

**Translation, Interpreting, and Language Studies: Confluence and Divergence**

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**RESPONSES**

**Teaching and Learning and in University Language Programs**

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**Fertilización recíproca de los estudios de traducción e interpretación  
y los estudios de lengua: Innovación metodológica**

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# Translation, Interpreting, and Language Studies: Confluence and Divergence



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**Abstract:** Perspectives on the interplay of translation, interpreting, and language studies regularly position these related fields in various stages of tension. Renewed interest in translation and interpreting may lead to their incorporation in language programs in an effort to provide cross-cultural and translanguual skills for graduates. Such curricular changes will result in several outcomes for these fields. First, formalized translation and interpreting programs will be established to prepare professional language service providers. Second, program graduates will be informed consumers of language services. Third, new offerings may serve as a vector for developing cross-cultural mediation and a method for further language development.

**Keywords:** interpreting/interpretación, Language for Specific Purposes (LSP)/lengua para fines específicos, pedagogy/pedagogía, translation/traducción

## Introduction

Translation, interpreting, and language learning share a long, interconnected history. The overlap of disciplinary research in the academy and the use of translation and interpreting in second language acquisition have waxed and waned as these fields developed.<sup>1</sup> Translation, in particular, has been a part of the language learning classroom and served as the foundation of the aptly-named grammar-translation method. As recently as the 1940s, this formalistic approach to second language acquisition occupied a central role in classrooms. The ultimate objective of this method was not language acquisition, since little focus was placed on pronunciation or oral production of the language. Instead, the development of “faculty of logical thought” (Richardson 1983: 21) was often proffered as one of its merits (Chastain 1971; Richards and Rodgers 2014). As a contrastive instructional strategy, translation served largely as the means to achieve other learning objectives rather than being the end instructional goal.

With the subsequent shift in the mid-twentieth century to the natural and communicative approaches to language learning, translation and interpreting were largely dismissed from language classrooms (Howatt 2009). In tracing translation’s role in language education, Colina (2002, 2003) notes the pervading perception of translation and interpreting as an inadequate teaching method in the language classroom. She hypothesizes that this position may be the result of underlying formalistic views of language despite formalistic teaching methodologies having already fallen out of favor.<sup>2</sup> In a review of language teaching research, Ellis (2012) highlights translation’s limited use in a number of language teaching methods. Laviosa (2014) also describes the shift away from translation as a taught skill or task to its use mainly as a comprehension check.

A resurgence of language for special purposes in the last few decades, however, has led to a closer examination of skills-based instruction and a growing interest in translation and interpreting. A 2007 Modern Language Association (MLA) report lists translation and interpreting as continuing priorities, in part because they are skills that form part of transcultural

competence. Carreres (2014) furthers this claim, noting “many individuals with no formal training in translation will have to carry out translation tasks in the course of their professional and/or personal lives” (126). Therefore, she argues that translation as a language-based skill is “one of the most authentic” (127) that can be taught in the language classroom.

Divergent perspectives on the relationships among translation, interpreting, and language studies demonstrate the breadth of these three fields. Predictions regarding their future nexus are necessarily tentative. The present essay is a forward-looking consideration of how translation and interpreting studies can co-exist with language studies and how their interaction may revive interest in language education and crosscultural mediation. The discussion is largely centered on the current US context.

### Development of the Disciplines

The 1940s marked the approximate turning point when translation was relegated to a lesser status in language acquisition. Translation and interpreting studies, however, did not languish in their absence from the language-learning classroom—instead both have flourished as fields unto themselves. James Holmes’s (2004) map of translation studies illustrates the breadth of the field, which has arguably expanded since the map’s earliest versions. Moreover, interpreting studies is no longer subsumed as a subdisciplinary division within Holmes’s map. As Pöchhacker and Shlesinger (2002) describe in their introduction to *The Interpreting Studies Reader*—ostensibly one of the field’s first encompassing collections—interpreting studies are similar to those of translation studies. Pöchhacker and Shlesinger affirm, however, that interpreting ought not to be classified as a medium-restricted form of translation. Despite this differentiation, the authors acknowledge the intrinsic relationship maintained between translation and interpreting studies.

