

# FROM THE EDITOR

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## INTRODUCTION

### TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETING IN THE PUBLIC SERVICES: CROSSING THE THRESHOLD INTO ADULTHOOD

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**F***ITISPos International Journal (FITISPos IJ)* is born at a specific moment in time with a clear goal in mind: almost eighteen years after the first article on Translation and Interpreting in Public Services (TIPS) (or Community Interpreting) (1997) was published in Spain, twenty years after the first Critical Link conference (1995), and coinciding with the launch of the first Spanish association in PSIT (AFIPTIPS, *AFIPTIS*, in Spanish *Asociación de Formadores, Investigadores y Profesionales de la Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos*- in English *Association of Trainers, Researchers and Professionals in Public Service Interpreting and Translation*), and the *European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT)* with the support of the European Union. *FITISPos IJ* has been created with the goal of promoting and spreading the word about research studies related to PSIT from a multilingual, multicultural and multidisciplinary perspective.

*FITISPos IJ* aims to be an instrument through which to communicate information from FITISPos research group. This name is derived from the group's objectives: *Formación e Investigación en Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos* (in English, *Training and Research in Public Service Interpreting and Translation*). This interdisciplinary, multilingual group is based out of the University of Alcalá, Madrid, Spain. One of the most ambitious goals of the group revolves around training and research.

The training, which has been provided since 2001, is focused on the preparation of qualified professionals to serve as liaisons to communication with foreigners. Students

receive preparation in order to gain theoretical knowledge, as well as the skills, abilities and tools which are necessary to serve not only as linguistic liaisons, but also as cultural liaisons between staff from official institutions and clients with limited Spanish. The most established training option offered by the group is the European Master in Intercultural Communication, Interpreting and Translation in Public Services, which has been offered since 2005 in 10 language pairs: German-Spanish, Arabic-Spanish, Bulgarian-Spanish, Chinese-Spanish, French-Spanish, English-Spanish, Portuguese-Spanish, Polish-Spanish, Romanian-Spanish, and Russian-Spanish.

The research has three main objectives:

- Analyze the quality of communication in public services.
- Study and contribute to the design of multicultural and multilingual societies.
- Develop and exchange training materials.

These objectives have been expanded upon since the group's creation, as further projects and initiatives have been developed. More than a dozen volumes have been published detailing research outcomes, in addition to many other useful materials for both the immigrant community and public service providers. Examples of such publications are: *Guía básica multilingüe de atención al paciente (Basic Multilingual Guide for Patient Care)*; *Guía multilingüe de atención al inmigrante en los Servicios Sociales (Multilingual Guide for Assisting Immigrants in Social Services)*; *Guía de atención al menor. Hábitos de vida saludables (Guide for Assisting Minors, Healthy Life Habits)*; o *Guía multilingüe de atención al alumno extranjero (Multilingual Guide for Assisting the Foreign Student)*. All of the above are printed in a multilingual format: Spanish-Arabic, Spanish-Bulgarian, Spanish-French, Spanish-English, Spanish-Polish, Spanish-Romanian, Spanish-Russian.

Ever since PSIT became the focus of academic and research activity in 1995 in Canada and in 1997 in Spain, when the first article was published as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> *Encuentros Internacionales de Traducción* (3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference on Translation), held at the University of Alcalá, Madrid, has not stopped publishing in this specialty. As a result, many questions have been raised: What is published? What type of research? Empirical research? Descriptive studies? Training proposals? Has this specialization gained recognition within the field of Translation and Interpreting Studies? Does it progress along with other disciplines? Does it have a web presence? What have been some of the barriers that marked its beginnings? These barriers were: A lack of awareness around intercultural communication; linguistic and cultural barriers; restricted access and use of Information

Technology and Communication (ITC); lack of knowledge around the figure of the translator and interpreter; disorganization, lack of quality control of available resources; scarcity of interdisciplinary studies; lack of approaches and integration models; or difficulty accessing empirical research among others (Valero Garcés 2008).

We hope to find the answer to these and many other questions in subsequent editions. A brief chronology of the topics which have been the focus of Critical Link in the past will help us to see the evolution that has occurred and contextualize where we are at present. Critical Link 1, 1995: *Interpreting in Legal, Health and Social Service Settings*; Critical Link 2, 1998: *Standards and Ethics in Community Interpreting: Recent Developments*; Critical Link 3, 2001: *Interpreting in the Community: The Complexity of the Profession*; Critical Link 4, 2004: *Professionalization of interpreting in the community*; Critical Link 5, 2007: *Quality in interpreting: A shared responsibility*. Critical Link 6, 2010: *Interpreting in a Changing Landscape*; Critical Link 7, 2013: *Global Awakening: Leading Practices in Interpreting*.

