

INTERPRETING IN ITS OWN PYRENEES: A COMPARISON OF PROFESSIONALIZATION IN SPAIN AND TURKEY

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Abstract

Conference interpreting is quite a recent activity, as simultaneous interpreting was officially used for the first time in the mid 1940's. Since then, the number of conference interpreters has grown all around the world. However, professionalization has not evolved at the same rate as the growth in the number of interpreters in every country. Are conference interpreters fully represented by professional associations at the moment? What is their role and relevance? What benefits do these associations offer? This paper tries to establish the role of conference interpreters' associations in two different countries - Spain and Turkey - and to assess how they contribute to the representation and perception of conference interpreters as a professional group.

Key Words: Professionalization, conference interpreting, Spain, Turkey, professional associations

ÖZET

Simultane (eşzamanlı) çevirinin resmi olarak ilk kez 1940'lı yılların ortasında kullanıldığı düşünüldüğünde konferans çevirmenliğinin oldukça yeni bir sözlü çeviri türü olduğunu söylemek mümkündür. O zamandan günümüze değin dünyadaki konferans çevirmenlerinin sayısı artmaya devam etmiştir. Bununla birlikte, meslektaşının, her ülkede sözlü çevirmen sayısı ile aynı hızda bir evrim geçirmediği gözlemlenmektedir. Günümüzde konferans çevirmenleri mesleki dernekler ve birlikler tarafından temsil ediliyor mu? Sözkonusu derneklerin oynadığı rol ve üyelerine sunduğu şartlar nelerdir? Bu çalışma, İspanya ve Türkiye gibi iki farklı ülkede yer alan konferans

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çevirmenleri derneklerinin oynadığı rolü ve bir mesleki grup olarak konferans çevirmenlerinin temsili ve yansıtılmasına buldukları katkıları karşılaştırmalı bir biçimde ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Meslekleşme, konferans çevirmenliği, İspanya, Türkiye, mesleki dernekler

“There is no expert group which does not tend to deny the truth may possibly be found outside the boundaries of its private Pyrenees”

Harold Laski

Conference interpreting as we know it today, with two main work modes: consecutive and simultaneous, started in 1945, when simultaneous interpreting was used effectively for the first time² at the Nuremberg Trials. From that point onwards, what was considered as art became a profession for many people who, after the Trials (1947), became full-time interpreters for governments or for the newly-established United Nations. It was also in the mid-1940 when the first interpreting school was founded by Antoine Velleman at the University of Geneva. Since then, the number of conference interpreters in the world has grown continuously and these individuals soon realized that they needed to be associated for a professional representation.³

In the latter part of the 1940's and the early part of the '50's, some national and local associations or groups of conference interpreters were created, such as the Association of Interpreters and Translators (AIT), the International Association of Conference Interpreters and Translators (IACIT), the London Association of Conference Interpreters (LACI) and Free-Lance Interpreters Geneva (FLIG). However, it was in 1953 when the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) in its current form was founded (Keiser, 2004). Since its establishment, AIIC has grown steadily and, according to the official AIIC web site, “(...) it brings together more than 2800 professional conference interpreters in over 250 cities in over 90 countries.”⁴ It is the main association for conference interpreters around the world, including

² A system of simultaneous interpreting was previously used during the 1920's at the International Labour Conference in Geneva and during the 6th Congress of the Communist International, but on a trial basis.

³ For further information, please see *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, Francesca Gaiba, 1998, University of Toronto Press.

⁴ For further information about the AIIC, please see www.aiic.net, Official AIIC Web Site.

those who work for international organizations such as the United Nations, the European Union, etc.

In most European countries there are other conference interpreters' associations, both on the national and regional level. However; it is also possible to state that rather than concentrate on ensuring a better professional representation; these associations of various qualities tend to stay on the more 'practical' side such as issuing code of ethics, organizing seminars, workshops and providing practical training for their members. Moving from the generally accepted opinion that a professional association exists in order to improve the relevant aspects and conditions for its practitioners; this study will try to find out to what extent Turkish and Spanish professional interpreters' associations can achieve this vital objective.

One of the aims of this study is to find out the present extent of professionalization in Spain and Turkey. However, as we acknowledge the fact that professionalization per se is an issue which would be too comprehensive for an article of limited space. Therefore, we decided to focus on one single aspect of the essentials of professionalization, namely the professional associations, and to conduct our study by drawing on data from the professional associations of two countries in question. This, under no circumstances, should be interpreted as an absolute or conclusive study about the professionalization of conference interpreting in Spain and Turkey; yet, we also hold the belief this study might make a kind of contribution on its own, if not enlighten all questions all at once.

