



Towards LSP(II) – Language Teaching for Future Interpreters: Graduate Profiles

Heather Adams and Laura Cruz-García

University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
heather.adams@ulpgc.es, laura.cruz@ulpgc.es

Abstract

This paper presents some of the findings from research carried out among language teachers on translation and interpreting (T&I) degree courses in Spain, who responded to a questionnaire aiming to obtain a clearer idea of how foreign language teaching in this field of studies differed from approaches in other areas. The main purpose was to compile data based on actual practice, rather than theoretical notions. While the questions posed tended to be framed in such a way as to draw conclusions more for translation than for interpreting, a number of them were conducive to eliciting responses relating to aural and oral performance. Our paper will set forth the ensuing findings that can be applied to the development of language- and culture-based competences for subsequent interpreting courses and practices, as well as exploring possible further areas of study in the area of the teaching of both foreign languages and the mother tongue based on the specific language competences required in the different modalities of interpreting. We are, of course, immensely grateful to all those teachers who took the time and trouble to answer our questions.

Keywords: foreign language acquisition, interpreting, actual teaching practice

1 Introduction

In a previous paper, presented at SELM, Sevilla, in November 2015, we presented a brief overview of the literature on teaching of foreign languages for Translators and Interpreters in Spanish undergraduate settings, citing the work of Brehm Cripps, J. (1996); Brehm Cripps, J. & Hurtado Albir, A. (1999); Beeby, A. (1996) and Berenguer (1996), together with some of the specific language skill requirements for trainee interpreters, as presented by Gile, D. (1985); Angelelli, C. & Degueldre, (2002); Blasco Mayor, M.J. (2007), and Cerezo Herrero, E. (2013). Here, our aim is to focus on the graduate profiles for Translation and Interpreting (T&I) students in Spain, particularly those that require aural/oral skills in the foreign language(s) and to compare the language skills required with the proportion of attention they receive in the foreign language class.

2 Professional Translation and Interpreting Graduate Profiles

The relevant Spanish norms, contained in *El Libro Blanco* drawn up by the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assurance in University Education, (ANECA: 2004) establish six professional profiles for T&I graduates, namely:

1. Professional “general” translator
2. Linguistic and cultural mediator
3. Liaison interpreter
4. Editorial reader, editor, corrector, proofreader
5. Lexicographer, terminologist and language project manager
6. Language teacher

If we look in further detail at the specific foreign language skills required (as specified in the *Libro Blanco*) for each profile, and starting with those that make little or only implicit mention of listening and speaking competence, we can see that profile 4 does not stipulate any aural/oral skills, while profile 5 mentions a few skills that could be interpreted as including oral communication skills in the foreign language, but nothing explicit is stated. No explicit mention is made of these types of competences in profile 6, although common sense would dictate that language teachers need to be able to both understand and produce spoken utterances in said language if they are to be able to carry out their work. Meanwhile, profile 1 specifies “perfect command of the mother tongue” and a “deep knowledge of the source languages”; it could, of course, be argued that “deep knowledge” of the foreign language would necessarily include the ability to understand and produce the spoken word, but a) this is not explicitly mentioned, and b) by definition, and in contrast with profiles 2 and 3, the translator deals with written texts, and thus will not, strictly speaking, need aural/oral competence to carry out his/her work.

However, the situation is very different in the cases of profiles 2 and 3. Thus we can see that profile 2, Linguistic and Cultural Mediator, “requires such knowledge in their A, B and C languages as to enable them to act in commercial or other situations, such as dealing with foreign clients and interlocutors from other countries (from branches or subsidiary companies, suppliers, authorities, associated bodies, etc), as part of day-to-day work in any sector”. (Our translation).

Meanwhile, in profile 3, Liaison Interpreter (also including social or community interpreting), the following foreign language-related requisites are established:

- A “superior” command of their mother tongue, as well as “perfect” competence in their working languages and solid *general knowledge/knowledge of culture in general*.
- Be able to express themselves correctly in the language pair needed in each situation.

