STUDY OF THE ONLINE REPUTATION OF INTERPRETERS IN SPANISH DIGITAL MEDIA: THE CASE OF *LA VOZ DE GALICIA* AND *EL PAÍS*

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Abstract

This is a first approach to the online reputation of interpreters in the Spanish digital press, gained through a study of two popular, non-specialised Spanish online newspapers in Galicia. A news corpus from the digital versions of the newspapers *La Voz de Galicia* and *El País* was analysed for the period 2013-2017, to ascertain the visibility of interpretation and the online reputation of interpreters. All news items with direct or indirect reference to interpretation were taken from the digital archive of the said

newspapers. The visibility of each interpreting technique and modality, as well as the perception of the interpreter figure, were analysed. Results indicate a poor presence, but a high positive perception of this profession in the 2 media analysed.

Keywords: Interpreting. Interpreter. Visibility of interpreting. Interpreting for the media. Online reputation.

Resumen

El presente trabajo constituye una aproximación a la reputación en línea de la profesión de intérprete a través del análisis de dos medios de prensa digital generalista española con importante difusión en Galicia. A partir de un corpus de noticias de las versiones digitales de *La Voz de Galicia* y *El País* durante el periodo 2013-2017, se analiza la visibilidad de la interpretación, así como la reputación en línea de las/os intérpretes. Para elaborar el corpus, se han recopilado todas las noticias que hacían referencia directa o indirecta a la interpretación a través de las hemerotecas digitales de los citados diarios. Posteriormente, se ha analizado la visibilidad de cada técnica y modalidad de interpretación, así como la valoración de la figura del/de la intérprete que se hace en el contenido periodístico. Tras el análisis de los resultados, se constata una presencia muy reducida de la profesión de intérprete, así como una valoración mayoritariamente positiva de la misma en los medios analizados.

Palabras clave: Interpretación. Intérprete. Visibilidad de la interpretación. Interpretación en los medios. Reputación en línea.

1. Introduction

Interpreting, understood as oral linguistic mediation between people who do not speak a common language, has been practised since ancient times, but its recognition as a modern profession only began at the Nuremberg Trials, after World War II with the creation of multilingual international bodies such as the UN or the EU (Baigorri Jalón 2000). This new profession is fraught with lack of visibility in society, confusion with other similar professions (such as translation or intercultural mediation) and professional intrusiveness, especially in sensitive settings such as courts, police, hospitals, educational centres, etc. Hence, the professional interpreter figure is not very well defined in society and certain news items published by the media add to the confusion. Moreover, the study of the presence of interpretation in the media has received

little attention from academia to date, except in works that focus on specific scenarios, such as media visibility of interpreting in conflict zones (Baker 2010), those that analyse media visibility of translation and interpreting in public services (PSI) (Campos Freire & Fernandes del Pozo 2011 and Cedillo Corrochano 2016), or the visibility of interpreting in digital media (Táboas Domínguez 2017).

2. The interpreter profession: history and definition

2.1 History

The interpreter profession was born when people from different parts of the world met and needed to communicate. Some testimonies point to the existence of the interpreter profession in Egypt back in the year 3000 BC, where a stone relief on the tomb of a prince from Elephantine depicts an interpreter. Moreover, the Greek historian Herodotus stated that interpreting was a truly professional activity among the professional guilds of Ancient Egypt; and we are aware of the existence of interpreters in other ancient civilisations like Greece or the Roman Empire, where orators like Cicero had already stated that only a bad interpreter would translate word for word. However, interpreters were not always admired in Ancient Rome because they were often slaves, prisoners of war, etc., and were hence not regarded as reliable persons. It was not until the Middle Ages when interpreters became admired for their skills and were even included as members of the Court. The expansion of Christianity in Europe at the time would not have been possible but for the great role played by monks or missionaries acting as interpreters. During the Spanish Conquest, explorers travelled to America with Arabic and Hebrew interpreters, and only realised that these languages were of no use to them after reaching these unknown lands (Alonso Araguás & Baigorri Jalón 2002). However, their eagerness to communicate with the indigenous people led them to kidnap natives to teach them Spanish and later use them as interpreters. Centuries later, expeditions were sent to Africa and Asia where interpretation was crucial. Meanwhile, France emerged as the main power in Europe, thereby making French the language of culture and of diplomacy. This led to a fall in demand for interpreters. However, despite the fact that diplomats

mostly communicated in French, interpreters were still required by emperors, missionaries, traders, etc., in countries that did not follow this trend.