As mentioned above, the issue of professionalization could be analyzed on the basis of certain related elements; such as training, professional qualifications, ethics; and professional formations only constitute one part of this. For the purposes of this study, the concept of professional associations will be described and analyzed with the aim of discussing the bigger concept of professionalization.

There are two main reasons for the use of professional associations as a tool to discuss and analyze the professionalization concept in conference interpreting: It is known that professional associations constitute what is 'the backbone' of a profession by providing professionals with certain benefits.

Secondly, interpreting studies, conference interpreting in particular, go through a phase of a more sociological approach towards interpreting and

interpreters rather than the previous approaches, mainly characterized by cognitive studies. Therefore; the sociological aspects of interpreting studies need to be reinforced so that interpreting as a profession and activity can be perceived within a social and a professional framework.

Moving from this main aim; two countries, namely Spain and Turkey, will be compared in terms of professional conference interpreters' associations as well as their functions, contribution to and impact on the profession. Both located in the Mediterranean, Spain and Turkey are two countries with increasing interpreting activities. A comparison on the levels of professionalization in conference interpreting and professional associations might not only enable further exchange of good practices between these two countries but it will also, ideally pave the way for future comparative research in interpreting studies, which ought to strengthen the sociological perspective in this field.

As mentioned above, the countries that have been chosen for comparison show both similar and varying traits, which might be stemming from various reasons. On one hand, Turkey and Spain are both Mediterranean countries, which might be relevant in terms of their resemblances within the interpreting field; on the other hand Spain is a European Union member whereas Turkey continues the accession negotiations. These factors should be taken into consideration in the discussion of the professionalization levels and situations of these two countries.

Spain is a country with an old tradition of interpreters, and there are documents from the 16th century which prove the existence of an Aztec woman, La Malinche, who acted as an interpreter when the Spanish conquered the Aztecs (Bowen et al., 1995). However, the boom in conference interpreting started in the middle of the 1980's, when Spain became a member of the European Union. Since then, the profession started growing and nowadays 25 Spanish universities offer undergraduate courses on Translation and Interpreting.⁵ This also means that more professional interpreters work within the Spanish market, but after more than 20 years of professional development, there is no single official association which gathers all conference interpreters or at least translators and interpreters regardless of distinction between the mode of professional activity under the same roof.

⁵ Official web site of Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. <http://web.micinn.es/>

Turkey is a country where the contemporary conference interpreting studies date back to the 1960's; however, it is also important to note that, during the Ottoman Empire, interpreters were widely used as early as the 16th century due to increasing relationships with other foreign communities. The need for interpreters was such that it was decided to establish a Translation Office in Bab-ı Ali so that the Muslim community could learn a foreign language and the ever increasing need for translation and interpreting services could be met (Paker 2004: 571-580). Shedding light on the present, when full accession negotiations with European Union are on the national agenda, one can envisage the importance attached to both interpreting and translation services; hence we can say that interpreters and translators hold roughly the same level of importance or perhaps higher than that of the Ottoman Empire. From the 1980s onwards, there was a certain increase in the demand for interpreting activity which can be associated with Turkey's outbound initiatives along with more active relationships with the rest of the world (Doğan, 2003). Interpreting is also a subject of training and further research in Turkey. Presently, 19 public and private universities offer interpreting training at undergraduate level⁶ and every year a certain number of MA's or PhD's involving interpreting research in this particular field are conferred at such universities.

As can be gathered from this introduction, Turkey seems to be following in a quite similar direction to that of Spain twenty years ago. Therefore, a comparison between these countries regarding the situation of interpreters' associations may be of certain assistance to Turkey to make long-term adjustments and planning in interpreting activities as well as to reinforce the structuring in professionalization according to a certain principle. This comparison will also, in our opinion, help Spanish interpreters to see if the professional situation in Spain is represented in a sufficient manner or whether models based on a single association should be followed. Besides these specific opportunities for the countries in question, we also hope that such a comparative study from a sociological point of view may contribute to interpreting research in terms of the professional-sociological approach at hand. Last but not least, it should be noted that, when discussing the concept of professionalization, the existing associations for conference interpreters, both national and international, are mentioned so as to show the current situation in this profession. Therefore, there is no intention to make any statements for or against these particular

⁶ <http://www.transint.boun.edu.tr/html/link.htm>, 26 October 2009.

professional associations; as mentioned above, the overarching aim of this paper is to provide an answer to the issue of professionalization which we consider to be essential for the profession of both translators and interpreters.

Analysis of interpreting from the perspective of professionalization requires, in the first place, a concrete definition and description of this concept. In the following section, a basic definition of professionalization will be proposed, along with nine criteria constituting the concept with a view to establishing a basis for the further analysis of conference interpreting in Spain and Turkey respectively.

