

# Research Tendencies in Translation and Interpreting Studies and Intercultural Communication

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## Abstract

The rise of globalization, the strengthening of multicultural societies, the abolishment of borders, technological advances, social networks, and the increasing political power of economic forces are all unmistakable occurrences that are characteristic of the 21st century. Communication within these multilingual societies comes across new developments and challenges that inevitably modify each type of intervention. All these issues are subjects of growing interest within the scope of research and training in Translation and Interpreting Studies and intercultural communication. This article focuses on some of these issues. First, the author will briefly write about some overarching themes in Translation and Interpreting Studies (T&IS). This will be followed by an overview of the influence of some disciplines. After that, some tendencies in research methods used in T&IS will be explored. Finally, an example of crossing domains in research and practice in T&IS in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be presented taking as an example the Master Thesis from the MA in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation (Chinese- Spanish) offered at the University of Alcalá, Madrid, Spain.

**Keywords:** Interpreting, Intercultural communication, Research, Chinese – Spanish

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Intercultural Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

All we know that globalization, multicultural and multilingual societies, technological advances, social networks, and the increasing political power of economic forces are all characteristics of the 21st century. There is also an increased awareness regarding the need of effective communication in all types of fields including legal, medical, business, educational, political, administrative, and/or academic settings.

This also leads – or should lead- to an increased interest regarding the need for qualified interpreters and translators.

Research in Translation and Interpreting provides enough evidence of this growing interest. Rovira-Esteva et al (2015) in the introduction to the monograph *Bibliometric Studies and Bibliographic Research in Translation Studies* states that “in 2015 there were over 110 living specialized journals in Translation and Interpreting Studies (T&IS), a few dictionaries and encyclopedias dealing only with this discipline, and more than 60,000 items of scientific publications, with over 40,000 in the last 20 years.”

Research conducted by Zanettin et al. (2015) using the database of *Translation Studies Abstracts* also demonstrates this interest. Zanettin et al identify 27 categories within Translation and Interpreting Studies. Of these categories, eleven relate exclusively to translation. Seven categories relate to Interpreting. Nine categories relate to more general subjects regarding both fields as is the case with the categories of Research Methodology and Evaluation, Intercultural Studies, Contrastive and Comparative Studies, or Terminology and Lexicography). Of these 9 categories, two have called our attention: Intercultural Studies (ranked 3) and Community/Dialogue/Public Service Interpreting (ranked 18 in terms of the number of publications under the heading).

### 1.2 Hypotheses

This scenario demonstrates the presence of new fields or domains in T&IS, but it may very well reflect an increasing need for specialization given the rise of daily encounters between people of various cultural backgrounds who speak different languages. We are also spectators in this 21st century of large population shifts caused by wars, natural disasters, communication advancements, and/ or technological developments. As a result languages and cultures that are otherwise almost unheard are now in contact with other majority languages for means of communication. These multilingual societies face, as Maylath et al. (2015) points out, “the new realities of a post-monolingual order, where the need for policies to manage multiculturalism in cross-cultural contacts becomes critical to overcome the dysfunction of previous societies”.

The following pages will be dedicated to explore these emergent fields and domains in T&S.

## 2. Method and Research Design

A combination of qualitative and descriptive approach was adopted in this study. The main sources also come from the combination of different sources including.

1. The analysis of the main topics of the international conference Critical Link, an organization which highly represents the evolution of intercultural communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> century,
2. The study of the influence of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and ethics for which language is an instrument and not a purpose in itself,
3. The exploration of research methods used in research in T&I and specially in Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) (also known as Community Interpreting and Translation),
4. The analysis of MA in Intercultural Communication Public Service Interpreting and Translation (Spanish – Chinese specialization) as an example of the new tendencies to manage multiculturalism in cross- cultural contacts and of crossing domains in research and practice in T&IS.

### **3. Results**

#### *3.1 Overarching themes in the Critical Link series*

A brief overview of overarching themes following the Critical Link Series reflects somehow the new needs and evolution in research and the profession:

The first conference in 1995 put the emphasis in new areas till then unknown in T&IS. The main theme/ topic was: Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings.

1998. Standards and Ethics in Community Interpreting: Recent Developments.

2001. Interpreting in the Community: The Complexity of the Profession.

2004. Professionalization of interpreting in the community.

2007. Quality in interpreting – a shared responsibility. (Society/market / academia).

2010. Interpreting in a Changing Landscape (Migration /refugees).

2013. Global Awakenings Leading Practices in Interpreting. (Focus is in training and Good practices).

2016. A new generation: Future-proofing interpreting and translating.(Technology).

The broadening of issues addressed in literature also reflects changes including cross-cultural aspects studies on institutional constraints (Sasso & Malli, 2014), political agendas and ideology (Gentile, 2016), or debates about power relations in interpreter-mediator interaction,, to name just a few.

