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Sworn translators: a neglected species?

An interdisciplinary study about the early academisation of public translators' training in Argentina

1/2021

DOI: 10.25365/cts-2021-3-1-4

Herausgegeben am / Éditée au /
Edited at the: Zentrum für
Translationswissenschaft der
Universität Wien

ISSN: 2617-3441

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This study analyses the genesis of the academisation process of sworn translation and interpretation in Argentina. As early as in the mid-1860s, a study programme was developed at the University of Buenos Aires and the degree of public translator and interpreter has been granted by this institution ever since. This is a remarkable fact because even today it is the State itself that has developed different mechanisms to validate public translation and interpretation competencies and interventions in public matters, and there are scarce undergraduate programmes in higher education institutions conferring this degree. The study analyses the ancillary role of these professionals as court assistants, linked to the political sovereignty and identity of the modern states, and deals with its early academisation in Argentina. It examines the socio-political and historical factors that made it possible for this country to devise, deliver and award this degree, and explores what the early academisation of this profession meant for translation and interpretation, and how the degree evolved and gave birth to a particular professional ethos.

Keywords: public translators' identity, early academisation, State-University alliance, court interpreters (ELF), German-American identity

Zum Zitieren des Artikels / Pour citer l'article / To cite the article:

Plencovich, María Cristina; Bacco, Silvia; Rivas, Diana & Jeansalle, Lidia (2021): Sworn translators: a neglected species? An interdisciplinary study about the early academisation of public translators' training in Argentina, *Chronotopos* 3 (1), 53-73. DOI: 10.25365/cts-2021-3-1-4



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Introduction

Research about the translator and interpreter professions has increased steadily worldwide. These professions have been thoroughly studied, and their social, cognitive, and metacognitive processes have been meticulously scrutinized as well as their historical origins. However, when it comes to the so-called sworn or certified translators – *public translators* in Argentina – there is relatively little research about the historical genesis and development of this profession in Spanish-speaking countries; the fact is that it is almost invisible. Some might reasonably argue that such a situation is commensurate with the lack of systematic programmes or courses leading to a sworn/certified or public translator/interpreter undergraduate degree. This is true in many of these countries, but it is not a universal principle.¹ In fact, in Argentina, this

¹ Despite the fact that there are many Spanish-speaking countries where sworn translators are certified by the State, there are not many where a specific university degree programme is a *condi-*

university programme – which has fused both translators and interpreters' competencies² in one degree – can be traced to 1865 when it was first established at Buenos Aires University.

To gain knowledge about the genesis and development of this profession, and understand how history forged its identity, we decided to conduct a study about public translators' and interpreters' undergraduate degree (from now on *public translators' degree*) in Argentina to determine (i) what characterized the identity of interpreters and translators in the pre-academisation period in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata and in the independentist era; (ii) what sociopolitical and historical factors made it possible for Argentina to devise, deliver and award this specific degree as early as in the mid-1860s, (iii) what the academisation of this profession meant for the emerging nation and the role that the University and the State played in this early alliance, and (iv) how the degree and the profession evolved in the country.

In the following sections, we will briefly present some aspects of the profession in Argentina, the research background of this article, the theoretical framework, and some methodology notes. Theoretical underpinnings for this article are drawn mainly from the work of sociologists, historians and linguists, given the interdisciplinary nature of its epistemic object. Then, we will proceed chronologically to present the most important findings together with a discussion about them in the light of the theoretical framework. The study is closed with some concluding remarks and questions raised for further research.

What does a public translator do?

The degree of *public translators (traductores públicos)* in Argentina includes sworn translators, interpreters and expert witnesses' competencies. These professionals are authorized to provide sworn translations, also known as certified translations. Public translators endorse the documents they translate with their signature and seal. This means that they take full responsibility for the faithfulness of the document produced by them concerning its original or source document. This endorsement grants the document an official, formal status and a legal value that is equivalent to the original document.

tio sine qua non for the professional practice. At present, Argentina and Uruguay are the only countries in America to have a university degree programme of Public Translator. The rest of the countries have different *licenciaturas*, teachers training programmes in foreign languages and undergraduate degrees for generalist translators.

²Notwithstanding the different processes involved in sworn translators' and interpreters' training and education (COLLADOS AÍS & FERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ 2001), in Argentina both competencies are included under the umbrella of *public translation*, covering translation and interpretation training and profession. In Spain, the official name of this professional changed in 2009 by a Royal Decree (Real Decreto 2002/2009) from *intérprete jurado* (sworn interpreter) to *traductor-intérprete jurado* (sworn translator and interpreter) (GARCIA LUQUE 2017).