A Definition of ‘Profession’

By its own nature, the word “profession” has always been accepted as somewhat problematic. Therefore, especially in the field of organizational studies, many attempts have been made to define this concept. Cogan states that there are “dictionary and legal definitions”, “arbitrary and applied definitions”, “definitions expressed in terms of power and prestige”, “profession as formal association” and definitions regarding “techniques of internal regulation” (Cogan, 1953). Moving from this review of literature, Cogan offers his own definition of the profession as such:

“(…) a vocation whose practice is founded upon an understanding of the theoretical structure of some department of learning or science, and upon the abilities accompanying such understanding. This understanding and these abilities are applied to the vital practice affairs of man. The practices of the profession are modified by knowledge of a generalized nature and by the accumulated wisdom and experience of mankind, which serve to correct the errors of specialism. The profession, serving the vital needs of man, considers its first ethical imperative to be altruistic service to the client.”

(*ibid.*, p.49).

In parallel with this basic definition, it is also worthwhile considering the difference between concepts of ‘professionalism’ and ‘professionalization’. Professionalism is preferred when referring to a certain ideology, a way of thinking and related activities which can be found within many occupational groups in which members try to achieve a particular professional status. According to Strauss, there are four values associated with the notion of professionalism: “expertise, autonomy, commitment and responsibility”

(Strauss, 1963). As an ideology per se, professionalism might encourage the members of any occupational group to become professional, though it will not necessarily mean that these occupational groups with a certain professionalism ideology will be deemed very advanced with regard to professionalization. In other words; “professionalism may be a necessary constituent of professionalization, but professionalism is not a sufficient cause for the entire professionalization process” (Mills & Vollmer 1966: p.4).

In the case of such intricate concepts, it should also be borne in mind that almost all of the changes in the occupational field, including what is called the process of professionalization, are basically a result of industrialization, which has had a certain impact on almost all aspects of modern life as we know it. With the appearance of factories and the related mass production methods, it can be said that the work aspect has been separated and isolated from the other dimensions of human life. However, social environment is a place where nothing can remain fixed; different circumstances take place, bearing a certain impact on both the professions and the professionals.

Criteria of Professionalization

For a full and accurate description of professionalization, the major constituents should be put forward in the first place. One important thing regarding this set of criteria is that they all possess a significant and indispensable nature regardless of the order they are listed in this study. The aspects constituting professionalization can be summarized as follows (Meigh, 1952: pp.126-140).⁷

2.1 Specialized Training and Education

A proper training to grasp the basic elements of a profession is essential for those individuals who are seeking professionalization, as this will also enable them to perceive their sides which need to be further reinforced.

2.2 Intellectual Technique

The chief distinguishing characteristic of the professions is the application of intellectual techniques to the professional life acquired as a result of prolonged and specialized training.

⁷ See also The system of Professions (1988) by Andrew Abbott.

2.3 Practice and Experience of Vocation

Sometimes it is stated that experience is the only indispensable thing and training and education are extra ‘ingredients’ for a profession, but there is no doubt that there is a clear relationship between experience and training that should not certainly be overlooked.

2.4 Suitable Personal Qualifications

In general terms, suitable personality is the basis of achievement in almost all professions, but the acquired knowledge, experience and the competence to turn all these aspects into an asset will make the professionals ready for the future.

2.5 Code of Professional Conduct

A professional code highlights the professionalization level of a certain profession, helps the establishment of sound trust in the profession and it is implemented via professional associations.

2.6 Continuing Discipline of Study, and Assisting in the Technical Advancement of Professional Knowledge

The practitioners of a profession should make progress as the knowledge increases. This is often achieved by the individual efforts of the professionals as well as the conferences, training courses, workshops and different kinds of activities organized generally by the professional associations or other related institutions.

2.7 Willingness to Give Unselfish Service to the Community

Professions are also expected to provide an ‘added value’ to the community, offering their products or services at the right time, as economically as possible with the aim of making a higher standard of life possible.

2.8 Professional Spirit with a Sense of Mission

Alongside their careers, the professionals have to serve the community as well. The professional spirit becomes apparent in the belief that one can do something valuable for the good of the whole community.

2.9 Professional Association

If no man is an island, then no professional is an island. The practitioners of a profession feel the need to come together and associate, rather than try to achieve a full professional life in isolation. According to Carr-Saunders and Wilson “a number of men, though they perform similar functions, do not make a profession if they remain apart in isolation. A profession can only be said to exist when there are bonds between the practitioners, and the bonds can take but one shape, that of formal association” (Carr-Saunders & Wilson: 298, op.cit). One thing agreed upon by almost all the authors about professionalization is that professional associations are essential to the process and concept of professionalization. If we go back and look at the occupational groups throughout history, it is possible to state that such associations played a major role especially in attracting attention to adequate training and education, today’s important issues with regards to professionalization.

