author's proposals for future offerings included the requirement of a second foreign language for T-I students, especially so when one of the two foreign languages required is Spanish. In Nebraska this was only a recommendation for Spanish-English T-I students, but one that a few of them enjoyed following! This two-foreign-language combination in T-I training is common practice in other countries and quite a few of our college and university foreign students normally do it, by learning or improving their English while learning yet another foreign language in the U.S. As a result, when they graduate, they can usually handle two foreign languages—or more—in addition to their mother tongue. Add to this the fact that in a few cases they also acquire a specialty, and the final result is a greatly competitive graduate. If U.S. students do not attempt to do the same, they risk eventually losing the edge as graduates, not only internationally, but in our domestic market as well!

### **Conclusions**

Gone are the times when *translation training* only meant "Literary Translation Training." It would be an absurd proposition to claim we can train "literary" translators who cannot

translate daily, basic matters, or do not yet possess the minimum knowledge and skills in their foreign language and its culture. The colossal development of cybernetics, electronics, computers and the sciences of information demand that any and all training should be able to cover most possible types of translation-interpreting, perhaps with literary translation only as an object of graduate, specialized courses for individuals with excellent writing skills and a solid background in literature.

The present output of millions of translation pages in the world on a daily basis (Sherr, 2004, and González, 2005) as well as a constant demand for qualified, knowledgeable interpreters and translators require diversification and multi-training. The U.S. and other countries in the Americas cannot afford to ignore such 21<sup>st</sup> century reality. To do so would mean loss of competitiveness, loss of business and fatal lagging behind strong world competitors and those who are emerging as the economic giants of the next few years. Among those competitors and giants we can find the European Union, The BRIC group of countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), Japan and Korea.

The need to incorporate more and better T-I training courses in our higher education system can be met. New manuals and materials can and should be created to accomplish such objective, and such manuals and materials should reflect the current and developing tendencies of the languages in contact. The future for translation and interpretation, based on past and present tendencies, appears to be guaranteed. Such future involves not only scholars and linguists who choose this beautiful and challenging field of endeavor, but also specialists in other fields who often need translation and interpreting skills in one or more foreign languages. Such future is already at our door!

### Notes

[1](#) When nine new languages were incorporated in the European Union organizations in 2004, there had been **245** translators from different departments already studying those languages since **1998**. Conversely, for translators recruited from new member states, EU training is provided, if needed, in the most widely used languages, information technology and subject matters most often demanded. More information is available at EU web pages on its directorates, missions and overviews.

[2](#) Reference here is made to Havana University and Moscow Linguistic University, formerly known as "Maurice Thorez" Moscow State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages, where interpreters, translators and teachers were trained. Many of their graduates served in the Soviet and Russian governments as well as at the United Nations Organizations. Pavel Palazchenko, interpreter for Gorbachev and Shevardnadze, is one of their best known graduates and professors in modern times.

3 A bilingual person, according to Catford, is able to handle two (or more) languages, sometimes quite well, but there is always one language which is predominant over the other (s). An ambilingual person, on the other hand, is one who is capable of handling two (or more) languages at the same level of complexity and in any field of endeavor. The latter is, however, quite uncommon.

4 The term *text* is used in this work with the meaning of any segment of speech, be it oral or written, one word or a whole book: Fire! He's my brother; *¿me amas?*; *La revolución mexicana*.

5 In the first examples, the speakers were of Mexican origin, and claimed to often travel between border cities in Mexico and the U.S. Due to the use of Code Switching as well as special "border" terminology, their idiolect could be almost incomprehensible to a speaker of "only" English or Spanish. In the other example, the speaker was from Miami, where there is a strong influence of Cuban variants, albeit not by far the only ones. Tens of thousands of Haitians, Nicaraguans, Colombians and other Hispanics also influence both Spanish and *Spanglish* in Miami and Miami-Dade County in South Florida. *Rufero* (*techero/reparador de techos* in Spanglish) can also mean, in Cuban slang, a bus driver (In Cuba, *chofer de guagua, ómnibus*) from *rufa* (bus).

6 Another example of "variants" or sub-variants of Spanish in our Hispanic countries: A Quintana Roo University colleague, while studying at a U.S. university for his Master's degree and taking translation-interpretation classes with this author, was shadowing me in court as part of his training. One interpreting act was performed between a U.S. Public Defender and a Mexican defendant. The Mexican gentleman spoke Spanish, but he used terms in his speech that belonged either to his "border" variant or to Spanglish. When the interview was over, I asked my Mexican colleague if he had understood everything and he confessed there were some terms used by his fellow countryman he could not understand at all!

7 This note refers to the *Medical Interpreter's Bilingual Manual*, published in August, 2006. It is written in a very accessible style and format: patients' visits to health providers within the framework of various specialties, dialogues, vocabulary and development exercises. Each lesson/visit includes bilingual explanations of language usage, variants, style, ethics, and so forth.

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(\*) *Bridges* is the official publication of the Atlanta Association for Interpreters and Translators.

(\*\*) *Proteus* is the official publication of NAJIT, the National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators.

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