Thus we can see that in these two professional profiles, both of which feature dialogue, or liaison, interpreting in both directions (i.e. not only from the foreign language into the mother tongue but also from the latter into the former), the specific foreign (and mother tongue) language skills required are aural and oral in nature.

3 Bilateral Liaison Interpreting

3.1 Characteristics of Bilateral Liaison Interpreting

Interpreters working in this mode will work in both directions, and will therefore have to both understand and transmit spoken messages in the foreign language(s). The communicative situation is face-to-face, and interpreters will often be sitting next to, or very close to, the people for whom they are interpreting: a typical spatial distribution is for the interpreter to sit in between the interlocutors or participants. It is also worth pointing out that, with the evolution of new technologies, sometimes at least one of the interlocutors will not be physically present but rather will participate in remote mode, by videoconference, skype or telephone, among other options, which can sometimes entail further complications both in terms of understanding their input (in the case of faulty connections, interference, etc) and situation management (particularly if remote interventions suffer from some kind of delay). As far as subject domains are concerned, although there are obviously some that recur more frequently, as we can deduce from the communicative settings mentioned below, the truth is that the list is practically endless, as anywhere that people speaking different languages want to communicate about anything, bilateral interpretation will be required, be it provided by a qualified professional or well-meaning amateur.

3.2 Communicative Settings

The communicative settings in which this type of interpreting takes place are also very wide-ranging. The fact that no specific equipment is required (such as the booths, consoles and headsets needed for simultaneous interpreting) and that intervention timings and turn-takings are much more flexible (by comparison with both simultaneous and consecutive interpreting), makes it the perfect option for a wide range of events. One of the key facets of bilateral liaison interpreters has to be their ability to adapt to the specific setting in which interpreting is required. We will not go into this in more depth here, as our aim is to concentrate on our study of linguistic skills as taught in Spanish T&I centres, but it is clear that any such adaptation may affect the register, tone or other language parameters, as well as other non-linguistic variables.

To illustrate the wide variety of communicative settings, we would cite the following as a non-exhaustive list: trade and business settings, such as trade fair stands, formal and informal meetings, guided tours (factories, farms, science and technology facilities, ribbon-cutting, etc) and social settings (institutions, justice, hospitals, prisons, police stations, sports training sessions, culinary and other masterclasses, visits by delegations of all walks of life, weddings, burials and a long list of possible other options).

In fact, the versatility required of a bilateral liaison interpreter is such that this figure has received a wide range of different names, unlike that of the simultaneous and consecutive conference interpreters, where the factors that define their role leave little room for ambiguity. Thus, we have liaison and dialogue interpreter, together with (following Roy, 2002) intercultural mediator, communication-facilitator, bilingual specialist, bicultural specialist in English, and in Spanish (Sarmiento 2008:37) “intérprete, lengua intérprete, trujamán (trujimán, truchimán, dragomán, drogmán), faraute, adalid, práctico”.

To sum up this brief overview of this type of interpreting, as Collados Aís and Fernández (2001) have stated, this type of interpreting is more complex than it might appear at first, conditioned as it is by the behaviour of the participants in any given situation and the relationship established with the interpreter. What stands out clearly is the need for a high level of foreign language (and cultural) competence in both the understanding and production of spoken language, and the ability to adapt to a very wide range of communicative situations.

4 Our Study

In this context, and in the light of all this data, we set out to explore the current state of affairs in T&I Faculties in Spain. To this end, we sent out a questionnaire to teachers of foreign languages at said Faculties (B and C languages) across Spain. Their responses have given us an insight into the general situation with regards to foreign language teaching in said faculties.

The questionnaire included twelve questions, each of which was aimed at eliciting specific information. It was filled in and returned, on a voluntary, disinterested basis, by 58 lecturers from the Translation and Interpreting Faculties of the following 13 universities: Alicante, Autónoma de Barcelona, Europea de Madrid, Felipe II, Granada, Jaume I, Málaga, Pompeu Fabra, Salamanca, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Valladolid, Vic and Vigo between 2008 and 2009.

