Lost in interpreting? Analysing the marginalisation of interpreting in Spanish university degrees

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Abstract

This article analyses the marginal role of interpreting within Spanish university degrees in Translation and Interpreting (T&I), by examining both current Spanish T&I curricula and a nationwide survey of T&I students. Although interpreting is a highly specialised and demanding discipline, it remains underrepresented in most T&I programmes, both in terms of compulsory coursework and practical training. In addition, the lack of technological tools, such as computer-assisted interpreting (CAI), further limits students' preparation for the demands of the profession. Through the design and distribution of a nationwide survey, this study gathers students' perceptions, expectations and experiences, revealing widespread concern over the imbalance between translation and interpreting. The results confirm the need to restructure academic programmes by integrating interpreting courses earlier, increasing practical sessions and embracing technological advancements. This research calls for an urgent reassessment of T&I curricula to ensure students graduate with comprehensive, modern and competitive skills aligned with real-world interpreting practices.

Keywords

Curriculum design, interpreting training, Spanish universities, student perception, Translation and Interpreting degrees.

ANNEX

Annex 1: Survey

University

1. University of Malaga
2. University of Granada
3. University of Cordoba
4. Pablo de Olavide University
5. University of Salamanca
6. University of Valladolid
7. University of Barcelona
8. Pompeu Fabra University
9. University of Lleida
10. Autonomous University of Madrid
11. Complutense University of Madrid
12. King Juan Carlos University
13. University of Valencia
14. University of Alicante
15. Jaume I University
16. University of Vigo
17. University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria
18. University of Murcia
19. University of Basque Country

Grade
A. 3.º
B. 4.º
C. 5.º

Age
A. <18
B. 19
C. 20
D. 21
E. More than 21

Gender
A. Male
B. Female
C. Other

What is your nationality?

1. ¿Translation and Interpreting was your first choice to enter in a university degree?
A. Yes.
B. No, actually, it was the second.
C. No, the third.
D. No but I have not entered another site.

2. How long have you wanted to study this career?
A. Since always.
B. Since ESO [Secondary Education].
C. Since the beginning of Bachillerato [Baccalaureate].
D. I decided just before the EVAU [Exam for accessing the university system].
E. I decided after EVAU.
F. I have changed from another career.

3. To what extent do you think that AI will replace translators on a scale from 0 to 5 (0 being nothing and 5 being a total replacement)?
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

4. To what extent do you think that AI will replace interpreters on a scale from 0 to 5 (with 0 being nothing and 5 being a total replacement)?
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

5. Do you think that there are enough interpreting courses in your degree programme?
A. Yes
B. No

6. With what professional aims did you enter the degree course?
A. Becoming a translator
B. Becoming an interpreter
C. Becoming a translator-interpreter
D. Becoming a teacher
E. Other

7. Have these goals changed since you started your studies?
A. Yes
B. No

8. If so, in what way? Explain briefly why ...

9. Do you know what CAT tools are?
A. Yes
B. No

10. Can you name at least three CAT tools? ...

11. Do you know what CAI tools are?
A. Yes
B. No

12. Could you cite at least three CAI tools? ...

13. How would you rate the training you have received in technology during your career from 0 to 5 (0 none, 1 hardly seen anything, 2 insufficient, 3 only the essential, 4 good, 5 complete)?
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

14. Which degree/speciality are you studying?
A. General translation
B. Specialised translation
C. Conference interpreting
D. Does not apply

15. Do you think you are currently prepared to work as an interpreter or that you will be when you finish your studies?
A) Yes
B) No

16. Is there any aspect of your training that you see as incomplete? Do you think you are missing any subjects?
A. No
B. Yes, there are missing translation subjects
C. Yes, there are missing interpreting subjects
D. Yes, there are missing technology subjects
E. Yes, there are missing language subjects

17. Do you regret having chosen this degree?
A. Yes
B. No

18. How many languages did you want to include in your academic curriculum during your degree (excluding Spanish) before you started?
A) 2 B) 3 C) 4 D) more than 5

19. And after graduation?
A) 2 B) 3 C) 4 D) more than 5

20. What motivates you to include more languages in your curriculum?
A. Intrinsic motivation: personal motives, pleasure
B. Extrinsic motivation: professional motives
C. Looking to relocate or stay abroad
D. Other

21. To what extent do you think interpreting is given sufficient value. Please rate from 0-5 with 1 being a none and 5 being the maximum.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

22. Have you acquired certain study methods for the perpetuity of grammatical structures and lexical constructions?
A. Yes
B. No

23. If so, have you acquired these methods from experience or have you been provided with them in your training?
A. I have acquired them from experience.
B. They have been taught to me at university.