Indeed, translation and interpreting studies have not been divorced entirely from language studies. Translation and interpreting competence models regularly situate language competence at their core or as a pre-requisite prior to subsequent skills acquisition (Colina and Angelelli 2016; Kiraly 2000). A number of course manuals and textbooks in translation and interpreting attest to the linguistic and cultural competences required of language professionals (e.g., Colina 2015; Gillies 2013; Washbourne 2010). Likewise, scholarly investigation in the fields has ties with a number of disciplines. Angelelli and Baer (2016) adopt a post-structuralist perspective on translation and interpreting research and present a broad range of conceptual frameworks in which scholarship is conducted. Contributors to their volume outline commonly adopted theoretical frameworks in translation and interpreting studies and trace their origins from related fields. For example, Angelelli (2016) examines research in bilingualism and multilingualism and the relationship held between approaches to these areas of investigation and translation and interpreting. As she notes, these concepts are central to the field despite their limited interaction to date.<sup>3</sup>

More recently, scholarly inquiry has returned to translation and interpreting as potential teaching methodologies in the classroom. Sometimes called “pedagogic translation,” scholars in the field have begun to draw together research on second language acquisition, translation, interpreting, and language learning. Cook (2010) and Laviosa (2014) offer two book-length treatments on the topic that ground their suggestion to incorporate translation back into the classroom in theory and recent SLA research. Laviosa’s (2014) monograph proposes a holistic translation-based pedagogy and hopes to stimulate dialogue on “the role of translation in the development of communicative, metalinguistic, and transcultural competences” (2). Significant work is still needed to investigate the role interpreting may play in language acquisition. Lee (2014) provides evidence of improved language proficiency through sight translation and consecutive interpreting exercises. Blasco Mayor (2014) adopts the opposite approach, and instead examines second language proficiency as a potential indicator of interpreting aptitude.

### Three Predictions

The evolving landscape of research on translation, interpreting, and language studies naturally leads to convergent areas of interest and inquiry. Each field brings its perspective to language, culture, and cross-cultural mediation. When considered as a whole, these three disciplines can mutually inform scholarship and practice. As noted previously, the 2007 MLA report squarely positions translation and interpreting as priorities for university language programs. This placement should not be taken as a vocationalization of higher education. On the contrary, the incorporation of translation and interpreting in educational contexts allows language departments to engage research on translation and interpreting and their role in authorship, power, history, and culture.<sup>4</sup> These humanistic perspectives dovetail with pragmatic objectives to better equip graduates with crosscultural, translingual skillsets that will be of immediate use. Here, three possibilities for future confluence of these fields are explored. This consideration is undertaken with the explicit understanding that these scenarios are not mutually exclusive and may ebb and flow.

The first prediction is that the confluence of translation, interpreting, and language studies will lead to the creation and expansion of formalized translation and interpreting programs to prepare professional translators and interpreters. The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects growth at a “much faster than average” rate for jobs in translation and interpreting over the 2012–2022 period. Nevertheless, relatively few translation programs exist in the United States beyond the level of certificate programs. A similar situation can be described for interpreting programs. Matthews and Ardemagni (2013) explore the state of judicial interpreting programs in the United States and identify only a dozen programs nationwide at varying levels.

The considerable growth of job prospects for graduates of translation and interpreting programs coupled with the present dearth of academic programs serves as compelling evidence for language programs to diversify their offerings. As Matthews and Ardemagni (2013) attest: “Colleges and universities in the United States are now beginning to play a significant role in the education of judicial interpreters, but there is an opportunity for academia to demonstrate genuine leadership in the field” (91). This sentiment is equally applicable to other types of interpreting and to written translation. Baer and Koby (2003) and Krawutschke (2008), as well as several of the contributors to their edited collections, describe some of the challenges related to translation and interpreting being taught in the university context. They offer practical solutions and reflect on the current state of translation and interpreting pedagogy in language programs. If, however, we consider the divergence of scholarship in translation and interpreting from language studies, it is clear that caution should be exercised in developing programs without the requisite expertise in the area. Rather than relying on experts in related disciplines, programs ought to consider complementing their current faculties with translation and interpreting scholars.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, skills and competences required of professional translators and interpreters can be articulated with current course offerings (see, for example, Colina (2002, 2015), Gillies (2013), Kiraly (2000), and Washbourne (2010) for more complete descriptions of these competences). Moreover, scholarly inquiry will diversify the departmental research profile.

The development of translation and interpreting programs is imperative now and in the foreseeable future to prepare professional language service providers. These programs can be stand-alone academic units or housed within language programs. While there are benefits and drawbacks to each approach, the development of these programs within existing academic units may be more feasible. Increased visibility of translation and interpreting within language programs provides students with additional career path options and dovetails with curriculum in language for special purposes.