In this country, to be certified as a public translator, candidates have to attend 4-to-5-year university programmes (National Law 20.305) leading to the professional degree of public translator. They also have to take an oath and register at the pertinent jurisdiction of the translator's professional bodies (*colegios de traductores públicos*). These regulatory associations have codes of ethics by which their members must abide, which is a guarantee for quality and transparency in the profession. In addition, if they want to work as expert witnesses in courts, they have to periodically register with different courts and jurisdictions. Such registration is made through the translators' collegiate bodies which have a list of the public translators who have registered with them to work as expert witnesses.³ In brief, their professional practice is enabled by three main instances: the university degree of public translator, the enrolment with the body governing the professional registration, and the register with a state dependency or office (judicial system) to work as expert witnesses.⁴

As mentioned, the public translators' degree encompasses both translators and interpreters' professional competencies, which may be developed privately or in public settings. Public translators may translate legal documents—such as birth certificates, affidavits, articles of incorporation, letters rogatory, passports—or other kinds of texts (reports, manuals, scientific or technological articles, etc.) filed by the court, parties, or any other entities (for example, *amicus curiae*) in court proceedings. They also work as expert witnesses in court settings.

As public interpreters, they enable communication between speakers of minority and majority languages from different countries in court and other institutional settings (civil registry offices, health facilities, social welfare offices, police stations, etc.). Additionally, they may work for the Legislative Power in the Translators Corps as both public translators and interpreters. In the Executive Power, they also work in diplomacy as interpreters, enabling communication among leaders, officials and citizens

³ The CTPCBA (Public Translators Association of the City of Buenos Aires), for instance, has a roster of about 7500 public translators, out of which only about 150 have enrolled to work as expert witnesses in courts (<https://www.traductores.org.ar/>).

⁴ At present, in Spanish-speaking countries, only Uruguay has a university undergraduate degree of public translator awarded by the Universidad de la República (1976) and a voluntary association. In Chile, it is the State itself through the Department of Translators and Interpreters that is in charge of official translations. In Costa Rica, translators are certified by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Venezuela, translators have to take a test at the Ministry of Domestic Affairs and Justice. In Colombia, translators *must* have a Certificate of Suitability issued by the National University of Colombia, University of Antioquia or the Ministry of Justice. In Paraguay, translators register with the Supreme Court to work as court translators and interpreters. Mexican *peritos traductores jurados* are endorsed by the Superior Court of Justice. In Peru, the position of *Traductor Público Juramentado* is obtained through a competitive public contest organized by the state. In Panamá, there are no university grades related to foreign languages. Then, those willing to work as sworn translators have to take an exam with the Ministry of Education before two examiners. In many of these countries, except for Uruguay, the public characteristic of translation seems to be an attribute, in some cases even an ephemeral one, which is annexed to foreign languages degrees.

and their foreign counterparts. Interpreters working on behalf of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are often an essential component of the country's foreign policy efforts. They translate treaties and take part in any activity where language differences would otherwise be a barrier to communication. They may also work as the president's official interpreter and in many government dependencies. Therefore, this profession has social and political importance (ŠARČEVIĆ 2000).

Research background

There are some historical studies about translators and interpreters in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata (1776-1814) (ARNAUD 1950; PLENCOVICH et al. 2020; WITTHAUS 1981) but we do not know any specific research about the history of the public translation academisation process in Argentina and its links to the State ideology. However, there is an exhaustive article about the accreditation of the public translators' profession vis-à-vis sworn translators in Spain (VIGIER MORENO 2013), and some other comparative research carried out from a synchronic perspective (VIGIER MORENO et al. 2012). The Argentine professional collegiate system is also thoroughly described by Nafá Waasaf (2003).

In Spain, it is not until 1870 (PEÑARROJA FA 2000) that the regulation concerning the profession can be considered as that of the sworn translators and interpreters. However, *stricto sensu*, the academisation of the sworn translator profession in most Spanish-speaking countries is still pending and appointments for the profession, in general, are made by the States, which have their recruiting criteria.⁵ For example, at present the appointment as sworn translator and interpreter in Spain is made by the *Oficina de Interpretación de Lenguas* of the Foreign Affairs and Cooperation Ministry, which has its system of admission to this position. In this respect, there is an interesting report of the European Commission carried out by Pym et al. (2012) about the status of the profession in Europe, which has not varied much since the report date (see also BAJČIĆ & DOBRIĆ BASANEŽE 2016). Pym and his collaborators (2012) stated that there were three different ways in which the translation of official documents was handled in Europe:

[...] In some countries, translations are certified by notaries, or are not certified at all; in others, a corps of authorised or sworn translators is tested and certified by a state institution of some kind; and in a third set of countries, authorised/sworn translators can be recognised on the basis of educational qualifications alone (PYM et al. 2012: 3).