This shift is also reflected in a growing interest in non-Western cultures and for different forms of intercultural mediation working with Inuit; working with Moroccans; working with, Chinese, South-African Xhosa-speakers (Pena2016).

#### *3.2 Crossing Domains in Translation and Interpreting Studies*

Besides we observe the influence of other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, psychology and ethics for which language is an instrument and not a purpose in itself. A short review of some of the most influential authors in this discipline follows

### 3.2.1 Translation and Interpreting Studies and Anthropology

The influence of anthropology comes from authors like Göhring (1977), Hymes' SPEAKING model of communication or Bhabha's (1996) "Third Space Theory". Bhabha uses of the concept of "third space" to refer to the place that the interpreter, as a third participant, should be situated, i.e. in neither of the participants' cultures, but in a third culture somewhere in between of the previous cultures. Authors like Rudvin and Tomassini (2011) or Bahadir (2004) agree on the similarities between interpreters and ethnographers, especially with regard to the role(s) the interpreter should perform and the never-ending debate between objectivity and visibility, and subjectivity and "invisibility" (Cambridge, 2002, p. 119).

Influence from anthropology is also evident in the dilemma between the ethics of accurately conveying the original text and the constraints and differences between the original and the final text. This dilemma has also proven to be very productive specially in Community Interpreting since the beginning of the century (Hale, 2007; Cambridge, 2002, Camayd-Freixas, 2010; Baixauli-Olmos 2010).

### 3.2.2 Translation and Interpreting Studies and Sociology

As for sociology, since the beginning of the 21st century, much insight has been gained regarding the view of translation as a social practice. This has led some scholars to talk about a sociological turn in T&IS. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu is one of the authors that have been highly influential. His influence is seen in research conducted by Inghilleri (2003, pp. 243-245) or Angelelli (2010), among others. Inghilleri applies the concept of *habitus to the interpreter* and defends a "legitimate translation" within a particular context. Angelelli (2010) also uses the concept of "habitus," explores the lives, experiences, and perceptions of young bilinguals who act as family interpreters, and she o analyzes some of the controversies surrounding their role.

Bourdieu also influences Michaela Wolf (2010). Wolf critically discusses some of the reasons for a sociological approach and defends the need to rewrite when translating/ interpreting in order to produce a text in line with the setting, the recipient of the conversation, and the host culture, and not just a mere reproduction of the original message.

### 3.2.3 Translation and Interpreting Studies and Psychology

A psychological approach has been adopted when examining issues related to interpreting skills in specific circumstances (e.g. with refugees, mental health, or domestic violence). Thus the influences of emotional and psychological aspects in interpreting processes and performances have also produced interesting research following studies about conference interpreting conducted by Kurz (2002). Some examples include the pioneer work by Baistow (2000), which analyzes the effects of working in risky conditions. Concepts like stress, burnout, and emotional intelligence are explored and applied to the performance of interpreters. The need for training to cope with sensitive issues in specific situations is one of the main conclusions.

Bancroft as a trainer and researcher in areas such domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking and child abuse is a significant contributor in the developing of training curricula in particular in survivors of torture, war trauma, and gender-based violence. (Bambaren-Call et al 2012). The

materials created as a result of the EU project “Speak Out for Support (SOS-VICS)” (JUST/2011/JPEN/AG/2912) is also a good example of the raising interest in psychological aspects in training.

### 3.2.4 Translation and Interpreting Studies and Ethics

Finally, ethics also present as a theme of growing interest. Ethics is a complex term with numerous definitions, often used to describe concepts such as deontology and morals or value; it may even be used interchangeably. Starting with work by Australian scholars, e.g. Gentile, Ozolins and Vasilakakos (1996), ethics is a subject that has been and it is the focus of numerous studies, and the different relations that can emerge between personal and professional ethics (Inghillery, 2011; Rudvin & Tomassini, 2011, Valero-Garcés & Tipton 2017).

Some topics include issues related to the interpreter’s role and their (in) visibility (Rok, 2014), the reactions of novel interpreters in situations of conflict (Hunt et al., 2014), ideological and political consideration when interpreting and translating in wartime (Capelli, 2014), or the controversy between personal and collective identity and ethics (Maata, 2014).