The second prediction is that translation and interpreting will be integrated into current curricula to help prepare well-informed consumers of language services. While full-fledged

translation and interpreting programs may not be immediately possible, courses in both fields allow students to explore the challenges inherent in professional multilingual communication. As noted previously, many graduates will undertake translation and interpreting in non-professional contexts (Carreres 2014: 126). In providing the fundamentals of these two tasks, language programs will position students to be better suited to perform these tasks in certain contexts. Moreover, graduates will be able to recognize the necessary skillsets required, to understand how to work with professional translators and interpreters, and to identify contexts in which their use is appropriate.

Learning objectives related to translation and interpreting are particularly salient in the US context in light of results from a 2015 Instituto Cervantes report. Currently, the United States is estimated to have the second largest Spanish-speaking population of any country; only Mexico has more hispanophones. If predictions hold true and by 2050 the United States is home to more Spanish speakers than any other country, graduates of language programs most assuredly will need a foundation in both translation and interpreting.

The third prediction is that the confluence of translation, interpreting, and language studies will foster improved cross-cultural awareness and mediation. The multi-faceted and interdisciplinary nature of translation and interpreting is self-evident at the level of the word-face. However, both disciplines are also concerned with the embedding of communication in a cultural and situational context. Therefore, coursework in translation and interpreting will stimulate additional reflection in the classroom in a way that extends language to broader considerations such as the intersections of culture, politics, and religion. This type of investigation can be integrated into the language classroom, particularly if it is contextualized as a means of multilingual communication.

## Conclusion

Translation and interpreting studies are established fields of investigation in their own right, but they ought not to be considered in opposition to the goals of language studies. In fact, both fields are well suited for inclusion within language departments since they share common interests in language, communication, and culture. Translation and interpreting need to be reconsidered as means to enrich language learning, in terms of both acquisition and application.

Three ideas are offered here as predictions for the future direction of the collaboration of these three fields. First, universities should reflect on current course offerings and should open a space for dialogue and incorporation of translation and interpreting. Both scholarly inquiry and teaching in these areas will bolster curricula as programs are developed and expanded. Second, students will be better equipped to engage translation and interpreting in a number of contexts thanks to the inclusion of translation and interpreting in language classrooms. While some graduates will work as professional translators or interpreters, all students will recognize the complex task of multilingual communication and become informed consumers of language services. The confluence of translation, interpreting, and language studies will reinforce the importance of linguistic mediation that is culturally sensitive and appropriate. Finally, translation and interpreting will be reconsidered as an important means to enrich language learning by embedding it in a broader cultural and professional context. The prospects for cross-fertilization and mutual support are immense. The three predictions offered here outline broad opportunities for the future development of these fields.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>A number of scholars in second language acquisition and language learning have traced the development of trends in language instruction. Colina (2002, 2003), Cook (2010), Carreres (2014), and Laviosa (2014) provide insight into translation in language education, particularly in the United States and European contexts.

<sup>2</sup>Incidentally, Colina (2002) also explains that this dismissive attitude is at times shared by translation and interpreting trainers who do not see their classrooms as a place to learn a language. Instead, the prevailing wisdom of trainers is that bilingual competence ought to be assumed as a prerequisite to entrance into translation and interpreting programs.

<sup>3</sup>An emerging and related area of research, translanguaging, has gained traction in its engagement with translation studies. Perhaps notable evidence of this burgeoning field of investigation is the creation of a new journal, *Translation and Translanguaging in Multilingual Contexts*, published by John Benjamins. For an overview of translanguaging research, see Beres (2015) in its inaugural issue, or García and Wei (2014).

<sup>4</sup>Translation and interpreting studies are truly interdisciplinary and therefore these constructs only serve as examples. See Angelelli and Baer (2016), Baker and Saldanha (2009), Chan (2014), Mellinger and Hanson (2017), Pöschhacker (2015), and Saldanha and O'Brien (2013) for extensive treatment of the various research questions and methodologies addressed in both fields.

<sup>5</sup>A cursory overview of current job listings in Spanish departments suggests that translation and interpreting are becoming an increasing priority. The lament of lack of terminal degrees in the area may begin to wane as universities establish doctoral level programs in translation, such as the one founded in 2007 at Kent State University.