However, the educational qualifications mentioned mostly refer to the Bachelor's or Master's degrees in Foreign Languages or general competencies for translation/interpretation but not for public/certified/sworn translation.⁶

⁵ Some of them rely on their own examinations with or without prior training courses or along with university degrees in foreign languages or in general translation and interpreter competencies. See previous footnote.

⁶ As regards research about professional insertion, there has been an increase in studies about competencies similar to those of public translators due to the publication of FITISPOS International Journal, founded in 2014 by the research group of training and research in Public Services

We believe that there is scarce research about public translation as a subfield of translation history compared to literary translation, for example. This belief is supported by bibliometric data provided by BITRA.⁷ It seems as if translation historians were only slowly turning their attention to pragmatic translation/translators. In addition, within pragmatic translation studies, Claire-Hélène Lavigne (2006) emphasized that out of the many articles that have been written over the years on the subject of legal translation, only a few address the history of legal translation. Although public translation is not the same as legal translation (CHIESA 2009, TIERSMA & SOLAN 2012), we may also argue that those researching translators' training or their professional insertion are only slowly taking into account historical dimensions. Hence, we believe public translators are a neglected species in translation history.

Theoretical framework and methodological notes

We developed a theoretical interdisciplinary framework for scaffolding a historical and critical approach to the Argentine public translator profession based on the interplay of some main concepts: academisation, profession, professional identity, and trust.

Academisation is the process whereby a profession becomes a graduate occupation, giving shape to study programmes delivered at university or other higher education institutions (HEIs). These institutions are different from centres or institutes managed directly by the State, such as military, security, diplomacy institutions, or others. The concept of academisation refers to processes by which the modern states establish institutions and practices modelled on mainstream academia, and actively use markers of said institutions, such as admission standards, internal systems, quality standards, assessment and evaluation, and accountability to overview the education and training of such professions. However, in democratic political settings, they do not intervene directly in the government, management, and administration of universities.

The academisation of professions is a phenomenon that occurred mainly in the 19th century when study programmes were created or included at universities or other HEIs institutional settings. These institutions provided specific education, and granted university degrees that accredited the skills of professionals.

In most cases, professions existed before their academisation. There were even centennial professions that were academized late in that century, such as Architecture and Engineering. The former, for example, had its own training system within pro-

Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) at the University of Alcalá (Spain) (VALERO-GARCÉS 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2019, 2020; WALLACE & MONZÓ-BENOT 2019). See also Mikkelson (1996).

⁷ BITRA (Bibliografía de Interpretación y Traducción) is a multilingual database developed by Alcalá University (Spain) which in July 2021 had over 85.000 entries (<http://dti.ua.es/es/bitra/introduccion.html>). When searching *translation studies*, we retrieved 12815 references, out of which a *historical studies* search brought back 920, mostly in English (759). *Sworn translation* (together with legal translation) registered 185 hits, only 8 about history. PSIT studies had 57 references, out of which 5 were about (modern) history.

fessional guilds or associations, closely linked to professional practice (PLENCOVICH 2018).⁸ In this study, our focus lies on the process of academisation as a reflection or epiphenomenon of the ideology of modern states.

As regards professions, we drew in part on the Bourdieusian theory of profession as socially constructed fields (BOURDIEU 2000a). Likewise, professions' formal or informal training are conditioned by historical processes that modulate the curricula and the professional profiles. History also conditions the professional recruitment systems. In the case of translators and interpreters, Cronin (2002) developed a theory of autonomous and heteronomous systems described below.

Undoubtedly, translation is a socio-cultural process (Pym et al. 2006) which complies with institutional practices (linguistic system, educational system, professional organization), norms, and collective intent, making possible translators' power of agency. Translators' professional identity hinges on the logic of the educational training systems and that of the professional field (Bourdieu 2000a), which condition their intellectual production (SAPIRO 2008). This collective identity is historically forged through socio-political dialogues with different institutions and actors. Above all, it is a profession based on *trust* (PYM 2015, 2020), which is permeated by historical processes.

