

# Teaching Translation in Brazilian Universities: A Study about the Possible Impacts of Translators' Comments on the Cyberspace about Translator Education

Erica Lima

**Abstract**—The objective of this paper is to discuss relevant points about teaching translation in Brazilian universities and the possible impacts of blogs and social networks to translator education today. It is intended to analyze the curricula of Brazilian translation courses, contrasting them to information obtained from two social networking groups of great visibility in the area concerning essential characteristics to become a successful profession. Therefore, research has, as its main corpus, a few undergraduate translation programs' syllabuses, as well as a few postings on social networks groups that specifically share professional opinions regarding the necessity for a translator to obtain a degree in translation to practice the profession. To a certain extent, such comments and their corresponding responses lead to the propagation of discourses which influence the ideas that aspiring translators and recent graduates end up having towards themselves and their undergraduate courses. The postings also show that many professionals do not have a clear position regarding the translator education; while refuting it, they also encourage "free" courses. It is thus observed that cyberspace constitutes, on the one hand, a place of mobilization of people in defense of similar ideas. However, on the other hand, it embodies a place of tension and conflict, in view of the fact that there are many participants and, as in any other situation of interlocution, disagreements may arise. From the postings, aspects related to professionalism were analyzed (including discussions about regulation), as well as questions about the classic dichotomies: theory/practice; art/technique; self-education/academic training. As partial result, the common interest regarding the valorization of the profession could be mentioned, although there is no consensus on the essential characteristics to be a good translator. It was also possible to observe that the set of socially constructed representations in the group reflects characteristics of the world situation of the translation courses (especially in some European countries and in the United States), which, in the first instance, does not accurately reflect the Brazilian idiosyncrasies of the area.

**Keywords**—Cyberspace, teaching translation, translator education, university.

## I. INTRODUCTION

IN Brazil, the last few decades have been marked by a small increase in the visibility of the translator as a profession, compared to a greater institutional recognition of translation studies as academic field. Both increases are results of the establishment of undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as the high number of article publications about translator training, and the importance of theoretical reflection on translation. However, alongside this new translator profile and

greater visibility of the area, it is possible to observe that some questions continue to be discussed, especially on blogs and networking translations groups, such as the need of a degree in translation to become a professional translator. The objective of this paper is to reflect on the teaching of translation in Brazilian universities and the possible impacts blogs and social networks have in translator education today. To achieve this goal, the first part of the study will address typical aspects of undergraduate courses in Brazil today. Subsequently, we conducted a survey of some translation courses curricula with the aim of verifying which paths Brazilian universities intend to take to train translators. Afterwards, some comments on translation training published on social networking were analysed, and some points about Brazilian universities were introduced. Finally, partial results of the research and future expectations were presented.

## II. TRANSLATION COURSES IN BRAZIL: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

In Brazil, the Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC), through e-MEC, regulates and evaluates Institutions of Higher Education (IES), maintaining an official and unique database of information about undergraduate and graduate courses. Since e-MEC information is official, it was decided to approach the translator training courses at the undergraduate level based on data found on the e-MEC platform [1]. Two advanced searches were made: the first one with word translation, and the second one with word translator. In both, only baccalaureate in activity throughout national territory, distance and classroom learning were selected. There were 21 courses, 12 with word translation and nine with word translator. In consultation of the pages of these universities, it was possible to observe that there are, in the curricular grids, several similar disciplines, although there is no minimum curriculum established by MEC; that is, since the profession - translator - in Brazil is not regulated, it is not necessary to have any training in the area. Only Public Translators and Commercial Interpreters (commonly known as sworn translators) need to pass an examination to be an official translator (whose stamp and signature are required for the translation of documents in general).

Some disciplines appear in all curricula, with some changes in their denominations. These disciplines are considered to be common core, i.e., they are part of almost all training courses for language teacher and translators. They can be summarized as follows:

Erica Lima is with the Applied Linguistics Department, University of Campinas, Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil (e-mail: ericalima@iel.unicamp.br).

- Portuguese language
- Foreign language(s)
- Studies of texts in Portuguese (types and genres of texts, writing, editing)
- Studies of texts in Foreign Language(s) (contrastive analysis, writing, reading and text comprehension)
- Linguistics (discourse analysis, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics)
- Literature (literary genres, literary theory and criticism, literature and other arts)
- Culture and Society (Brazilian culture, foreign language(s) culture, language and society)

It is observed that there is a large workload for foreign language, usually presented in all semesters of the courses. This can be explained by the fact that Brazilians do not have fluency in foreign language, which necessitates a simultaneous study of language and aspects of translation. Even with this deficiency, it is possible to verify that there is a significant variety of specific disciplines, (covering the theoretical and the practical part of the training), whose most recurrent are:

- Translation Studies (Introduction, Contemporary theories, History)
- Language Technologies (Translation tools, Computer-aided translation)
- Translation Methodology
- Terminology and Lexicology
- Corpus Linguistics
- Comparative Translation (Translation Criticism)
- Professional ethics (political and ideological influences on translation)
- Translation Practice (general translation, technical and scientific translation, literary translation, audiovisual translation)
- Translation into a Foreign Language

This list of disciplines points to one thing: there is a concern in offering a sufficiently complete education, covering different perspectives of the study of language and translation, including translation tools, an aspect required by the labor market. In addition, a more attentive study [2] also shows the inseparability between theory and practice for professional success [3], [4], with disciplines that provide reflection on the role of the translator and awareness of the sociocultural and political importance of translation.