In Spain, the publications which have come out of the conferences and activities organized by the FITISPos group also reveal the evolution which has occurred in a country that, once considered to be monolingual and monocultural, received a great number of immigrants with diverse languages and cultures in a very short time period (1995-2007) and within a reduced geographic area (main urban centers and the south of Spain). The first contact with PSIT was at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Conference on Translation, held in 1997 at the University of Alcalá (UAH) under the title “New Trends in Translation Studies”, where the paper “TISP ¿de qué me hablas? ¿una nueva especialización en los Estudios de Traducción?” (*PSIT: What are you talking about? A New Specialization in Translation Studies*) (Valero Garcés 1997: 267-277) was presented and published. Beginning in 2002, the chronology was as follows: 1st FITISPos conference on PSIT – with the PSIT topic *TISP: Nuevas necesidades para nuevas realidades/ PSIT: New Needs for New Realities*. This conference was held at the same time that a massive wave of immigrants were arriving to the country with specific needs having to be met.

2<sup>nd</sup> FITISPos Conference, 2005: *TISP: Mediación entre lenguas y culturas/ (Translation as Mediation or how to Bridge Linguistic and Cultural Gaps)*.

3<sup>rd</sup> FITISPos Conference 2008: *Investigación y práctica en TISP: desafíos y alianzas (Challenges and Alliances in PSIT: Research and Practice)*.

4th FITISPos Conference 2011: *El futuro en el presente: Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos en un mundo INTERcoNEcTado* o de forma breve *TISP\_en INTERNET (Future in the present: PSIT in the Wild Wired World)*.

5th FITISPos Conference 2014: *(Re)visitando ética e ideología en situaciones de conflicto ((Re) Visiting Ethics and Ideology in Situations of Conflict)*.

Meanwhile, different EU countries had been developing diverse policies and initiatives related to PSIT and steps have also been taken by the European Union itself. With respect to the most significant developments, we can refer to the 2010/64/UE Directive from the European Parliament and Council of October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, regarding the right to interpreting and translation in criminal proceedings, the publication of the report entitled *Special Interest Group on Translation and Interpreting in Public Services (SIGTIPS) 2012*, as well as the support granted in creating the *European PSIT Network*.

PSIT is born of and for institutions and the public sector and Spain's case is undoubtedly another example of where we stand at present. Thus, given that PSIT is just reaching the age of adulthood in this country, I will point out, with no other objective in mind other than that of reflexion, ten points that have caught my attention:

- We continue to compare PSIT to conference interpreting, but we have also made progress in terms of recognition and training.

- We continue to discuss the need for training, not only for translators and interpreters, but also for those other agents that play a roll in the communication, the service providers (public officials, attorneys, physicians, administrators, police officers).

- We continue to talk about PSIT in different settings and apply labels (legal, medical, administrative). But the experience of many of those who practice PSIT shows that all of these belong to the same overarching category, though they progress at different rates.

- We continue to talk of Interpreting in Public Services (ISP) and often forget translation, but there is no public service within which the written text does not play a roll – even though it may be brief and of a very different nature – informed consents, school reports, airline tickets, social services pamphlet, etc.

- At conferences and meetings, we have evolved from a majority made up of delegates, representatives of diverse communities, and those practicing PSIT (1995 first Critical Link) to a majority of academics. This may create an imbalance, even as it broadens the options for training and research.

- We have gone from courses, seminars and workshops organized by a handful of enthusiastic volunteers, PSIT practitioners and trainers and held on a local level to more solid structures, which provide examples of best practices.

- We have moved beyond local experiences to other national and even transnational ones with the creation of non-profits and associations that have continued to fight for the recognition of PSIT (e.g. *Babelea*, which in 2000 held its first conference. Now, in 2013, the aforementioned *European PSIT Network*, is born out of the path laid by FITISPos group, and *AFIPTISP* (Association of Trainers, Researchers and Professionals in PSIT) has just been created.

- Once far-removed from technology, PSIT now makes extensive use of certain technological advances, such as remote interpreting (telephone or videoconferencing) and ventures to make even greater use of this technology due to, among other reasons, the tendency on the part of the administration to want to save time and money. Now we just need to find out how to achieve a balance.