The motives underlying the creation of professional associations are clear: People with similar professional interests come together to protect and develop those interests. Durkheim says that the major purpose is “(...) just to associate, for the sole pleasure of mixing with their fellows and of no longer feeling lost in the midst of adversaries, as well as for the pleasure of communing together, that is, in short, of being able to lead their lives with the same moral aim” (Durkheim, 1958:25). The sense of professional consciousness, though partly developed during the formal training period, is reinforced and influenced within the framework of professional associations. This sense which can be simply described as awareness of the role played by that particular profession in the larger society is also a result of the acceptance of responsibilities – both individual and collective – of such a professional status in the community. Therefore, it is possible to say that individuals and professional associations depend on one another in a mutual way to maintain their effectiveness. At this point it is worth mentioning the issue of representativeness with regards to professional associations. The professional associations should be both selective and inclusive enough; the ‘fine tune’ necessary to keep the association on the right path in terms of the established and generally accepted standards yet include and embrace as many professionals as possible to gain strength and serve the community is a considerably tough challenge. Collectiveness should take priority over individuality as “the individual responsibility of practitioners and a

consciousness of the aims of the occupation are very much a function of collective action” (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, op.cit. p.304).

As can be gathered from what has been stated hereabove, professionalization is a multi-lateral concept and a process with many relevant actors inside. For the purposes of this paper, the criterion of professional associations will be utilized as the basic benchmarking norm for the comparison between the interpreting professionalization in Spain and Turkey. One of the main reasons for this selection is that professional associations are the kind of bodies in which it is relatively easy to observe the current trends in that particular profession and country as well as embodying the remaining professionalization criteria in their own structure. Therefore, we believe that, looking at the professional associations of these countries will enable us to have a certain idea of the level of professionalization in interpreting within these contexts.

Conference Interpreters’ Associations in Spain

In Spain, the first national association of conference interpreters was created in 1968. However, conference interpreting started being socially regarded as a profession when the country joined NATO in 1982 and the European Union in 1986 and the need of conference interpreters for Spanish language rose. Later on, in 1992, Spain held two international events which required a large number of conference interpreters: the Universal Exhibition of Seville (Expo’92) and the Olympic Games in Barcelona (Abril Martí, 2000). These events did not only open the country to the rest of the world, but they also showed that conference interpreters were professionals and that their job was not ‘magic’, but something real.

With the initial acceptance of conference interpreting as a separate profession, interpreting became one of the training fields in the academy. A number of universities in Spain included Translation and Interpreting Studies in their academic structures. At the same time, a number of professional associations appeared aiming at providing decent working conditions for all their members. Although an accelerated change in the field took place at the beginning of 90s, the increased trend soon came to a standstill.

Professional associations currently available for conference interpreters in Spain can be divided into three groups:

International associations

Mainly represented by AIIC, that, as mentioned above, constitutes the main association representing conference interpreters around the globe since 1953. It has established a code of ethics and professional standards that all members have to comply with.

If an interpreter in any country wants to join AIIC, s/he needs to send an application form with his/her personal data, the languages that he/she speaks and the names of at least three sponsors who can assess his/her work. Two sponsors need to live in the candidate's region; all of them have to be active members of AIIC, have five years seniority in the languages they are sponsoring and cover at least one of the language pairs. The process is quite long and complicated, depending on the candidate's working languages. It is obvious that it is easier to become an AIIC member for those interpreters who work at international organizations, as many of their everyday colleagues (most of them already AIIC members) can be their sponsors. In the case of free-lancer interpreters, it is more difficult to become an AIIC member, especially for those candidates not living in large cities, as many freelance conference interpreters who are already AIIC members usually live in big cities.

The Spanish members of AIIC have a delegation of the international association in their country "to be the spokesperson of the profession in Spain, thus contributing to the design of syllabuses and regulating the access to the profession" (<http://www.espaic.es/espaic/index.html>, our translation). Currently, AIIC has 90 members in 10 different Spanish cities (most of them in Madrid and Barcelona), and the number has been increasing gradually in the few last years.

National Associations

Most of the national Spanish associations which represent translators and interpreters were founded at the end of the 80's and the beginning of the 90's. The majority of the data needed to carry out this study on the relevant associations were taken from their official web sites. As it was possible to obtain on-line information for membership from only one association (AICE), we contacted the rest to get further information, however none of them was able

to provide any particular data in the given time. In some cases we were unable to get a response and in others we were replied that we could not have access to such information because of the Law of Data Protection. Therefore the comparison between two countries' associations will be conducted on the basis of existing data accessed within such limitations. The main national associations in Spain can be summarized as follows:

AICE (Association of Spanish Conference Interpreters)

Created in 1968, AICE is located in Madrid and it has 70 members all around Spain. As stated on the official web site,⁸ most of its members work for national and international organizations. But what characterizes AICE members is that they are specialized in various fields and they work for different types companies and institutions, such as banks, medical associations, universities, institutes of scientific research, etc.