Considering the peculiarity of the Brazilian student, undergraduate education is essential, since the higher level courses provide conditions guided towards graduation required by the market and for the success of the professional. Despite the fact that researchers and professors advocate specific undergraduate training, and the market starts to place it as a prerequisite for hiring the graduated translator, there is not a consensus among the professionals regarding graduation requirements, as can be seen in the analyzed postings.

### III. POSTINGS ON SOCIAL NETWORKING

One of the most visible Brazilian groups on Facebook is "Translators, Interpreters and Curious Ones" ("Tradutores, Intérpretes e Curiosos"-TIC), which achieved over 16,000

members in only four years of existence (from May 2013 to May 2017 [5]). By being open to "curious ones", the group attracts many beginners and people interested in getting into the profession. Thus, TIC ends up being a space where information is exchanged, including courses.

The group has been studied since its creation, and especially during the past year (April 2016 to April 2017), it called the author's attention to the increase of extension courses or "free" courses offered, and the lack of reference to "official" translation programs (A study about the description and designation of translation courses is found in [6]). In a one-month period, for example, there were about ten offers of translation extension courses ("independent", that is, unrelated to a university).

On January 8, 2017 a post caught the attention of the group participants, who discussed the subject for a week:

January 8, 2017

[EDUCATION] Colleagues, do you consider indispensable for a translator to have a higher education/ Ograduation? I ask because only this week three agencies appeared asking for my CV, and all of them asked me to prove my training. They asked for a PDF file, which would be my scanned diploma. And no, at no moment the agencies have specified the area of the projects that they will send me, so there is no way to know if I have a degree in veterinary medicine - they just want to know if I have a degree. What do you think?

The interactions that occurred afterwards facilitate the possibility of an analysis of the representations that the translators have of the courses and of the profession. The author of the post did not say that she must have a degree in translation, rather any degree. The answers, however, raised several other important points: Many people see the idea of having a translation degree as an attempt to ensure work and even raise doubt whether it would be better to have a graduation in another area. The most common statement is "a certificate or diploma in translation means very little in our profession", although several agree that, increasingly, there is this requirement on the part of the clients. Another finding is that while seniors in the profession already have a great client portfolio, the training would be beneficial to help beginners who have a lack of experience. There is a consensus that a diploma is now considered to be more important because of a historical question: The first universities are from the late 1960s, that is, those with more than 30 years of profession were already established when the first graduates entered the marketplace. Some are against the regulations that would come with official education, which could prevent people from other areas from working with translation. Finally, a rather common argument is that "translation should always be a graduate course, never an undergraduate one," as it occurs in the United Kingdom and other countries. Two interesting points about the interaction: (1) nobody contested the increasing offer of extension or short duration courses, whether face-to-face or online; (2) there is a stereotype that a degree in the area does not cover aspects that the market demands, which does not correspond to the proposals of the

courses found on the universities' websites.

Another post representative of common web discussions was published on November 24, 2016 and triggered several replies:

November 24, 2016

I have a degree in Journalism and I have advanced English (always studying to improve, of course). Lately I've been thinking about working with translation. But I have no idea how to get started. Do you think it is essential to have a degree in Translation Studies or any translation course would be enough? In my case (with a degree in Journalism), a graduate course would be a better idea?

Again, the idea that a degree in the area is not essential appears, since the person can choose between that and the graduate or free (or extension) courses. It is observed, therefore, that there is a social representation of the translator as someone who does not need to have a degree in the area, which ends up weakening the profession, since many "adventurers" are launched in the market, thinking that knowing a foreign language is enough to be a translator (discussed in [7]).

#### IV. THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAMS

The Brazilian institutionalization of translation began in 1968, with the creation of the course at Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro (PUC-RJ) [6]. Since the beginning, the teaching of translation was based on the relationship between praxis and theory, as [8] and [9] point out. Frota [10] and Guerini et al. [11] present a balance of the historical context of Translation Studies and show the expansion of studies in the area, in quantity, quality and diversity.

For the translator, the space provided by the university is fundamental for constant discussions about critical issues for society, such as alterity, diversity, discourse, ideology, and construction of meanings. Usually, these subjects are not discussed on the web. It is also the university's role to raise awareness of "commitment", of "becoming a professional", implemented with the diploma or certificate that "nominates" a translator.

In contrast to what many professionals with no field training believe, it can be observed, in the available online curricula, a concern to attend to the needs of the professional life, so that the skills and abilities worked in the classrooms are aligned with the market expectations (as with the Federal University of Uberlândia, for example [12]). Some universities do not have a translation program, but they do at least offer some courses that deal with translation theory and practice, in different languages. At University of Campinas (UNICAMP [13]), for example, the students have a theoretical introduction to the subject, followed by Translation Practice, and they can continue to dedicate themselves to the area, either through extension courses, or by admission to the graduate level.