To sum up, the recognition of interpreting as a modern profession only began in the period between World War I and World War II and was definitively consolidated during the Nuremberg Trials and after the creation of multilingual international bodies such as the UN or the EU (Baigorri Jalón 2000).

2.2. Definition

As explained in the previous paragraphs, the definition of interpreting has undergone changes over time to now become a wider concept that currently includes issues such as: cultural transfer, pragmatic implications, functionality and even independence of the target text as a valid product in itself (Alonso Bacigalupe 1998: 15). One of the first formal definitions of an interpreter's task, as we understand it today, was provided by Herbert in 1952 in his handbook on conference interpreting:

> The mission of the interpreter is to help individuals and communities to acquire a fuller knowledge and a deeper understanding of one another, and, what is still more important, a greater respect for one another. Also to come to an agreement if they should want to do so (1952: 3).

Herbert's definition deviates from the traditional prevailing idea that the interpreter is a kind of machine responsible for providing automatic and quick equivalences of words from one language into another. Gile (1995) goes a step further in defining the profession and highlights certain essential elements to understand what interpreting is from the perspective of the interpretative event, which includes important factors such as the communicative function, the communication service, the working environments, the users of the service, the economic conditions, the professional and ethical aspects, etc. Hence interpreting can be considered as a service provided to someone, the success of which depends on many factors. Gentile (1996: 39) also takes up the idea of service, and explicitly includes the place and time contexts, as well as the semantic, semiotic and pragmatic dimensions of the communicative exchange:

> The essence of interpreting skills is to receive a message which is not formulated for the interpreter and to deliver that message in a form and a

character indistinguishable from the original. The message includes all the elements which constitute the act of communication (comprising semantic, pragmatic and semiotic dimensions) in a particular temporal and situational context. The skills of an interpreter therefore extend beyond the linguistic and include the capacity to internalize and transmit the many nuances of a particular situation.

All these definitions, and many others, can help us better understand what interpreting is all about. Alonso (1998: 20) further states that by combining the different elements stated by the above-mentioned authors, we can arrive at a global definition:

Interpretation is a remunerated professional activity and is therefore subject to abidance of professional standards. It consists of transferring a message from a source to a target language for a specific target audience. Such transfer is done within a specific context and situation, seeking pragmatic, semiotic and semantic correspondence of the message, and moreover understanding all the elements that comprise it, in order to achieve full intercultural communication between users of the different languages, and providing the necessary explanations so that such communication is effective[2].

3. Justification: Why study the online reputation of interpreters

Despite the progress made in consolidation of the interpreter profession, there are many current problems faced by this profession in Spain, and particularly noteworthy is the lack of professionalization, understood as a lack of social and institutional recognition of the higher educational training needed to carry out the tasks of an interpreter. The causes underlying this lack of professionalization have been the subject of several studies (Ortega Herráez 2010, Del Pozo Triviño 2013, Blasco Mayor & Del Pozo Triviño 2015, etc.). Two of the recurring and complementary reasons are: a) the limited and vague social projection of the interpreter profession, and b) the fact that the modern professional interpreter figure is a relatively recent one, often mainly associated with conference interpreting, just as the translator figure is closely identified with literary translation.

The lack of professionalization leads to other problems that affect the interpreter profession, namely, the high level of professional intrusiveness

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2. Translated by authors.

(Monzó Nebot & Borja Albi 2005). Professional intrusiveness not only has negative consequences for professional interpreters in terms of labour market access but also leads to a substantial reduction in the quality of interpretation, thereby causing significant problems for users of such linguistic mediation. This is particularly serious in sensitive areas such as public services (police, courts, health, education, etc.), where there is a greater degree of intrusiveness due to the lax procurement procedures applied by the public administrations and the absence of effective quality controls and/or complaint mechanisms (Ortega Herráez 2010, Blasco Mayor & Del Pozo Triviño 2015).

The rise in tourism, the intense migratory processes and the European mobility offered within the Schengen area result in a greater presence and frequent contact with foreigners in Spain, especially in hospitals, schools, police stations and courts. Interpreting is not guaranteed in most public services despite the growing contact with foreigners, and when available, it is mostly provided by unqualified recruited persons. However, the lack of professionalization and poor provision of quality interpreting by the public services generate true linguistic vulnerability situations that hinder effectiveness of the work of professional public servants. Noteworthy are the cases where persons with criminal records were recruited to interpret, for example, in jihadist terrorism investigations[3]. There are many other dramatic situations without media coverage, such as those where minors are used to interpret for parents (Greene et al. 2005), perpetrators are used to communicate with their own victims of gender-based violence (Del Pozo Triviño et al. 2014), volunteers are used to communicate with refugees and/or asylum seekers (León Pinilla et al. 2016) or prison inmates are used to communicate with foreign prisoners[4]. This situation has been repeatedly reported in Spain by