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Response 1 to “Translation, Interpreting, and  
Language Studies: Confluence and Divergence”



## On Translation's Place in Language Teaching and Learning and in University Language Programs

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**Keywords:** interpreting/interpretación, language learning/aprendizaje de lenguas, language teaching/enseñanza de lenguas, translation/traducción, translation studies/estudios de traducción

Since translation—which here includes both written and spoken modes—has often been considered incompatible with communicative language teaching and learning, translation studies must carefully find its place in university language programs. Translation's unfortunate reputation as a means for second language (L2) acquisition stems from some of its earliest pedagogical implementations, which, particularly in the case of younger learners, consisted of:

sentences for translation . . . especially constructed to illustrate particular points of grammar and to ensure graded progression. This focus on isolated sentences, however well intended, drew the ire of proponents of so-called 'Natural' methods of language learning and teaching, steeped as many of them were, in the new discipline of psychology with its emphasis on connectivity and association (Pym, Malmkjær, and Gutiérrez-Colón 2013: 12)

The activity of translating unconnected sentences was contrary to this emphasis and, hence, did not permit natural conversation. Moreover, the grammar lessons contained in grammar-translation course books focused more on word classes than on the syntactic relationships between them, thus encouraging word-for-word translation and further disconnection and disassociation (Pym, Malmkjær, and Gutiérrez-Colón 2013: 12).<sup>1</sup> What was missing was research exploring “the benefits of creative and communicative ways of making translation a useful and practical learning activity” (Pym, Malmkjær, and Gutiérrez-Colón 2013: 16).<sup>2</sup> Translation activities may vary greatly (from written to spoken or audiovisual or from scaffolding in initial L2 learning to complex tasks designed to build several skills at advanced levels), but, “Translation should not be proposed as a stand-alone teaching method in itself” (Pym, Malmkjær, and Gutiérrez-Colón 2013: 139). Thanks to increasing recognition of translation studies, more research is currently being carried out on how translation may complement L2 teaching and learning. More (refined) research should help elucidate (more clearly) the different ways translation may specifically be combined with general L2 approaches to produce optimal effects.

University language programs undertaking curricular programming in translation should carefully weigh student needs, whether the goal is to produce graduates who will indeed pursue career paths in translation or whether it is only to equip L2 graduates with complementary translation skills and knowledge. Either way, students who are placed in translation classes prematurely, when L2 skills are underdeveloped, may depend (too) heavily on these courses for language acquisition. These students would likely be better placed in a communicative or immersion environment where they might more adequately build these skills. One way active



L2 acquisition may, to a certain extent, be built into a translation course is by creating a CLIL (content and language integrated learning) or immersion setting. However, there is currently no consensus on whether this is a best-practice translation teaching method, as practices seem to vary depending on the country, institution, or instructor. Washbourne (2010), for example, is of the opinion that “Striving for an ‘immersion’ environment in a translation class sends the message that language acquisition is the primary goal, which it is not” (11). Regardless of when or how programs introduce translation, Hague (2013) aptly reminds us that:

successful translation programs do not limit their requirements to translation courses. Instead, they also require that students take language, literature, and culture classes. The expectation is that these courses will help students develop the linguistic and cultural sub-competencies necessary for translation competence. In so doing, students should also gain the critical-thinking skills and experiential learning promoted in modern views of liberal education. (28)

Even if students do not go on to become professional translators, there is value to be found in translation studies. Not only may students become well-informed translation consumers, knowledgeable about multilingual and multicultural communication needs and challenges, they may also cultivate a broad humanistic “appreciation of the craft and contributions of translation to the world in which they live” (Doyle 1991: 19).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Koike and Klee (2013: 4–6) for a user-friendly brief history of the grammar-translation method.

<sup>2</sup> Here it should be noted that “Translation Studies established itself as an interdiscipline partly by turning its back on the use of translation in language learning, thereby leaving an open road where the ideologies of Communicative Language Teaching could belittle translation or shun it entirely” (Pym 2015).

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## **Fertilización recíproca de los estudios de traducción e interpretación y los estudios de lengua: Innovación metodológica**

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**Palabras clave:** innovation/innovación, interpreting/interpretación, methodological translation/traducción metodológica, teaching methodologies/metodologías de la enseñanza

### **Introducción**

Desde la antigüedad el campo de la traducción e interpretación ha mantenido una estrecha relación con los Estudios de Lengua y esta relación se ha reflejado en la configuración de la disciplina. En concreto, a partir de la década de 1950, destaca la influencia de teorías del campo de la lingüística y los estudios culturales. Los avances de dichas disciplinas han ido fertilizando y afianzando el rigor teórico y metodológico de los estudios de traducción e interpretación hasta la actualidad. Dicho rigor teórico y metodológico ha dado lugar en la última década a innovaciones metodológicas que fomentan el mutuo enriquecimiento de estas tres ramas en los departamentos de lenguas, en concreto, en el contexto universitario estadounidense. Por tanto, en esta réplica, pretendemos abordar y contribuir al diálogo sobre la confluencia, según palabras del autor, o coexistencia de disciplinas como garante de innovación metodológica tanto en la docencia como en la investigación. A este respecto, en la medida de lo posible, profundizaremos en las tres predicciones que ha presentado Mellinger (2017).