24. What did you learn? Explain briefly.

25. What study or retention techniques do you use to reinforce language skills and fluency in the language(s)? ...

26. Have you acquired any of these techniques during your studies?
A. Yes
B. No

27. Does the training of this degree correspond to what you initially expected?
A. Yes
B. No, it has exceeded my expectations
C. No, it did not meet my expectations

28. What else would you have liked to know before applying for the degree programme? ...

29. To what extent are you satisfied with the training you are receiving? Please rate on a scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being not at all satisfied and 5 being fully satisfied.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

30. In what ways do you put language skills into practice outside the classroom?

31. Do you feel that you have been provided with sufficient means to practise the languages you are studying, especially when it comes to speaking them?
A. Yes
B. No

32. How much time did you need to spend abroad to improve your language skills?
A. I have not been abroad
B. I have been away for less than a year
C. I have been away for one year
D. I have been away for two years
E. I have been away for more than two years

33. How did you reach level B in language B?
A. I reached it during my studies
B. Previous studies (language schools, Cambridge exams...)
C. I am a bilingual/native speaker
D. I do not consider that I have a sufficient level in language B

34. If you know language(s) C, where and how did you learn it/them?

35. If you have only received the training offered at university for this language, do you think you are prepared to work as a translator of your language B?
A. Yes
B. No

36. And as an interpreter?
A. Yes
B. No

37. If you have only received the training offered at the university for this language, do you think you are prepared to work as a translator for your C language?
A. Yes
B. No

38. And as an interpreter?
A. Yes
B. No

39. What motivated you to choose your language combination?

40. Do you consider that there are any subjects that you did not take but could have done well?
A. Yes
B. No If yes, which one? ...

41. Do you consider that you took any subject that has not been useful to you later?
A. Yes
B. No

42. If so, which subject would that be?.....

43. What kind of work have you always wanted to do?
A. Translator
B. Interpreter
C. Teacher
D. Other

44. Have you changed your mind during your studies?
A. Yes
B. No

45. If so, what kind of work do you want to do now?
E. Translator
F. Interpreter
G. Teacher
H. Other

46. Do you have a field of specialisation in mind?
A. Literary translation
B. Specialised translation (technical, scientific, legal)
C. Interpreting
D. Other

47. Of all these options, which one has the most influence on your job prospects/job search?
A. Salary
B. Working hours
C. Comfort
D. Professional recognition

48. What other options would you consider if you were not working as a translator or interpreter?

49. Do you think a good interpreter is born or made?
A. Born
B. Made

50. What characteristics, competences or skills does a good interpreter have to have? ...

51. To what extent can learning in the T&I degree be achieved through other parallel training, e.g. applied linguistics, philology, long stays in the country of origin, streaming tools, work experience in contact with foreign staff, etc.? Rate on a scale of 0 to 5 the need to take this degree in order to work as a translator, with 0 being unnecessary and 5 being absolutely essential.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

52. Rate on a scale of 0 to 5 the need to take this degree in order to practise the profession of a translator, with 0 being unnecessary and 5 being completely essential.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

53. To what extent do you consider technology to be a threat to your work as an interpreter or translator? Please rate it on a scale of 0 to 5.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

54. Do you think that the programme should allow the use of technology in daily practice or class exams more than it currently does?
A. Yes
B. No

55. Would the above premise mean for you a break in the acquisition and anchoring of knowledge?
A. Yes
B. No

56. What would you disagree with in the academic planning of the degree programme?

57. Would you add or remove interpreting subjects?
A. I would add
B. I would remove

58. Would you separate Translation from Interpreting as two different degrees?
A. Yes
B. No

59. Would you like to do an unpaid internship?
A. Yes
B. No

60. If so, would you know of any companies?
A. Yes
B. No

61. Have you been given the opportunity to do an internship as a translator during your studies? (Only for last year students)
A. Yes
B. No

62. Have you been given the opportunity to do an internship as an interpreter during your studies? (Only for last year students)
A. Yes
B. No

63. Being a fairly practical but theoretically focused degree, to what extent do you think that the training you received would make it easier for you to find a job? Please rate it on a scale of 0 to 5.
A) 0 B) 1 C) 2 D) 3 E) 4 F) 5

64. Do you see any inconsistencies or mismatches between Translation and/or Interpreting subjects?
A. Yes
B. No

65. If so, which ones?

66. Reason for entering the degree programme:
A. Average university entrance exam mark
B. Recommendation
C. Professional opportunities
D. Syllabus
E. Location
F. Academic prestige
G. Other

67. If your reason for entering the degree does not match any of the ones given above, please indicate briefly what it was.

68. What are the criteria that lead you to the selection of optional subjects?
A. Timetable
B. Teacher
C. Credits
D. Personal interest
E. Professional usefulness
F. Less hours of study

69. When you entered the degree, did you make an analysis of your professional opportunities?
A. Yes
B. No

70. Do you know the current status of translators and interpreters in the market and the possible job opportunities after graduation?
A. Yes
B. No

71. Which master's degree would you like to study?
A. Specialised translation
B. Interpreting
C. Teaching
D. International relations
E. Research
F. Other
G. None

72. If you would like to study a master's degree which does not appear in the list given above, please state which.

73. Do you intend to spend years studying/working abroad?
A. Yes
B. No

74. If so, please indicate where.

75. Are you satisfied with the languages offered in the degree programme?
A. Yes
B. No

76. If not, please list the ones you are missing.