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3. Bandera, M. (2008) *Interior emplea traductores sin garantías en sus investigaciones* (Diario Público): http://www.publico.es/espana/interior-emplea-traductores-garantias-investigaciones.html

4. Peñalosa, Gemma (2008) *La falta de traductores impide a la juez de Fontcalent comunicarse con reos extranjeros* (El Mundo): http://www.elmundo.es/elmundo/2008/03/22/valencia/1206194259.html and El Confidencial Digital (2014) *El aumento de los reclusos islamistas obliga a Prisiones a contratar traductores de dialectos árabes*: https://www.elconfidencialdigital.com/seguridad/islamistas-reclusos-prisiones-dialectos_arabes_0_2351764827.html

the main professional associations, united under the Vértice Network[5], and has also been conclusively documented in the academic field, in particular, through projects and research carried out by the members of the Comunica Network[6], notable among which are the Translation and Interpretation in Criminal Proceedings Project (TIPp)[7] and the Speak Out for Support (SOS-VICS) Project[8].

Job insecurity and instability of interpreters in public services is not unique to the Spanish context, but is also present in countries with older and more varied migration histories, whose interpreting needs in public services are even greater. This is the case, for example, in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States or Australia, where despite having a greater projection of the professional interpreter figure, linguistic vulnerability cases are still being documented and combated.

Therefore, professional intrusiveness and the resultant lower quality of the interpretation services provided both in the public and private sectors, damage the image of interpretation and of persons working as interpreters, but such damage is less frequent in the private sector. This jeopardises the social prestige of the work of interpreters, which in turn contributes to perpetuating the lack of effective professionalism. Despite this being a widespread complaint among professional and academic groups, no special attention has been paid so far to the image of the interpreter profession, either to follow-up or to boost it through specific communication campaigns.

Likewise, there are no studies focused on measuring or analysing the presence of the interpreter profession in the media agenda, nor are there any reports addressing their presence in social networks. The role of social media

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5. The Vértice Network is a grouping of several professional associations of interpreters and translators who monitor and voice the precarious situation of interpretation in public services. Several of its reports can be read on its website: http://www.redvertice.org/p/comunicados.html

6. The Comunica Network is the Permanent Observatory on Translation and Interpretation in the Public Services (PSIT). It is comprised of different Spanish research groups/projects specialized in PSIT, such as the Alfaqueque Group (University of Salamanca), the MIRAS Group (Autonomous University of Barcelona) or the SOS-VICS Project (University of Vigo), among others: http:// red-comunica.blogspot.com.es/

7. http://pagines.uab.cat/tipp/

8. http://sosvicsweb.webs.uvigo.es/

and digital communication is becoming increasingly important in today's information society; hence, monitoring media presence and analysing online reputation are essential to address corporate, institutional and other types of targeted communications.

> Visibility refers to the public presence of an individual or organization in the media, and has an influence on organizational perceptions in times of crisis, buying preferences, and trust (Yang & Kent 2014: 563).

On the date of publication of this article, the only works relating to the visibility of interpreting in the media known to the authors are those carried out by Baker (2010), Campos Freire & Fernandes del Pozo (2011), Cedillo Corrochano (2016) and Táboas Domínguez (2017).

> Drawing on available studies and recent media reports on contemporary conflicts, and adopting a narrative perspective to make sense of the findings, this article focuses on two issues. The first is how translators and interpreters are narrated by other participants in the war zone, including military personnel, war correspondents, mainstream media, alternative media and local populations. The second is how they themselves participate in elaborating the range of public narratives of the conflict that become available to us, and, in so doing, influence the course of the war in ways that are subtle, often invisible, but nevertheless extremely significant (Baker 2010: 197).

The work of Campos Freire & Fernandes del Pozo (2011) and that of Cedillo Corrochano (2016) address the presence of PSIT in digital and social media. Although they have limited methodology, both papers have analysed a large sample and coincide on the invisibility of PSIT in the media landscape. The work of Táboas Domínguez, part of an unpublished Bachelor's Degree dissertation defended at the University of Vigo in 2017, is a first approximation with a modest methodology to the presence of news in three general daily newspapers, but is a good testimony to the incipient interest in this issue.

In view of the above, given the absence of studies and data in this field, we present the following preliminary research work on the online reputation of interpretation in two Spanish digital media in order to help monitor the presence of interpretation in the media and the online reputation of interpreters. This first step towards a better management of the reputation and image of the interpreter figure will contribute to its professionalization.