In order to become an AICE member, the candidate must send an application form with all his/her personal data and working languages. If the candidate fulfills the first phase, s/he will be sent 10 report forms which should be filled by other AICE members once they have worked with the candidate at different events.

AICE does not establish public minimum rates which should be paid to their members, but it is well-known that it issues an 'official' rate list every year and notifies its members about the minimum rates which should be charged per interpreting task. Some of the members forward this list to some other colleagues and in the end everybody takes these prices as a reference.

APETI (Professional Spanish Association of Translators and Interpreters)

This was the first association of Spanish translators and interpreters and it was created in 1954. Its members are divided into four different groups: literary translators, technical translators, sworn interpreters and conference interpreters. Its main aim is to fight against the application of the European norm UNE-EN 15038, accused by some because of its implications regarding translator and interpreter invisibility,, especially in the technical translations. Being an APETI member means having the prestige of being part of the oldest translator's and

⁸ AICE official web site <http://www.aice-interpretes.com/>.

interpreter's association in Spain. This association offers clear and detailed standards, minimum recommended rates and a legal advice service for all its members.

APETI has a brand new code of ethics, which contains a general part and specific sections for each of the four types of members. The main points of the code of ethics describe the rights and duties of APETI members. However, in the part about conference interpreters, the code of ethics simply contains different sections of the Spanish Law of Copyright, and does not state anything further about the interpreters' duties or rights.

TRIAC (Associated Translators and Interpreters for an Official Association)

TRIAC started in 1995 in Barcelona as an association to create an Official Spanish Association of Translators and Interpreters (similar to those already in existence for lawyers, doctors or architects). The aims of this association would be to regulate, protect and improve the profession, trying to solve the problems of translators and interpreters.

An official Spanish association of translators and interpreters would legally regulate the profession; suggest minimum prices to be charged by translators and interpreters and certify those with a proper university degree to work as 'certified' professionals.

ASETRAD (Spanish Association of Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters)

This Association was created in Madrid in 2003. It has not only established a code of ethics for its members, but also articles of association and internal regulations. Although it is supposed to gather 'Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters', interpreters are just mentioned once in the code of ethics. As a matter of fact, the web site only mentions translators 'and other professionals from similar areas'. It organizes translation courses and seminars for its members and the web site offers the possibility to find a translator among its members through a search engine.

Regional Associations

Spain is a country divided into 17 different autonomous communities and some of these areas, especially those where dialects are spoken such as Catalonia or Galicia, have their own Translators and Interpreters Associations.

ASATI (Association of Translators and Interpreters of Aragón)

AGPTI (Galician Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters)

ATIC (Association of Translators and Interpreters of Catalonia)

EIZIE (Association of Translators, Proofreaders and Interpreters of Basque Language)

Red de Traductores e Intérpretes de la Comunidad Valenciana (Network of Translators and Interpreters of the Region of Valencia)

After this brief analysis of the different Spanish associations representing conference interpreters, we can see that unlike other countries, such as France or Germany, there are no national or regional overarching associations for translators and interpreters that ensure full and complete professional representation of these professionals in the labour market. This means that one of the main criteria for professionalization does not function efficiently indeed, and it can lead to (and it is easily recognizable among translators and interpreters in Spain) the entry of unqualified people into the profession, the lack of professional spirit with a sense of mission and the lack of a series of professional standards.

It can be stated that, presently, the professionalization of conference interpreting and freelancer interpreters in Spain, is quite low; which is further supported by the problematic professional representation associated with freelancer conference interpreters.

Those who want to become members of any of two major interpreters' associations, AIIC and AICE, need to personally know other interpreters who are older members of these associations so that they can be assessed and become new members. In the case of the other national associations, although they mention interpreters in their codes of ethics and their web sites, their main aim is to represent translators. And finally, there are some regional associations in the areas of Spain where a dialect is spoken, but they only represent professionals of specific regions, such as Catalonia, the Basque Country, etc.

and they are mainly focused on translators as well. This leads to a situation where many Spanish conference interpreters are not represented at all and they cannot share their experiences or be represented when unfair situations take place (such as fellow interpreters who offer extremely low fees when asked for a quotation). This is obvious, because if we take into account that nowadays 25 Spanish universities are offering the degree on Translation and Interpreting and some of these faculties have been in existence for more than 20 years now, it is completely illogical to think that there are around 200 interpreters working in Spain (90 AIIC + 70 AICE+ some members of other associations for translators and interpreters). It is clear that many conference interpreters are not represented at all. Therefore, it seems to be necessary either to create a national and embracing association (official or not) for all interpreters to be represented, or to get the already existing associations to be more open and embracing. In this way, conference interpreters, who have been working in Spain for many years now, would start being recognized as a profession and they would all be represented as a single voice in the professional world in a structure supported by necessary initiatives and efficient organizational power.