The foreign languages taught by the lecturers who returned the questionnaires duly filled in and the number of lecturers in each case are given in the table below:

Foreign language	Number of lecturers
English	25
German	17
French	8
Italian	3
Portuguese	2
Arabic	1
Chinese	1
Japanese	1
TOTAL	58

Table 1. Foreign languages taught by lecturers who participated in the study

Although we are aware of the fact that there are more lecturers of foreign languages in these faculties, we believe our sample to be significant.

In our previous paper (SELM, 2015), our analysis of the data obtained concentrated on two particular aspects: **the approximate percentage assigned to the different skills (reading comprehension, writing, listening and speaking)** in language classes in T&I Centres in Spain, according to the responses to our questionnaire (R: reading; W: writing; L: listening; S: speaking). Our conclusions reflected a clear emphasis on written, as opposed to aural/oral, skills as well as on comprehension as opposed to production in the foreign language. In this case, we are particularly interested in the responses related to speaking, given the bilateral nature of the interpreting profiles established for our graduates.

Linguistic skills	Occurrences
All equally important	11
Most important: R	16
Most important: W	6
Most important: L	1
Most important: S	1
Equally important: R, W, L	1
Equally important: R, W	10
Equally important: L, S	2
Equally important: R, L	9
Equally important W, L	1
Total	58

Table 2. Language skills taught in T&I Centres in Spain

As we can see, almost a fifth of language teachers in T&I Centres in Spain believe all four skills to be equally important. However, only one of the 58 respondents considered speaking the foreign language to be the most important skill, while 2 others considered listening and speaking to be equally important. This extremely low rating of the importance of speaking the foreign language means that students' written language skills will have to be activated in preparation for their interpreting classes, either as part of an autonomous learning situation or as part of at least the first part of the interpreting courses. In either case, this component will need to be included either before students start to interpret or in the initial stages of their interpreting training.

Table 3 shows the breakdown between Comprehension vs. Production and Written vs. Aural/Oral skills. The results are not encouraging for the needs of would-be bilateral liaison interpreters, as eight times as many respondents consider written skills to be more important than spoken modes, and nearly three-quarters deem comprehension to be more important than production.

Proportions: Comprehension/Production and Written/Aural-oral	Occurrences
Comprehension More important than Production	26
Production more important than Comprehension	7
Written more important than aural/oral	32
Aural/oral more important than written	4 ¹

Table 3. Perceived importance of Comprehension vs. Production and Written vs. Aural/Oral skills

We can now present the relationship produced between more or lesser importance attributed to each of the linguistic skills by curricular year.

	First year	Second year	Third year	Fourth year
B language	17	11	3	0
C language	21	19	6	4
Total	38	30	9	4

Table 4. Foreign language lecturers by curricular year

¹¹The fact that the total number of occurrences (81) exceeds the 58 lecturers included in the survey can be explained by the fact that one lecturer will typically teach groups in different curricular years. The largest number of lecturers teach in the first year of T&I studies; moreover, it is important to remember that some faculties only offer language classes in the first year, others in the first two years, and so on.

Of the 38 lecturers who teach in the first year, 17 do so in the B language and 21 in the C, while 10 lecturers teach both B and C languages.

The results obtained in terms of importance given to each of the four language skills by language year are shown in table 5.

Skills	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year	4 th year
All equally important	6 (15.78)	5 (16.66)	4 (44.44)	1 (25)
Most important: R	10 (26.31)	11 (36.66)	3 (33.33)	1 (25)
Most important: W	2 (5.26)	4 (13.33)	0	0
Most important: L	1 (2.63)	0	0	0
Most important : S	1 (2.63)	1 (3.33)	0	0
Equally important: R, W, L	1 (2.63)	0	0	0
Equally important R, W	9 (23.68)	1 (3.33)	0	1 (25)
Equally important L, S	2 (5.26)	1 (3.33)	0	0
Equally important R, S	6 (15.78)	6 (20)	2 (22.22)	1 (25)
Equally important W, L.	0	1 (3.33)	0	0
Total	38	30	9	4