4. Online reputation of interpreters in Spanish digital media: The case of *La Voz de Galicia* and *El País* (2013-2017)

This paper is a first approach to the media image of the interpreter figure and its online reputation as portrayed in the Spanish digital media. The absence of prior data and research in this area makes it difficult to define the extent of a preliminary study like this one, which in turn limits the scope and representativeness of the results. Nevertheless, this work attempts to portray the current situation, as a first step towards a broader and deeper exploration into the online reputation of the interpreter profession and its evolution.

4.1. Methodology

The methodology used in this study is essentially quantitative. The sample selected to carry out this work was information collected during a five-year period from the electronic versions of two general Spanish reference media: *El País* and *La Voz de Galicia*. These two media were chosen because they ranked second and fifth in the number of readers according to the General Media Study (AIMC 2017). Both are national media but one caters to the national scenario while the other to the regional one (Galicia).

A news corpus of the digital versions of these newspapers was compiled for the period 2013-2017, by collecting information with direct or indirect reference to interpreting or interpreters, and resulted in a total of 37 hits. In order to identify news items for analysis within the framework of this work, the key words "interpretation", "interpreter", "translator", and "translation" were used in the search engines of the digital libraries of the aforementioned newspapers, because interpreter activity is often confused with translator activity. The results that referred only to linguistic interpretation were filtered to remove any results related to (written) translation or interpretation understood as an artistic concept (music, theatre, film interpretation/actors, etc.). Moreover, the results found in corporate blogs or citizen's opinion articles were also excluded, since the aim of this study is to know the online reputation of the interpreter profession resulting from its visibility and treatment in the digital media. Given that the search was carried out by manually typing keywords and despite the exhaustive nature of the search, some news items

may have been missed out because they did not contain any of the keywords used.

The results were subsequently introduced in an individual table[9] for each media by assigning a two-letter code (referring to the name of the media from which they were extracted) followed by a numerical ordinal sequence reflecting the date on which news item was published. The table contains both description and analysis fields to facilitate data processing and further analysis. In the description fields, the keywords used to locate the information item in the digital library of the media are included after the (classification) code. This is followed by the date, section and headline of the journalistic item. Lastly, the URL of the information is indicated. The classification-related fields that appear after the headline identify the interpreting technique, the interpreting modality referred to in the information, and the assessment offered as understood by the authors (neutral, negative or positive).

Using the above data, a first analysis was performed to determine the presence and visibility of interpretation in the Spanish digital media. The scope of the pertinent information and the treatment given to the interpreter figure were then analysed to offer an initial picture of the interpreters' online reputation. The present paper uses a quantitative-qualitative approach for content analysis since a mixed approach is indispensable for carrying out this type of research (Krippendorff 2004: 87).

4.2. Results

The results for the period 2013-2017 show that a total of 37 news items on interpreting were published; 9 in *La Voz de Galicia* and 28 in *El País*. The information in *La Voz de Galicia* was published in the following sections: International (3), Sports (2), Galicia (1) and the remaining 3 in local editions (2 in Vigo City and 1 in Ferrol City). The news items published in *El País* were mostly published in the following sections: International (9), Spain (4) and Society (2), the rest were published in other heterogeneous sections, such as Future Planet (1), Púnica Operation (1), In-Depth (1), Front Line (1), Babelia (1), The United States (1), The Chronicle (1), Videos (1), Culture

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9. See Annexes 1 and 2.

(1), as well as 2 items in regional editions (Catalonia 1, Galicia 1) and 2 of them were not included in any particular section.

Despite the clear limitation of not having data on the total volume of news items published in the digital version of these newspapers, which would have served to establish the ratio of news on interpreting to that of the agenda of the media analysed in this study, these results nevertheless allow us to infer that the presence of interpreting or interpreter figure in the digital media consulted is, at most, scarce. As might be expected due to the intercultural nature of the profession, a sizeable part of the information published in both newspapers appears in the International section, but also striking is the fact that the rest of the information published appears in very diverse sections, and therefore the inference of an almost anecdotal appearance of interpreting.

As regards visibility of the different interpreting techniques, the most visible one is liaison interpreting (28 news items). There were just 2 news items from *El País* that explicitly referred to simultaneous interpreting and to transcription of telephone tapping. The remaining news items (7) did not refer to the technique used, and no mention was made of consecutive interpreting.