Conference Interpreters' Associations in Turkey

Looking at the background of interpreting in Turkish history, one can see that interpreting was considered as a highly reputable and important occupation, especially during the reign of Ottoman Empire. One of the most striking examples is the interpreters of Bab-ı Ali whom had been granted exceptional privileges as well as special uniforms. Another important example is the School of Dragomans, established in 1669 in the French Embassy to Ottoman Empire to train their own interpreters. These two major examples suggest that interpreting - especially in the sense of bilateral and escort interpreting – plays a certain role in this geography and interpreting as a profession is indeed a familiar issue.

The professionalization of interpreting in modern Turkey dates back to approximately forty years. In the second half of the 1950's, the first need for a higher number of interpreters was voiced, which, resulted in the initial steps for the professionalization of interpreting. Therefore, in 1959, the Ford Foundation organized a 9-month interpreting course to be taught by a group of American lecturers. (Doğan, 2003: 25-26). The 1960's saw the beginning of the 'free enterprise' concept in Turkey and TESEV (which used to be known as

Economic and Social Studies Conference Committee) decided to make up a team of simultaneous interpreters in cooperation with Simulta Corporation and with the support of the Ford Foundation. Those who successfully completed this training programme were among the first professional interpreters of contemporary Turkey. It should be noted that these first interpreters in Turkey were learning the ‘profession’ through hands-on practice by participating in training sessions while their colleagues in European countries such as Austria and Switzerland were trained how to interpret at colleges.⁹

The need for interpreters was felt to a greater extent when Turkey experienced far more international relationships as a result of its enhanced focus on foreign affairs outside the national borders in the 1980’s. According to Doğan, until then the number of interpreting tasks per person was 20 whereas at the moment interpreters can work for 130 working days (ibid. p.36). The increase in demand for interpreters in 1980’s also resulted in the foundation of private interpreting companies.

The first association of conference interpreters with a limited number of members was established in 1969 by a group of conference interpreters under the pioneering efforts of Hasan Akdelen. In 1999, with the participation of a private interpreting enterprise –namely UKT (International Conference Interpreters) - the number of members increased and the association was re-named the United Conference Interpreters Association (BKTD).

Although there are also some other associations which cover both translators and interpreters under the same roof, there is only one association of conference interpreters in Turkey. The professional associations available for interpreters in Turkey can be divided into two separate groups: namely national and international.

International Associations

Perhaps the one and only international association for interpreters worldwide, AIIC functions as a kind of ‘protector’ of the interpreter and their professional statuses. As mentioned above, AIIC sets the interpreting code of ethics, organizes regular meetings and workshops as well as training activities for the new interpreter candidates. At the moment there are 32 AIIC members

⁹ The speech by Leyla Ayaş delivered at BKTD Meeting on 9 September 2008: “To Where Is Conference Interpreting Going?”.

from Turkey, 2 and 30 respectively from Ankara and Istanbul, the two biggest metropolitan cities of Turkey. Until recently, Turkey used to be under the overall structure of AIIC, though with the recent change in structuring, AIIC Turkey as a separate region was established when required number of members was reached. With Turkey becoming one of the regions for the international organization, it is also granted the right to have a say in the decision-making process.¹⁰

National Associations

United Conference Interpreters Association (BKTD)

Established in 1969 in Istanbul, Conference Interpreters Association in Turkey had only 20 members in the beginning. The establishment of the association is considered as an “(...) initial step to bring together professional conference interpreters under the umbrella of a professional organization” by many interpreting scholars¹¹ and by the association itself.¹² Following a restructuring in 1998, the association was renamed the United Conference Interpreters Association (BKTD) to “reinforce the image of its broader membership”. The association aims to gather the professional interpreters in order to make conference interpreting a well-known and established profession in Turkey as well as founding the professional principles and code of ethics parallel to those on the international level.

Looking at the current 72 members of United Conference Interpreters Association (BKTD), it would not be wrong to claim that BKTD is a small-scale AIIC for Turkey. This is further supported by the fact that the members of BKTD and AIIC members from Turkey overlap to a great extent. Without any doubt, United Conference Interpreters Association seems to adopt the basic principles of AIIC as the over-arching organization in the interpreting arena, which is an aspect reinforcing association’s self-assurance.