### **Innovación metodológica**

En cuanto al análisis del producto como objeto de estudio, la innovación se ha cifrado en el acercamiento descriptivo de Toury (1995), la sociología de la traducción (Wolf y Fukari 2007) y la traducción cultural (Pym 2010), que se han consolidado como los marcos teóricos por excelencia. A su vez, la metodología más prolífica en el estudio del producto se centra en los estudios de traducción basados en corpus bilingües (Kruger, Wallmach, y Munday 2011) por su versatilidad metodológica.

El ímpetu innovador que se observa en los estudios del producto, se constata igualmente en las investigaciones centradas en el proceso de la traducción. Estas investigaciones, iniciadas a partir de estudios de lengua, han sido particularmente innovadoras por su acercamiento marcadamente interdisciplinario. En concreto, la innovación apunta a nuevos métodos de investigación, tanto cuantitativos como cualitativos, y nuevos diseños empíricos, entre los que la triangulación de métodos emerge como predominante; por ejemplo, la combinación de grabaciones de pantalla de computadora, teclado y ratón con técnicas de seguimiento de ojos. Estos nuevos métodos de recogida de datos hacen posibles análisis minuciosos del comportamiento traductológico (Shreve y Angelone 2010: 6). Dada la influencia de la tecnología en las industrias de la lengua, tanto los estudios de traducción automática como los de posesición se

han convertido en áreas fecundas que prometen nuevos modelos de traducción (Koehn 2010) en los que se comparan la calidad del proceso traductológico automático y humano. Dicha innovación metodológica es el ejemplo más ilustrativo de evolución disciplinaria en la última década de los estudios de traducción e interpretación.

La innovación metodológica en la didáctica se ha alimentado por ende de la innovación metodológica en las investigaciones del proceso y de ahí el impacto de sus aplicaciones didácticas tanto en metodología de la enseñanza como en el refinamiento de programas de formación del traductor. Dada la incorporación de la interdisciplinariedad también en la didáctica, los Estudios de Traducción, y en menor medida los de Interpretación, han evidenciado la incorporación de nuevas metodologías de la enseñanza que han complementado al método comunicativo en las clases de idiomas. Metodologías de enseñanza tales como las que se centran en el enfoque en proyectos (Li, Zhang, y He 2015) y la enseñanza por tareas (Washbourne 2009) han adquirido una presencia considerable en el aula de traducción e interpretación. A su vez, estas nuevas metodologías han contribuido nuevas formas de evaluación de competencias multidimensionales, lo cual permite lograr los objetivos sugeridos por el autor en la tercera predicción del artículo original.

Asimismo, la innovación metodológica en la didáctica aborda la primera predicción del autor. La innovación metodológica en la docencia no solo contribuye a la innovación curricular, ya que sirve de plataforma dinámica y flexible para la oferta de nuevas asignaturas interdisciplinarias, sino que vigoriza la misión del departamento a diversificar el catálogo. Entre la oferta didáctica que ha adquirido relevancia destacan las materias con énfasis en las tecnologías de la traducción, la gestión de proyectos, la localización de programas informáticos y la traducción audiovisual. Por ende, las nuevas metodologías enfatizan la dimensión instrumental y práctica de la lengua y, por tanto, el estudiantado se beneficia de la adquisición de competencias multidimensionales que facilitan en buena medida la transición al mundo laboral.

## Conclusión

La coexistencia de los estudios de traducción e interpretación y de lengua es necesaria para garantizar una continua evolución de innovación metodológica en la investigación y en la didáctica. En esta réplica hemos abordado y concretado aquellos aspectos innovadores que hoy caracterizan a los estudios de traducción y que además complementan los estudios de lengua en la creación de un ente interdisciplinario. A modo de reflexión final, invitamos a los departamentos de lenguas a explorar las opciones de innovación metodológica abordadas con el objetivo de enriquecer la programación curricular, ante todo con el fin común de lograr la excelencia investigadora y académica en el ámbito interdisciplinario.

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