Table 5. Relative importance of language skills by curricular year (%s given in brackets)

Once again, these data reveal a noteworthy percentage of foreign language teachers deeming all four skills to be equally important, at least in the first three years of the degree. However, the number of teachers who considered speaking to skill is very low (1 respondent each in years one and two, respectively, and thereafter, none). In combination with listening, the figures reflect two in year one, one in year two and thereafter, none. It is only in combination with reading that the figures rise, with six respondents each in years one and two, two in year three and one in year four. The fact that all the figures fall off as we progress through degree years is linked to the tendency to give fewer language classes in the second cycle, where translation and interpreting courses normally make up the bulk of the curriculum. In any case, it is worth pointing out the relatively low incidence of speaking as a priority skill, even in the first two years.

In terms of the B vs. C languages, our findings are summarized in table 6:

Skills	B language	C language
All equally important	7 (24.13)	6 (15.78)
Most important: R	5 (17.24)	15 (39.47)
Most important: W	4 (13.79)	4 (10.52)
Most important: L	1 (3.44)	0
Most important: S	1 (3.44)	0
Equally important: R, W, L	0	1 (2.63)
Equally important R, W	6 (20.68)	5 (13.15)
Equally important L, S	1 (3.44)	1 (2.63)
Equally important R, L	3 (10.34)	6 (15.78)
Equally important W, L	1 (3.44)	0
Total	29	38

Table 6. Relative importance of language skills by B or C language

Once again, in both, B and C languages, a significant number of lecturers attribute equal importance to all four skills. However, when priority is given to one or more over the rest, speaking receives a very low rating (1 respondent for B language and none for C language), and the situation

scarcely improves when we look at combinations considered equally important. Here, speaking only appears in conjunction with listening, and is rated by only one respondent for each language.

A further breakdown by specific foreign language produces the scenario depicted in table 7:

Skills	En	De	Fr	It/Pt	Ch/Jp/Ar
All equally important	6 (24)	3 (17.64)	1 (12.5)	1 (20)	0
Most important R	6 (24)	8 (47.05)	1 (12.5)	0	1 (33.33)
Most important W	3 (12)	1 (5.88)	2 (25)	0	0
Most important L	1 (4)	0	0	0	0
Most important S	1 (4)	0	0	0	0
Equally important R, W, L	0	0	0	1 (20)	0
Equally important R, W	5 (20)	3 (17.64)	0	0	2 (66.66)
Equally important L, S	1 (4)	0	1 (12.5)	0	0
Equally important R, L	1 (4)	2 (11.76)	3 (37.5)	3 (60)	0
Equally important W, L	1 (4)	0	0	0	0
Total	25	17	8	5	3

Table 7. Language skills by specific language taught

Here, the familiar pattern of a significant number of teachers attributing equal importance to all four skills varies somewhat. While it remains steady in English, it drops in German, where a higher percentage of respondents considered reading to be the priority skill, falling off further in French and not receiving one single vote in Italian or Portuguese. In terms of speaking, it was only rated as the most important skill by one respondent in English and, together with listening (i.e. aural/oral skills), by one respondent in English and one in French.

5 Conclusions

Our study, carried out among teachers of foreign languages in Translation and Interpreting Faculties in Spain, suggests that current, or recent practice in this area tends to favour reading and writing skills over aural and oral skills. The reasons underlying this tendency lie beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that, whatever the reasons might be, speaking is far from being considered a key skill to be acquired in foreign language courses in the Translation and Interpreting Centres included in our survey. When we consider the two (out of six) graduate profiles established for our students, it is clear that during the initial stages of interpreting training, our learners will face a steep learning curve, not only because of the new discipline itself, but also because they will have to dedicate a considerable amount of cognitive energy to transferring their written and comprehension skills into oral production. Bilateral interpreting requires comprehension and production skills in both languages and it may be the case that increased attention to these competences in the foreign language could help trainees to feel less intimidated when they start their interpreting training.

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