We believe that trust is a social and attitudinal construct that is also faceted by history. It means belief in the reliability or capacity of someone or something (RIZZI et al. 2019) and, in translation, it entails the emotions and logics by which people allow translators to speak and write on behalf of others. Translation has implications for at least three levels of trust: interpersonal (in the case of public translators, mainly between translators and clients), institutional (trust in the profession), and regime-enacted (principles that enable coordinated actions leading to the reception and production of translation) (RIZZI et al. 2019:14). These levels can be associated with the concepts of *thick* trust, based on interpersonal relationships, and *thin* trust hinging on institutional issues.

This exploratory study can be placed within the sociohistorical turn of research in translation studies (ANGELELLI 2012) that focuses on translators/interpreters (in this case, sworn or *public translators*) and the institutions relating to their professions. The general epistemological approach to the research was hermeneutical-comprehensive. Translation is not only a material practice but a dialogue among cultural contexts shaped by history. In addition, it is an interpretive act and process entailing ethical responsibilities and political commitments (VENUTI 2012).

The historical findings were put into dialogue with the current structure of the public translator degree programme and its contextual framework, which constitutes what Marrou (1954) considered as the construction and comprehension of the historical process in the light of the present time (*sub lucis praesentis*), thus making the past meaningful.

⁸ Exceptions to this generalization are the professions of Law and Medicine, which were part of the university degree programmes from the university creation in medieval times.

As Hermans pointed out (2006), translation is a process of negotiating difference, and as “difference comes in many guises” (HERMANS 2006: 9), translation historical studies deal with the same logics and claim for interdisciplinary approaches. From an epistemological standpoint, disciplinary, discrete approaches are poorly prepared to capture the particularity of the local and the sheer variety of phenomena coming within its purview. Thus, we believe that translation history is an interdisciplinary field (NICOLESCU 2014).

Our research team is made up of public translators who also specialize in other disciplines – educational sciences, political education, history of education, technical, scientific and legal translation – something that favoured an interdisciplinary approach to the object of study, with the advantages that this type of study involves, as well as with its difficulties (FRICKEL & MATHIEU & PRAINSACK 2017).

Results and Discussion

This section will deal with the major findings of this study and their discussion. It is organized in subsections, according to the study goals.

(i) Pre-academisation period in the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata (1776-1810) and in the independentist era: translators/interpreters/ or lenguaraces

The Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata was established in 1776 from several former Spanish dependencies in South America and roughly comprised the present-day territories of Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Uruguay, and Equatorial Guinea in Africa. Its capital was Buenos Aires. Its establishment was part of the late Enlightenment Bourbon Reforms on commercial grounds – Buenos Aires was then a major spot for illegal trade – as well as on geopolitical concerns due to the growing interest of competing foreign powers in the area.

In the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata there was a long tradition of the professional practice of translators and interpreters before the independence era. It was rooted in the Spanish tradition regulated by the Laws of the Indies.⁹ They were called *intérpretes* (interpreters) or *lenguaraces*, the latter a Spanish term now out of use applied to those who master two or more languages, which has some derogatory nuances.¹⁰ These interpreters were present in the Spanish process of the conquest and territorialization of America and the importance of translation during this period is well-documented (VALDEÓN 2017). In the Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata, they played an important role in the military, diplomatic, scientific, and commercial exchange with indigenous peoples. As in this Viceroyalty most indigenous languages were only in oral use, interpreters’ functions prevailed over translators’ competencies.

⁹ However, it must also be pointed out that in native America, translation was widespread practice, long before Columbus arrived, notably at the courts of Tenochtitlan and Cuzco (BROTHERSTON 2002: 168). There is also evidence of these practices in inscriptions in parallel texts.

¹⁰ In the Río de la Plata, they were also called *lenguas* (tongues).

The Spanish empire used the two systems of recruiting interpreters described by Cronin (2002: 101) for colonial governments: a *heteronomous* system, which involved recruiting local interpreters and teaching them Spanish, and an *autonomous* system whereby they trained their own subjects in the indigenous language or languages.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, religious orders – mainly Jesuits¹¹ and Franciscans, coworking with indigenous peoples – contributed to the dissemination, teaching, and systematic learning of indigenous languages in evangelization and intercultural processes. They devised teaching and grammar books, glossaries, and dictionaries through translation and interpretation, and promoted *cátedras de lenguas* (institutionalized language courses/university chairs) which were created by law at universities, *reales audiencias* (royal courts) and chancelleries in the Spanish territories (ZOLÓRZANO PEREYRA [1648] 1945). These *cátedras* provided the indigenous common languages for priests and were in charge of native American speaking teachers who were chosen by Spanish and indigenous boards. Not only did these teachers teach these courses, but they also examined students thoroughly and certified their knowledge. Their services were officially paid, and priests needed to take these exams and get through them before indoctrinating indigenous peoples.

