

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

Translation and communication studies in Europe

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Translators are professional communicators. If you add foreign languages to the professional profiles of technical writers, business communicators, journalists, copywriters, proofreaders, revisers and editors, sometimes you might even be unable to tell the difference. However, if you were asked to tell these jobs apart by looking at the way they tend to be articulated in universities in several European countries (e.g., Spain, France, the UK) you might easily conclude that translators actually belong to a very different kind of business.

Most people pursuing university training as professional communicators often enroll in programs from communication schools



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within social science divisions, whereas would-be translators tend to knock at the doors of schools and departments of modern languages, usually within the humanities (Pym, 2009).

One of the obvious reasons for this is that translation trainees usually need to improve their language skills; so much that up to 40% of their undergraduate course load may be devoted to language classes; a good additional 40% goes to translation practice itself (ANECA 2004, p. 123). That is why in most Western and Northern European universities, translation programs have remained at hand-reaching distance of the language programs they often grew out of. Many undergraduate communication programs also tend to have a good portion of their syllabi focused on language and communicative skills.

Journalism might be the oldest true communication profile to be trained at universities—the *Ecole Supérieure de Journalisme* of Paris opened in 1899—and translation programs—the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting (former *Ecole de Traduction et d'Interprétation* [ETI]) in Geneva opened in 1941—have seen training demands rocket in the last 50 years (e.g., in Spain, 4 programs in 1989; 22 programs in 2012). In fact, they may have paved the way to many other professional communicator profiles that entered higher institutions later on. Ever since David Berlo founded the first general communication arts department at Michigan State, communication studies have been on the rise, although in between the language arts and the social sciences paradigms.

In the last 20 years, Western societies have undergone deep changes which are impacting our daily lives and our future in ways

that we are still trying to discern. Many of these changes have to do with information and communication technologies. Thus, universities are still coming to terms with the nature and specifics of professional communication training, mainly because it cuts across traditional academic classifications (Abbott, 1988, p. 53). That is why, still too often, communication degrees are offered by business schools, computing schools, campus-wide writing programs, native-language and foreign language departments.

In a landscape where some communication subfields still seem to be defining their contents (Mulder, Longnecker, & Davis, 2008), the tendency seems to be to group all professional communication programs together. In the US, this is what happened at University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, Syracuse University's SI Newhouse School of Public Communications and, recently, to the Brian Lamb School of Communication at Purdue. Concentrating subfields is also the aim of smaller units such as the communication departments at the University of Washington and UC Santa Barbara. A similar move from scattered first steps is taking place in Canada (Tate, Osler, Fouts, & Siegel, 2000). But translation and interpreting are usually still out in the cold.

The best way to improve the language and communication skills of professional communicators in general—not only translators and interpreters—might be to develop them in undergraduate programs in applied languages, which would cater for the 40% common curriculum in language skills; this is actually happening in many countries in Europe and abroad. Translation and interpreting programs would then

become graduate only (c.f. Snell-Hornby, 1992) and focus on the 40% of translation practice, which is the idea behind the EU's 60 ECTS European master's in translation. However, I would like to argue that training (novice) professional translators takes longer than one year, and that most of the remaining 20% course load in current undergraduate translation programs (e.g., technical writing, shared computer tools, text design & layout, information search & retrieval, terminology, web design) is also needed, and very close to the training needs of other profiles in professional communication.

In sum, I believe that establishing sounder bridges between all professional communication programs would enhance their flexibility and improve their adequacy to the demands of society (Amit-Kochavi, 1992). This is why I think we should move translation studies to the social sciences, and translation programs to communication schools. ■

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