- Local reports on the state of PSIT (needs to be met, profiles of those practicing PSIT, laughable or nonexistent budgets) have given way to more complex research (MA Theses and Doctoral Theses), as well as national and international projects, which play an essential role in the continued evolution of PSIT.

- In practicing PSIT, we have moved beyond a series of guidelines or guides for good conduct to a proliferation of ethical codes from different associations and entities, all of which are based on the four general principles that must be observed in any profession and which follow in the wake of more established organizations (Critical Link, The National Register of Public Service Interpreters (NRPSI). The best evidence of this interest is the development of the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) rule for Public Service Interpreting (*Community Interpreting*), which is in an advanced stage of the approval process.

These are just ten points demonstrating movement. At present, we continue working and joining forces – adding but never subtracting.

It was long ago that Hale (2004: xv) made his comments and although he refers to the legal setting, they are illustrative and could be extended to PSIT:

Much of what is being written or said on the topic (to professionalize legal interpreting) is of a very prescriptive or anecdotal nature, rarely based on empirical evidence. There is no real translation of research in the field of legal

interpreting, although a body of research has increased in the last twenty years, with the majority of data based linguistic research being carried out in Spanish-English.

Or the words of the editors of the *Interpreting* monograph devoted to medical interpretation (Shelinger and Pöchhacker 2005: 161):

Thirty years ago, Lang (1975) observed that “in the field of doctor-patient interaction language problems are customarily ignored entirely”. While progress has undoubtedly been made toward eliminating this blind spot, the medical literature as a whole, where it addresses problems of language and communication at all, is still far from treating foreign –language barriers as a mainstream concern.

Or my own words in 2007 (Valero Garcés 2007) when I alluded to the scarcity of information in Spain and pointed out some of the reasons behind it: 1. The late integration of PSIT in the academic world. 2. The profile of researchers and professionals, many of them coming from disciplines such as the social sciences, social work or law, who have received scant linguistic preparation and have leaned more towards cultural studies 3. The difficulties in achieving a corpus of authentic data given the setting in which this work is usually performed (hospitals, police stations, courts, government offices.....) and the characteristics of the participants (illegal immigrants, refugees, children...) whose information is often protected.

Along with this lack of research came the fact that the results obtained from the existing research did little to influence the work in practice (Angelelli (2008: 165):

Without empirical research, the practice will continue to be based on opinions and personal experience rather than on empirically tested and informal theories.

Encourage research, get research into practice, analyse practitioner’s behaviour...

This first issue of *FITISPOS-International Journal* joins a growing number of publications, seminars, conferences and diverse activities developed around PSIT.

There are seven sections in each issue: *From the editor; Feature article; Interview; Book review; Research corner; Working papers and News.*

In keeping with the journal’s multilingual nature, this issue includes articles in Arabic, Chinese, English, Spanish and Russian and thus, it embodies one of the main characteristics of the FITISPos Group. It also contributes to one of the group’s key

objectives– the development and exchange of training materials through, for example, the translation of written materials in English or other languages into less spoken languages or into those languages in which there is less information on PSIT available. The articles written by relevant figures in PSIT (Mikkelson, Ozolins, Sasso) are related to issues which are ever present in this arena: evolution, training, and ethics. These are followed by articles written by researchers and practitioners coming from two different cultures and who write in their native language (El Madkouri, Arabic; and Yu Zeng, Chinese). These authors are direct observers and promoters of PSIT in their home countries. Furthermore, the contribution from the FITISPos group on training and research (Valero and Vitalaru) is based on the group's experience designing, establishing and consolidating a program in PSIT in the European Union which is just one of the few, if not the only program of its kind.

In addition, the journal includes two interviews with two professionals from two very different worlds, law (Anne Corsellis) and associations (Pascal Rillof), regarding their vision of PSIT at present. The *Book Review* includes commentary on recent publications related to PSIT and in *Research Corner*, the reader will find summaries of doctoral theses based on scientific studies and projects which should be of interest to the educational and professional community at large. In the *Working Papers* section, the reader can find articles by postgraduate students who, after completing the MA in Intercultural Communication, Public Service Interpreting and Translation at the University of Alcalá, have decided to continue working towards a PhD. This is yet another example of the momentum of the PSIT.

With your continued collaboration, we hope to be able to experience continued success in our pursuit of this challenge.

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