During the Argentine independentist era (circa 1814-1853), there were records of interpreters' diplomas conferred by the government of the province of Buenos Aires or by the Army, awarded to Santiago Avendaño (1834-1874), held captive for seven years among *Ranqueles*, to participate in the government's frontier expansion campaigns and perform as an interpreter or *lenguaraz* for the Government of Buenos Aires and the Ranquel nation (HUX 2004; PÉREZ GRASS 2013). In one of his letters (dated July 1857) he revealed that he had received three diplomas:

Master Barros addresses me as lenguaraz, an expression that I would have never expected from this gentleman, for being the language of vulgar people; well, I am not one – Mr Editor – because lenguaraz is the one who babbles the dialect with difficulty, and this is not my case. Well, not only do I speak it regularly, but I write it with some precision, and I believe myself competent enough to negotiate sensitive issues. The three diplomas I have, honoured me greatly: one granted to me in [18]52, whereby the Government appointed me interpreter of the province, another one in [18]56, whereby I was recognized as an interpreter of the State of Buenos Aires in the Army of the Southern Border. The venerable General Escalada, also in another diploma, addressed me as his honoured and intelligent interpreter. How is it possible that now I am worthy of the epithet of lenguaraz? (Santiago Avendaño, Reply to Colonel Barros in Durán 2006 [1857]: 263, our translation).

¹¹ The Society of Jesuits was expelled from America in 1767, and when the Franciscan friars took over the missions among the Mapuche people, they were appalled to see the extent of the Jesuit instruction and their linguistic work, which had reached hundreds of people and pioneered interest in indigenous languages and cultures (FOERSTER 1996, FURLONG CARDIFF 1964, 1969, 1992, NEWSON 2020, PRIETO 2011).

However, all his background was based on a painfully earned¹² expertise and suitability for the position and not on *ad hoc* formal training.

During the independentist era, the system of recruitment was *sui generis*. Despite the colonial setting of Cronin's discussion (2002), his distinction between both methods of interpreters' recruitment can be mapped onto this period also and shows some special traits. Avendaño's case fits into the situation described by Cronin (2002), whereby the interpreter is returned to his language and culture of origin, having retraced the path from his B-language (in this case *Ranquel*) to his A-language (Spanish). Could he return as *native*? May he be suspected of duplicity? (CRONIN 2002: 57; DRAGOVIĆ-DROUET 2007; SCHARLAU/RIBAS 2003).

Avendaño and some other captives of the time that were "used" as interpreters by military forces and diplomatic officers at the Buenos Aires internal border, had Spanish as their mother tongue. Therefore, nobody had to teach them Spanish because they had been abducted in their infancy and knew the language. Likewise, nobody had to teach them the *Ranquel* or *Mapuche* language because they had learnt it for many years in immersion processes until they were able to escape from their captors.¹³

At that time, interpreters' and translators' identities should be understood from the perspective of the political term encompassed by the concept of nation as an entity defined by descent, culture, and aspiration. It was clear in the case of the aboriginal groups, but in the case of the *bonaerenses*,¹⁴ it was more a political and warlike aspiration and disputed project, which had to be fought on the territory with the hinterland provincial forces and the *Ranquel* nation in the south.

Avendaño's letter makes transparent the importance he gives to interpreters' competencies and their accreditation, the derogatory nuances that the word "lenguaraz" had at that moment and, above all, the idea of trust. This concept pervaded his exchanges with General Escalada and when he mentioned the *sensitive issues* he had to negotiate, he is illustrating an instance of thick trust. He also refers to the symbolic power diplomas have to shape reality by acting on its representation. According to Bourdieu/Raymond & Adamson (transl.) (2000b), credentials – like aristocratic titles and academic qualifications – extend in a durable way the value of their bearer by increasing the extent and the intensity of the belief in their value.

(ii) Sociopolitical and historical factors in the upsurge of modern states

Since their advent in the 19th century, modern states have been characterized by four essential elements: a permanent population, a defined territory, a type of govern-

¹² However, in his Memories, he stated that he was well-treated and respected by *Ranqueles* – they called him *el cristianito que habla con los papeles* (the little Christian who speaks to papers) (AVENDAÑO 2004: 162).

¹³ Girls and women were also abducted by native nations for work, trade, or mixed-ethnic unions (ROTKER 2002; MANSILLA 1967; PERNA 2016).