BKTD follows a series of procedures for membership. The minimum requirements to make an initial application are recommendations from at least two members. If the candidate is successful, this is followed by his/her nomination for candidacy. Only after the interpreters pass the tests of grammar

¹⁰ <http://www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=114665>, Turkish Daily News, Tuesday, September 9, 2008

¹¹ For instance see Ebru Diriker, Aymil Doğan.

¹² See <http://www.bktd.org/english.php>.

knowledge, simultaneous interpreting capability, general cultural issues and reliability, can they make another application for full membership. Those who can prove that they have worked for minimum 150 hours as a conference interpreter and can submit signatures of three guarantors, are evaluated, and if the overall judgment is positive, accepted into candidacy for full membership.¹³

Translation Association (ÇD)

This association uses the term Translation as a general and overarching term to include both the acts of translation & interpreting. The association, in the simplest terms, aims to ensure the full participation and better protect the rights of translators. Taking a look at the official website of the association, one gets the idea that the focus of the association is on translation rather than on interpreting. However, the association states that “even though translator is the first thing which occurs to everyone’s mind when the word ‘translation’ is mentioned, translation sector covers a much larger scope: managers of translation offices, publishers, editors, translation studies scholars; in short, everyone who actively contributes to translation process can also contribute to this association”.¹⁴

Established in 1999 by a group of academics from the major universities in Istanbul together with professional translators, the association requires the applicants for association membership to be professionally involved in translation business. The applicants must have obtained two recommendation letters from at least two current members and must also have a minimum of two years of experience. The full list of all the members cannot be accessed via the association’s web site.

Turkish Translator’s Association (TÜCED)

Established in 1992, the association also aims to gather all the translation professionals under the same roof. The association especially focuses on the mission of becoming a separate chamber and it is stated that they have also prepared and submitted a translatorship draft to Turkish National Assembly.

According to the official website, the association has a price list of translation into and from a group of languages.¹⁵ What is also striking is that the

¹³ See http://www.bktd.org/uyelik_kosullari.php?cat=2&par=100 for membership and acceptance criteria.

¹⁴ Official website of Translation Association: <http://ceviridernegi.org/derhakkinda.htm>

¹⁵ TÜCED official website: <http://www.tuced.org.tr/fiyat.asp?Lang=&pagename=fiyat>.

text about translation on the main site is exactly the same as the one on another association's- namely Translation Association- web site, which might suggest that the final aims of both associations could be overlapping to some extent. Based on the description of the association on the web site, it is also possible to state that the essential aim of the association is to establish an official chamber of translators in order to contribute to the overall professional reputation.

The practical business aspect of the association's website also should be noted: there are job announcements, list of sworn translation offices as well as a forum section where the visitors can discuss a number of issues such as the black-listed translation offices.

As a general evaluation of these associations in Turkey, perhaps the first thing to note is that while United Conference Interpreters Association (BKTD) focuses on conference interpreting and the other types of interpreting as the organizational scope, the other two associations try to deal with translation and interpreting, translation being their first-place concern. As mentioned above, Turkey has been going through a phase with increased share of import-export, commerce, marketing etc. activities and more advanced negotiations with European Union for full accession; both of which require multi-lingual organizations and conferences with interpreters. However, thinking that there is an only one association representing Turkish interpreter implies two relevant and interlocked cases: Not all the Turkish interpreters are fully represented and a very significant aspect of professionalization within a certain occupation is thus delayed. As also mentioned in the section describing the concept of professionalization, professional associations constitute the core aspects of professionalization. However full representation of the professionals in that particular profession to the greatest extent possible is a sine qua non feature of these associations to serve the major aim of professionalization. The fact that there is only one interpreters' association with less than 80 members in Turkey shows that there is an obvious need for progress in the professionalization of interpreting. A professional association aims at protecting its members, ensures that they are fully paid with right rates, work under decent conditions and be treated as professionals. But, no less important than these, a professional association aims at acting as a pillar for the professionals so that they will know they are not on their own. This, in turn, contributes greatly to the professionalization, feeling like a part of the profession. Moving from this basis, an association of only 72 interpreter members clearly makes a certain

contribution to the recognition of interpreting in a professional way; yet, the remaining interpreters should also be professionally represented.

Comparison and Evaluation

After analyzing conference interpreters' associations in Spain and Turkey, one can see that there are certain differences and similarities between both countries. The most obvious difference is primarily in the number of associations and their membership size. As a matter of fact, in Turkey there is just one 'concentrated' association for conference interpreters, while in Spain there are two, plus many national and regional associations both for translators and interpreters. Regarding their membership size, Spanish conference interpreters' associations are bigger than the ones in Turkey. For example, there are 90 AIIC members in Spain, while in Turkey the number reduces to 32. The total number of BKTD members is 72, which points out to the possibility that a certain number of interpreters are still not represented on the professional level. It should be noted that there is no standard number for associations or the members to ensure professionalization; what really counts is the inclusion of as many professionals as possible; thus, helping them with their representation.