It is important to note that the difference between the "commercial/independent" courses of extension and those linked to the university is the space held for the discussion on

the language and on the role of the translator. The extension courses that do not have relationship with the university tend to be more technical, focused on translation for a specific purpose or CAT tools. However, although the undergraduate courses are consistently improving, and extension courses include a wider range of options, the academy has not yet achieved its place or desired visibility. This can be evidenced by the increasing search for information on social networking in detriment of university websites, for example. The main question, therefore, is to think where we should invest more to "validate" translator education. Considering an approximation with professional groups, agencies and even associations (which in Brazil are still not very representative), seems to be a path to a greater visibility for what happens in the universities. It is not expected, therefore, to train the student considering only the market demands, but to consider these other "places" are also spaces of information and knowledge.

Besides the fact that professionals need more information on what is happening at the universities, the university students also need to have more voice in cyberspace, whether by publishing their work on social networking groups, joining associations (such as ABRATES-Brazilian Association of Translators and Interpreters [14]) or participating in blogs. It is part of the author's research project, for example, the development of a blog that aims to provide reliable information for people interested in translation, especially students, such as: courses available in the country, researches done by undergraduate and graduate students, events and tips [15].

#### V. FINAL REMARKS

It is true that there are several challenges in the training of translators, especially "with the emergence of new forms of translation, most of them stemming from technological developments, such as software localization and subtitling" [16]. It is also true that not every university offers a program that is complete with a theoretical approach, including linguistic, literary studies, cultural and language studies, as well as practical training, including practice of translation and training on memory systems. Besides that, few universities have internship programs or translation centers where students have real clients, with the opportunity of negotiating deadlines and payments with them. However, despite any shortcomings, it is important that the university remains a place of reflection, an idea already advocated in an article by Darin, which "intends to reflect upon the role and relevance of the theoretical knowledge in the training of translators at university level" [8]. As such, the university continues to be the place where it is possible to discuss "pedagogical issues such as teaching and learning approaches, goals, didactics, methods and strategies, as well as evaluation and assessment" [16]. Therefore, one of the strengths of the university is to evaluate the students' translation, enabling them to understand the forces that are involved in each process of construction of meaning. In this way, students will be able to understand, for example, that "products and translation processes are investigated in their relationship with markets and political-

ideological forces” [10]. Although many comments in social groups state otherwise, as Martins declares:

The main objective of a translator training course, no matter what level, has always been to lead the learner to acquire translation competence and to integrate successfully to the community of professionals in the field, which implies knowing the rules and conventions that govern the behavior of members of that community by interacting both internally and with other communities to whom they provide their service [16].

Cyberspace plays a very important role as a network and as a supplier of technology to the translator. Today, it is impossible to deny the importance of the networking for finding new jobs, resolving doubts, to creating personal marketing and to update abilities. On the one hand, cyberspace constitutes a place of mobilization of people in defense of similar ideas. On the other hand, it embodies a place of tension and conflict, especially when it comes to discussing whether the best way to get into the profession is by taking a degree or free courses or tutorials.

It is argued here that a more comprehensive education, completed in a respectable university, will provide better conditions for professional success and appreciation. It is also defended that “theory is important in the training of the translator, because it gives them the power of reflection on their professional life. It gives them confidence in decision making and professional positions they take. At the same time, theory helps the translator to find their place in the world, in history” [17].

Finally, it can be concluded that the curricula of outstanding universities reflect the inseparability between theoretical reflection and practical translation and show that, contrary to what some professionals insist on saying, the market demands are not left aside. Nonetheless, it is necessary to show the professionals, the media, and the market, that the role of the university is different than the disseminated ideas found on the web. A positive way to do that is to spread the word, for example, on blogs and social media groups.

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Érica Lima Ph.D., (Literary Theory) (2003) -Universidade Estadual Paulista - UNESP, Brazil; M.A., Applied Linguistics in Translation (1996) –Campinas University – Unicamp, Brazil; B.A., Translation (French) (1991) - Universidade Estadual Paulista - UNESP, Brazil; B.A., (English) (2014) - University Paulista – UNIP, Brazil.

She teaches at Campinas University (Department of Applied Linguistics, area: Language and Education – Translation), since 2015. Before that, she taught Portuguese Language at Georgetown University, Department of Spanish and Portuguese in Washington, DC, and Translation Practice and Translation Theory at undergraduate and graduate levels at several colleges and universities in São Paulo, Brazil. Her research interests range from current trends in translation studies (cultural, ideological, sociological and questions of ethnicity, identity and gender); the interface between translation studies and trends in contemporary thought, such as deconstruction and post-colonialism, and translator training and reflection on the fusion of theory and practice. She has published articles on these topics in *Tradução e Comunicação*, *Alfa*, *Estudos Linguísticos*, and others.

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