¹⁴ Pertaining to the Buenos Aires Province.

ment, and sovereignty. These qualifications were reaffirmed later in 1933 by the Montevideo Interamerican Convention, which concluded that a State is a person of international law (VANOSI 2013).

Sovereignty is the most exclusive element of states because without it no State can exist. As the supreme State power, sovereignty has internal and external dimensions. Internal sovereignty means the power of the State to order and regulate the activities of all the people, groups, and institutions which are at work within its territory. In this study, we will focus on external sovereignty, which entails the full freedom of the State to participate in the activities of the community of nations and the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

Each State has the sovereign power to formulate and act based on its independent foreign policy. It is this particular constituent when foreign states speak different languages from the sovereign State, that has given rise to the profession of public translators and interpreters. These professionals enable communication among states speaking different languages on public matters, mainly diplomatic, military, political, civil and commercial exchanges. As already stated, through their signatures and seals, public translators and court interpreters give faith that exchanges and documents are true and faithful to original texts (both oral or written) that have been produced before them in court or other settings.

Public translators accompanied the Argentine national organization process from its inception in 1853. The Argentine Constitution of that year promoted European immigration in its preamble, and its 25th article prohibited any barriers to immigration. This article, together with the Immigration and Colonization Law of 1876, and several governmental policies, helped foster immigration.

Public translators and interpreters reinforced Argentine sovereignty in the many transactions with non-Spanish speaking countries and in migratory issues which took place during the great immigration waves to Argentina from many countries of the world, especially in the late 19th and early 20th century. These waves consisted mostly of Italian and Spanish immigrants, along with other nationalities such as Ukrainians, Poles, Austro-Hungarians (mainly Croatians), Russians, French, Welsh, English, Germans and Swedish, among others. It is estimated that the country received over seven million immigrants between 1870 and 1930 (DEVOTO 1989).

This immigration policy was supported by the diplomat and political theorist Juan Bautista Alberti (1810-1884), who wrote *Bases and starting points for the political organization of the Argentine Republic* (1852), a draft for the new constitution and a political agenda for the country. He attributed most of the problems of Argentina to its low population and vast territory and his dictum was “to govern is to populate”.

As mentioned, in this article we focus on the academisation of the public translator's training; in other words, we take as a starting point the systematic and institutionalized training of this professional at an educational facility, which sets entrance requirements, in terms of age and training, and some system of knowledge delivery for the degree. In this sense, we understand by academisation the training or accreditation process that occurs in a body other than a state dependency or those that govern professional performance (PLENCOVICH 2018).

However, by placing this concept in the 19th century, some distinctive political nuances are added to the term based on the ideology of modern states. The origin of the diploma of public translator issued by an educational, autonomous institution dates to the late 1860s when the country was at the beginning of the national organization process.

In July 1868, the Ministry of Government of the Province of Buenos Aires published in the Official Gazette a decree signed by Alsina, which regulated how to get the degree of Public Translator.¹⁵

Decree on Public Translators
Buenos Aires, 17 July 1868.

It has been the practice until today that those who wish to obtain the certificate of Public Translators appear themselves before the Government without having produced information that proves the morality and good conduct of the person requesting it, which is extremely inconvenient because this certification purports that the holder can exercise a position of trust, to which it is added that translations make faith in trials and translators are the ones that decide many times in the resolution of important matters; and there are no fixed rules established to date, to which the interested parties must conform to prove suitability; For these reasons, the Government decrees:

Article 1: All those who wish to be conferred the certification of Public Translators shall produce before one of the courts of the first instance the information that practice and current provisions require to qualify for the positions of Notary Public, Prosecutor, and others, to record the morality and good conduct.

Article 2: Once the information has been approved, the interested parties will present themselves to the Rector of the University, so that he can receive the exam, presiding over the board, which will be made up of language professors (Buenos Aires, Official Gazette, 17 July 1868, our translation).

At that time, there were only two universities in Argentina, the University of Córdoba (1613), located inland, and the University of Buenos Aires (1821) situated near the Buenos Aires port. The institution mentioned by the Decree is the University of Buenos Aires, in which there are records¹⁶ about the first public translator exams taken by Martín de Sarratea to get the degree. They refer to at least three courses in Latin and two in English, each lasting one year.