There are other differences, such as the establishment dates or the different development stages of conference interpreters' associations in both countries. Thus, as has been pointed out, when Spain became a member of the European Union in 1986, the number of conference interpreters increased, which, in turn, contributed to the professionalization of conference interpreting along with the contribution of many related factors. From this standpoint, Spain has the advantage of its older history and experience of interpreters' associations whereas Turkey needs to work its way through. On the other hand, as Turkey is still negotiating its membership for the EU, it might not be wrong to predict that in the near future, the number of conference interpreters in the country will rise and conference interpreting will reach a more professionalized status than in other countries.

Both Turkish and Spanish conference interpreters' associations share some common features, as well. For example, the profession is governed by a very prestigious international association (AIIC) but in order to become a member processes are extremely complicated involving more than one phase. This might be interpreted as a way to keep the professional quality at a consistent level when admitting newcomers; yet, at the same time, such criteria

should not act as deterrence factors for interpreters. While the function and importance of AIIC is the same in both countries, the final result seems to be different: In Spain, there are not just international and national associations, but also regional professional bodies have emerged. However, in Turkey, the case is almost vice versa, with only one interpreters' professional association.

As can also be seen from the comparison and evaluation above, there are both similar and different aspects in terms of interpreters' associations between Turkey and Spain. The common issues might possibly be due to the Mediterranean culture shared by two countries in terms of the social patterns followed by the society. Yet, regardless of the actual reasons, this comparison offers a bottom line, which is of critical importance for the professionalization of interpreting: In Spain and Turkey interpreters, other than the members of the aforementioned associations, seem to be unrepresented on a professional level. This can be further proved by the member figures of these associations. With a simple calculation, one can conclude that there must be more than 72 interpreters in Turkey or more than 200 interpreters in Spain, which underlines the need for professional associations' role. The strong mutual reliance of professionalization and professional associations becomes even more visible in such cases. Positioning interpreting as a profession can mostly be achieved by the help and support from interpreters' associations. They should try to embrace the other professionals as much as possible, acting together and making the perception of interpreting as an independent, professional and high-quality vocation.

All in all, there seems to be a clear need for stronger and more inclusive associations, with more solid and representative codes of ethics and professional standards. This should be achieved through better interaction between professionals, academy, private market and the relevant parties.

Conclusion

Taking into account the situation in both countries compared in this study, it is possible to state that Spain and Turkey have somewhat different and similar positions with regard to professionalization of conference interpreting: the number of professional conference interpreters' associations is much more in Spain than in Turkey where there is only one association focusing on interpreting. However, the importance of AIIC for major professionals in the field in both countries is almost identical. For AIIC membership, one has to go

through a number of phases and challenges. The second similarity between these countries is they both seem to confirm the hypothesis that wherever there are strict conditions established for membership of the more 'prestigious' associations, a number of other associations might appear or no other association might be structured within the field, which in either case, results in a lack of unity of professionals to speak as a single voice and to fight against general problems, such as low fees, poor working conditions, etc. Finally, there is no doubt that if we evaluate these two cases from the perspective of, professionalization notion then these two countries are expected to make greater progress. Although it seems that in most European countries training in translation and interpreting is something common and mainly regulated by universities, in some places, more postgraduate courses are necessary, so that students can become professional conference interpreters. This is probably going to change in the following years with the introduction of the Bologna Process where it has not been initiated yet.

Interpreting, in all its modalities, is not a rare profession anymore, as it used to be some decades ago. At present, a certain number of European universities establish their own translation and interpreting departments where students can specialize in conference or community interpreting. It can be observed that the number of students studying interpreting is rising. Therefore, it seems vital for the future and professionalization of interpreting to be represented by professional associations by including the relevant actors in the interpreting arena to the maximum possible extent. It should be noted that, these professional associations should serve to improve the qualities of interpreting on a practical level as well as the overall professional impression in the business through establishing sound relationships with representatives of the sector and the academy. The benefits brought by the professional associations are quite long to be listed here individually; however, there is one significant aspect which is worth consideration: the inclusivity and representativeness of such interpreting associations in terms of their member profiles. Defining and putting forward the necessary conditions for acceptance as new member is naturally a must yet this should be performed with an embracing attitude rather than merely focus on a specific set of criteria or group of individuals. It is believed that, only then, can interpreting as a profession possibly be perceived as an institutionalized form of occupation. What is more; by this way, it might allow interpreters to be regarded as part of a bigger structure, not individuals on their own.

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