Baker (2014) also foresees a more central place of ethics for a number of reasons. These include the increased involvement and visibility of interpreters and translators in situations of violent conflict (Baker, 2006; Inghillery, 2011), the “weaponization” of translation in the counterinsurgency agenda (Rafael, 2012), the increased awareness of the role played by translation and interpretation or promoting aspects of the experiences of marginalized groups (Cronin, 2002, 2003, Maier, 2002), and the threat to the profession posed by new technologies and practices, such as machine translation and crowdsourcing.

The collection of articles included in the publication *Ideology, Ethics and Policy Development in Public Service Interpreting and Translation* (Valero-Garcés and Tipton, 2017) also provides fresh theoretical and empirical perspectives on the inconsistencies in language policy development observed in different geonational contexts and the often-reported tensions between prescribed approaches to ethics and practitioner experience.

### 3.3 Explorations of Research Methods in Translation and Interpreting Studies T&IS

Research methods used in research in T&I and specially in Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) (also known as Community Interpreting and Translation) also provide some clues about crossing domains in the era of globalization, technological advances, and social networks.

Hale and Napier (2014, p. 13) in their stimulating book *Research Methods in Interpreting* clearly state that research is not ‘neutral’, but reflects a range of the researchers’ personal interests, values, abilities, assumptions, aims and ambitions.

A close analysis to research in the last two decades reveals the following, especially in the subarea Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT):

1. An overabundance of smaller questionnaire-based surveys, often categorized as pilot studies- in addition to a few large-scale studies.

2. A preference for observational research over experimental research, as well as deductive over inductive.
3. A combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods, often referred to as “triangulation”.
4. A combination of different methodological and theoretical frameworks— oftentimes without explicitly stating what approach researchers are adopting or without due reflection on the theoretical roots, and often- though not always- focus on authentic data.
5. A growing interest in analyzing languages as a means of social expression within a specific context. As a result there are numerous studies based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) when it comes to researching the interactions that take place within specific settings such as refugees, gender violence victims, or wartime interpreting). In this type of analysis, language in itself is of no value, instead being useful as a reflection of certain social and cultural structures.

This combination of different methodological and theoretical frameworks is not is not necessarily a negative aspect. As Hale (2007, p. 204) points out: “By taking a multidisciplinary approach, a new paradigm is created, whereby only the methodologies that are useful to the aims of Community Interpreting research from different disciplines and methodologies are adopted”.

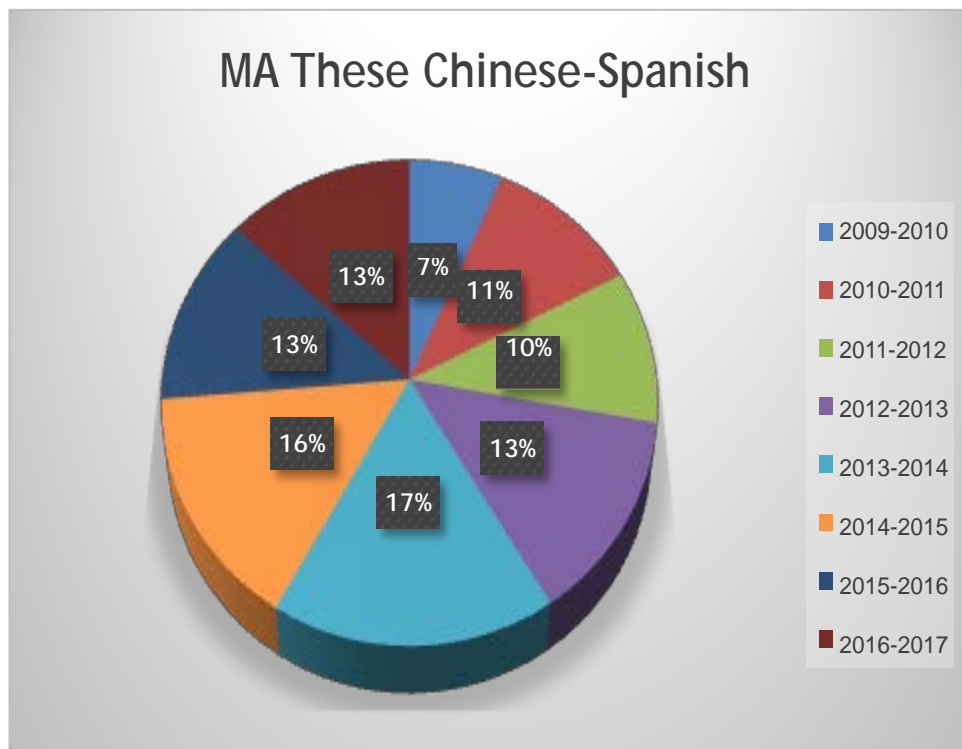
It is worth mentioning at this point a lack of corpora and databases in PSIT. This is also an indicator of some of the difficulties that are faced due to a lack of collaboration or confidence between the parties involved, that is, service providers, practitioners and the users.