Concerning the public translators training, the State could have furnished other means for validating translators' expertise, due to the ancillary role the profession had in State affairs. For example, it could have used its own *in-house* training centres as it did (and continues doing) with other professions, such as diplomacy, higher

¹⁵ Some months later, on 1st September 1868, through Decree No. 6675, the Department of Foreign Relations appointed Martín de Sarratea on behalf of the Vice President of the Republic in office as the official translator of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This was the first official appointment of the position at the national level.

¹⁶ Book I of Public Translators Final Exams and Book II of Midterm Exams at the University of Buenos Aires (1865-1869); page 37 (1865), pages 48 and 92 (1866), pages 108 and 164 (1869). University of Buenos Aires, Division of Degrees and Programmes, 1865-1869.

ranks of military officials' training, and others; however, it resorted to the university. This historical fact was a mark of the autonomy of the university and underpinned the relationship between this institution and the State.

Later, the Civil Code drawn up by jurist Dalmacio Vélez Sarsfield in 1869 referred to the profession in some sections, such as the one about public deeds, which states that they must be drafted in the national language, and that if the parties do not speak it, the deed must be drafted

in exact conformity with a rough draft signed by the parties themselves in the presence of the notary, who shall certify to the act, and to the acknowledgement of the signatures, if the parties did not sign it in his presence, after its translation by the public translators, and if there is no such translator, by one appointed by the judge. (Argentine Civil Code, Section 999, translated into English by Frank L. JOANNINI)¹⁷

(iii) Meaning of the academisation of this profession and of the role that the university and the State played in this early setting

The early academisation of this profession in Argentina was intended as a seal of quality. It represented the will of the State to have independent professionals bearing university degrees and working as auxiliary officers having sound training. At the same time, it was an accolade of the state legal system given to universities, which had preceded the State constitution in centuries, and the wish of aligning them with national policies.¹⁸

In this respect, the new State shifted from a closed system of directly recruiting its public translators and interpreters, to an expert knowledge system (the university) of selecting, training, and assessing candidates mainly based on knowledge expertise and ethical principles. The idea of trust also shifted from thick to thin trust.

The State trusted in the expertise and independence of the university to assure that these professionals had the corresponding competencies to fulfil the position of public translators. However, to have the degree was a necessary but not sufficient condition because the candidate had to file with government entities good conduct certificates and fulfil other requirements (See page 1, for the present requirements to work as a Public Translator in Argentina).

Unlike the preceding period, translators' competencies prevailed over the interpreters' functions in consonance with the new nation bureaucratic written needs. The idea of the public translation as an authoritative text, almost self-produced, pervaded

¹⁷ There is also another reference to the translation into Spanish of wills (Civil Code, article 3663), and of sections from other Codes, such as the Criminal Code and the Procedural Code.

¹⁸ It could also be considered as a strategy of transferring the costs of training of a State that was consolidating at that time and which did not have either the size or the resources to afford that very necessary endeavour.

the period and the translators' invisibility had a literal more than a metaphorical meaning.¹⁹

Besides, the field of translation/interpretation shifted from military and geopolitical issues to diplomatic, civil, commercial, and criminal matters. Languages also changed from native American and African languages²⁰ (ARNAUD 1950) to most European and some Asian languages.

Notwithstanding this period of harmonic relationships between the State and the University, shortly after (in 1880), the first university law (Avellaneda Law) was passed in the country, setting restrictions to university autonomy. However, the *quasi-public* degree of public translator remained within the university system.

(iv) Degree and professional evolution in the country

It was not within our scope to delve into the historical track of the degree programme or the profession in Argentina, on which there are exhaustive works (ARNAUD 1950; MAGEE & PEREIRO 2008; NITTI 1966; WITTHAUS 1981), but to refer to its genesis and early academisation and see how they gave birth to a particular professional *ethos*. The formal education and training of the Argentine public translator took place early, an uncommon fact at least in most Spanish-speaking countries for a profession in which suitability and performance preceded training. It should be borne in mind that, in the European Higher Education area, *ad hoc* training even for generalist translators only records a few decades in some countries, despite their long professional practice (cf. CÁCERES WÜRSIG 2004; CÁCERES WÜRSIG & PÉREZ GONZÁLEZ 2003).

The study programme underwent many changes from its start. At first, it was a minor degree within the University of Buenos Aires that changed its academic location until it was finally established at the Law School where it is nowadays.²¹ In time, the same degree was also taught at the National University of Córdoba. At present, in Argentina the degree is awarded at 23 universities, public or privately-run (PLENCOVICH et al. 2020).