It is worth studying both the results of the interpreting techniques and the modalities used, since one can also infer which technique was used through the modalities. The most mentioned modality was public services interpreting (15), followed by military or conflict zones interpreting (11) and conference interpreting (4), and to a lesser extent diplomatic interpreting (3), interpreting in history (2), in sports (1) or in the media (1). Liaison interpreting is the most visible technique because most news items speak of public services and military interpreting. Conference interpreting is the next most visible modality because simultaneous interpreting appears just once.

After obtaining the visibility results, the next step was to assess the image of interpreting or the interpreter figure portrayed in the information mentioned. To this end, as indicated in the Methodology section, the full contents of the news items were read to determine whether the assessment of the interpretation/interpreter figure was positive, negative or neutral, although it should be noted that there may be an involuntary bias in the assessment made by the authors. In some cases, despite the absence of an explicit assessment value on the interpreter/interpretation in the pertinent news items, these were evaluated as "positive" whenever they mentioned that the lack

of interpretation contributed to a violation of rights. Clear examples are: the EP12 news item in which the headline itself already explains that the absence of an interpreter caused serious harm: "An Algerian mother signed an adoption in the Xunta in the absence of an interpreter", and the EP14 news item entitled "Deported without understanding anything".

The overall assessment obtained was 21 "positive" items, 9 "neutral" items, and 7 "negative" items. The important presence of "positive" information is surprising given that, *a priori*, there have been no communication measures aimed at promoting the reputation of the interpreter profession by professional groups. The breakdown by media is *La Voz de Galicia*: 4 "neutral", 3 "positive" and 2 "negative" items, while for *El País* there were: 18 "positive", 5 "neutral" and 5 "negative" items. Although a slight variation can be observed between the media, the fact is that, for the purposes of interpreting the data, most news items were either "positive" or "neutral", and the "negative" items were the least ones (*La Voz de Galicia*) or the number was similar to the neutral items (*El País*).

Table. Summary of results

Total news items found	*La Voz de Galicia*	9
	El País	28
Techniques	Simultaneous	1
	Consecutive	0
	Liaison	28
	Transcription of Telephone Tapping	1
	Unknown	7
Modalities	Military	11
	History	2
	Public Services	15
	Sports	1
	Mass Media	1
	Diplomatic	3
	Conference	4

Global assessment	Neutral	9
	Positive	21
	Negative	7

Source: Prepared by authors.

4.3. Discussion of results

Without prejudice to the caution required when looking at the results from this preliminary study due to the said limitations, the analysis of the results obtained for the period and the media analysed indicate that there is a poor presence of news items relating to interpreters in digital media (37 news items over a period of 5 years). A greater presence in the national press versus the Galician press is observed with more visibility of liaison interpreting and the public services interpreting modality, as well as higher presence of positive information.

Although the results show that the overall assessment of the interpreter profession is positive, the low visibility and heterogeneous nature of the news items (both in varied journalistic genres that have not been dealt with in this article, as well as in the sections in which they appear) leads us to the conclusion that the online reputation of interpreters is practically non-existent. The authors consider that it would be interesting to compare the results of this study with other works done on the visibility and reputation of translation in the media (Montero Küpper & Luna Alonso 2018), since data from the translation field may widen the scope and help to better interpret the online reputation of the interpreter profession due to the prevailing confusion between interpreting and translation.

5. Conclusion

These preliminary results offer an x-ray of the (almost non-visible) online reputation of the interpreter profession which can be used as a diagnosis for preparing a subsequent coordinated communication strategy between professional groups, with a view to boosting a more consolidated presence of interpreting as a contemporary liberal profession and reinforcing the positive values associated with it.

The corpus in future studies should include other general digital media in order to improve sample quality. Besides expanding the corpus, one would also need to use a more efficient compilation methodology other than manual typing in search engines, to at least guarantee that the results offered by the search engines are exhaustive. A wider corpus would also permit the study of any differences that may exist between the news items in the several media. Additionally, the variables used to determine the assessment (positive, negative and neutral) need improving, since the analysis and evaluation of the information will become increasingly complex as sample size increases. Moreover, these variables will have to be fine tuned to the ones needed to track the online reputation.

Future studies on the online reputation of interpreters should evaluate the news items content beyond the assessment offered in this preliminary study, such as, for example, the positioning of interpretation as a primary, secondary or anecdotal information theme, or its appearance in the title or header of the news item. On the subject of content analysis, and especially in relation to the study of visibility of the different techniques and modalities used, worth highlighting are the issues to which interpreting is usually related (rights, violation of rights, diversity, racism, xenophobia, politics, etc.), and therefore, the need for incorporating other academic disciplines into the research on the visibility of interpreting (communication studies, public relations, marketing, sociology, discourse analysis, etc.).

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