In this sense, and as claimed in some forums (Valero-Garcés, 2013), this can be an important reason to recognize the value of postgraduate pilot studies conducted by students who are often members of lesser used languages communities. It is usually easier for them to gain access to the minority group(s) to which they may belong.

### *3.4 Crossing Domains in Research and Practice. A n example: Chinese – Spanish*

An example can be taken from the Chinese students in the MA in Intercultural Communication Public Service Interpreting and Translation offered at the University of Alcalá Madrid, Spain (<http://www3.uah.es/master-tisp-uah/>). A compulsory subject is to complete a Minor Thesis or Master’s Project.

From 2009 to 2017, we have about 200 MA Thesis in the language combination Chinese Spanish (Graph 1):

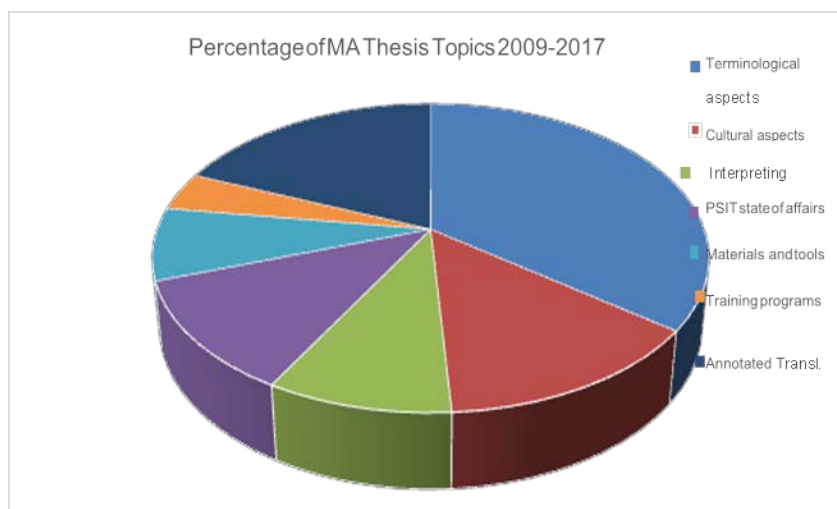


Graph 1. MA Thesis Chinese-Spanish per academic course

A broad classification show the following groups:

- Cultural aspects
- PSIT state of affairs
- Materials and tools
- Terminological aspects
- Training programs
- Interpreting
- Annotated translation

Graph 2 shows the percentage of Master Thesis for each topic:

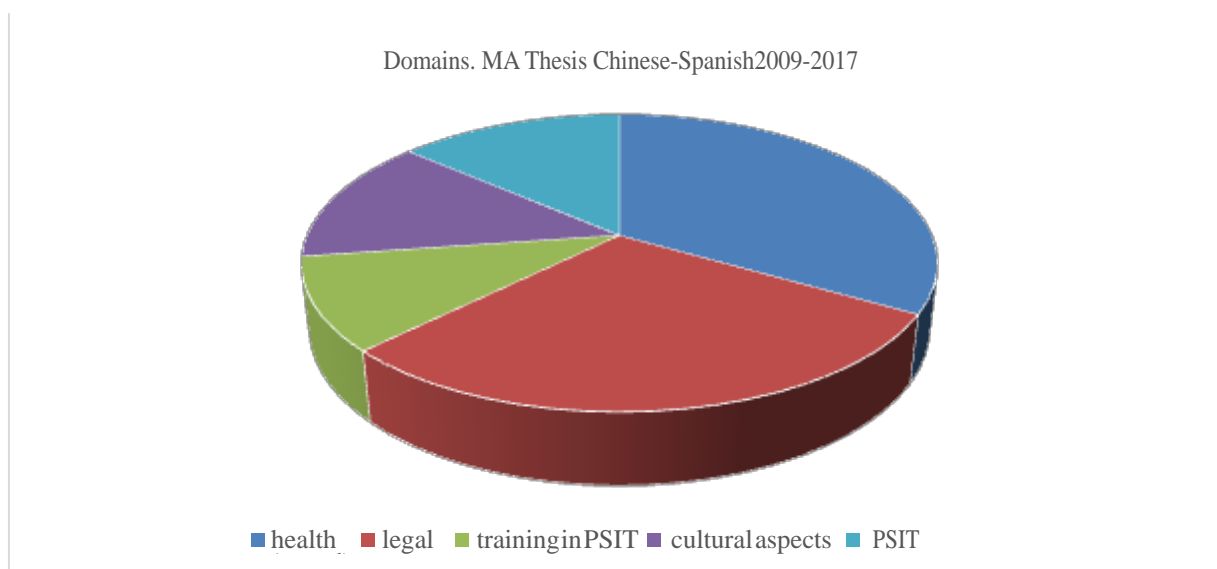


Graph 2. Percentage of MA Thesis Topics. Chinese-Spanish

1. Terminology represents: 35.35% of the total which shows the interest of the students due to a lack of specific glossaries, dictionaries, data bases in the combination Chinese/Spanish. These are interdisciplinary works as linguistics, translation (functionalism/Skopos), technology are together).
2. Annotated translation (from Spanish-Chinese) represents: 18.68% - Articles, book chapters, reports that students consider valuable for the future).
3. Cultural aspects: 13.63% (Distance cultures: Traditions, body languages/ educational systems, etc.).
4. Description/comparison about the state of art of T&I or PSIT (China/ Spain, other countries): 11.61%.
5. Aspects related to interpreting: 8.09%.
6. Materials and tools (Use, availability, development): 7.57 %
7. Training programs (analysis, didactic proposals): 4.04%, with a rising interest on this field.

The first Ph.D. on legal aspects Chinese /Spanish in Spain was read the University of Alcala on October 2017. The title was: *La traducción jurídica del Código Penal de España al chino. Análisis de los problemas de traducción y propuesta didáctica* (The legal translation of the Spanish Penal Code into Chinese. Analysis of translation problems and didactic proposal) by Yanping Tan (2017). Another PHD about legal translation- this time based on the Civil Code- and the design of an MA in Legal Translation (Chinese-Spanish) is underway and it will be read in the next academic year.

Graph 3 shows that the analysis by specific fields reveals a similar interest for the two main areas that the MA covers: legal and healthcare, with some overlapping in the other sections.



Graph 3. Domains MA Thesis Chinese Spanish



Generally speaking, these blocks – with the difficulties inherent (overlapping, diffuse lines) have been maintained in subsequent editions, providing valuable information and demonstrating that this research - with all its flaws - is a good tool for the students themselves for several reasons: first, it helps them to integrate academic knowledge and experience gained through their internships, and, secondly, it is a useful strategy to improve their own training across domains.

As tutors, our experience shows that the research results contribute, first, to improve the quality of teaching and, secondly, to establish partnerships with institutions.

#### **4. Conclusion**

After presenting the results, Communication within multilingual societies is becoming more and more complex influenced by (or as a consequence of) the rise of globalization, new technological advances and social networks and the increasing political power of economic forces. All of these issues are subjects of growing interest within the scope of research and training in Translation and Interpreting Studies. In practice, it is now very much the responsibility of interpreters and translators to provide support through the services they offer in a world that is so diverse, comprising a variety of languages and cultures, unprecedented levels of mobility, and technology that is increasingly advancing and being applied to the communication needs of society.

Just to finish and coming back to the overarching topic of crossing domains in research and practice, some conclusions are:

1. Research in T&IS shows an enormous diversity of paradigms, themes, and methodological approaches, not to mention the cultural/ ethnic/ linguistic diversity of the clients. These elements contain issues involving languages and cultural barriers as well as other external factors as for example power relations, technological advances, ideology or political agendas.
2. Research shows a certain evolution from a prescriptive perspective to a much more multidisciplinary, realistic, and fuller understanding of the complexities of the communicative event in a specific socio-cultural moment.
3. The information provided along these pages also shows that earlier linguistic theories still have some influence, but other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and ethnography, psychology, ethics, communication sciences, cultural studies, technology, etc. have been incorporated.
4. These approaches provide new insights into the participant's 'subjectivity' to the relativity of cultural (if not institutional) norms, to the ephemeral nature of the text, and to the potential contradictions inherent in the application of these various domains.
5. The broadening of issues addressed in the literature also reflects such developments. We find descriptive case studies on institutional constraints, discussions about the different roles of the interpreter in specific settings, or debates about power relations in interpreter-mediator interactions, and the role of technology in training and practice to name just a few.

Summarizing, discourse-based methodologies as well as a broadening of issues and multiplicity in disciplinary approaches—although fragmentary and insufficient—are extremely rewarding and very promising for the future, in both research and training.

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