Curriculum designs have some variations related to the different universities departments (facultades) where the degree is taught, although all of them have the same profile and competencies due to legal prescriptions. These designs underwent three epistemological turns along with their evolution: a juridical turn, a linguistic turn,

¹⁹Even today, notwithstanding the mandatory statement written by public translators attesting that the translation is a true translation into a certain language of the original document written in another language, and the submission of the original before the translated version, the translated document seems to become the original one.

²⁰ Especially when in civil or criminal matters, *bozales* or *bozalones* were involved. This term was applied to an African who had recently arrived from his or her country and had difficulties in understanding Spanish.

²¹ At present, at the University of Buenos Aires, the public translator degree is awarded in 120 majority and minority languages (Annex II. EXP-UBA 212.179/2012).

and a communicative turn, which reflect some general translation and interpretation viewpoints (PLENCOVICH et al. 2020).

Another characteristic of the Public Translator degree in Argentina is that its academisation was previous to that of the general translator. The *generalist* translator degree was created at some universities in the last third of the 20th century, and – even today – only suitability and performance may be enough to work as such in publishing and media agencies, outsourcing translators' services, and even at international organizations and institutions.

Regarding public translation in the European Union, the White Book of the bachelor's degree in Translation and Interpretation of the Spanish National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation states:

Sworn translation and interpretation deserve separate comment, as they are legally articulated in very different ways in Europe. For example, in France, it is the competence of the Courts of Appeal which, in the event of a vacancy, appoint the applicant after consulting his/her file. In Switzerland, applicants must comply with the requirements of the different cantonal justice departments. In Denmark, graduates of the master's degree in translation can register as sworn translators (at the Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs) and work as court interpreters. Only the University of Mainz states that it accredits the undergraduate degree (ANECA 2004: 32, our translation).

The creation of the first Public Translator professional Association by law in 1973 produced a synergy among the State, the University, and the Association, as the professional collegiality helped check the accountability or loyalty through an Ethical Code (1980) with professional standards, serving as a touchstone for the norm. The concept of trust evolved in time and now it is explicitly made part of the deontological norms included in the professional ethical code (1980).

As regards political and ideological issues, we may perceive a shift in the balance of power in the State-university dyad. The State seems now to rely both on the university and the association for direct professional control issues, although it is still the main source of power. Such power is exerted through the Ministry of Education that oversees all university degree programmes (Higher Education Law 24 521, sections 42, 43 and 44), the Ministry of Justice that governs the public translators' role as expert witnesses, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in issues related to international exchanges, just to mention the main executive power controls over the profession.

Concluding remarks and implications for further research

The identity of interpreters and translators in Río de la Plata was forged through different sociopolitical settings. The degree of Public Translator in Argentina represents a historical instance of a University-State alliance. The State benefitted from this relationship during the national organization period because it contributed to strengthening its emerging sovereignty. As an exchange, the degree received the aura of prestige of having university status.

Public translators' constitutive political role in the national organization of the country also entailed social and cultural dimensions which enabled the exercise of human rights in the different migration processes over the centuries. These professionals have played a key role in facilitating communication in times of war and in times of peace. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage historical research about this complex professional profile to bring to the forefront the sociopolitical importance of their interventions that are intertwined with ethical and deontological principles.

The concept of trust evolved through the different periods. In the independentist era, the idea of *thick* trust prevailed. Interpreters were entrusted by the military forces based on personal loyalty. In the national organization period, the effect of professionalization made it turn into *thin* trust and the state control over the profession was shared by the University, to a lesser extent.

The social construction of the profession was formalized through its early academisation and also changed the recruitment system based now on merit, trust, and credentials. The professional identity was further shaped by the creation of collegiate associations, which helped forge the public translator's *ethos*.

We believe that this unique history and tradition of the public translator background in Argentina has really impacted the present-day profession, in comparison to other countries. This could be comparatively and historically approached in further research.

Research focusing on the public translators/translation revolves around a complex construct that could be deconstructed and analysed. It may be represented by a three-dimensional figure (a tetrahedron shape may suit as a model) having four-plane faces: the subjectivity of public translators/translations and of their clients; the situated text; the social construction of the profession; and the state ideology. At the plane vertices, different levels of coordination – if any – could be researched to determine the impact of historical settings and ideologies.

Finally, we have written this study collegially, allowing for our four different viewpoints to emerge and develop as part of an ongoing reflexive dialogue. At first, we separately sketched some drafts based on our relative strengths and fields. Interdisciplinary work emerged as a result of a continuous feedback and dialectical process, which introduced many changes over the first ideas. We have to admit that these dialogues are still ongoing and we invite our readers to be part of an open discussion that would surely enhance future research.

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