



Investigación

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INTERVIEW WITH BART DEFRANCO, PRESIDENT OF CIUTI



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Bart Defrancq is Associate Professor of interpreting and legal translation at Ghent University. Originally a linguist, he turned to translation and interpreting studies a decade ago and has widely published on several aspects of interpreting: cognitive load, the use of technology and, particularly relevant to ENPSIT, interpreting in police and court settings. As a course coordinator he set up an interprofessional training programme for interpreting including trainees of professional groups that depend on services provided by translators and interpreters (www.ipti.ugent.be). Since September 2021 he is president of CIUTI.

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C.V.G. What are the main challenges professional translators and interpreters have to face in the 21st century?

The 21st century runs until 2099, some will say 2100 included; so far we only have a very limited view of what the challenges in the 21st century are. Since the beginning of the century we have of course witnessed an immense improvement in the quality of machine translation and its

incipient use in areas of oral communication, such as automatic captioning. We are adjusting to the presence of AI-based service providers in the translation market and we will need to adjust even more in the future, but on a positive note: 3D printing has not replaced the skilled mason, AirBNB has not replaced the traditional hotel sector and playing UEFA on a your PS5 console is still a whole different experience than going to watch a game in the stadium. So we have to first ask ourselves what keeps the traditional offer alive and try to apply the conclusions to translation and interpreting. Traditional masonry, hospitality and football offer a wider range of associated services than their digital counterparts: breakfasts, meals, entertainment shared with thousands of others, a person to consult to solve unforeseen problems, clearer liabilities in case a service fails to be delivered, a general sense of trust based on human contact, etc.

This is also what distinguishes human translators and interpreters from their digital counterparts: the ability to give customers advice on the most appropriate strategy to tackle multilingual communication, or professional feedback on the quality of source texts, the ability to factor in target audience features, higher levels of protection against misuse of data, etc. Translators and interpreters who stress these fundamentally human features of their job, will be the ones who will thrive in the future.

C.V.G. Many students are discouraged by uncertain career prospects at the end of their studies. What would you say to them?

Well, I would actually start by saying something to their trainers, because students ultimately trust their trainers to reassure them about their career prospects. If students are discouraged, we as trainers have failed to do our job. I believe it is important that we stress a view of interpreting and translation as communication services in our teaching. The act of translation or interpreting is at the core of the service, but it is by no means its alpha and omega. Communication encompasses a much broader array of activities, including advice and consultancy. If anything, the Covid crisis has shown us how important communication is, in particular how important inclusive multilingual communication is. Sign language interpreting suddenly gained prominence because health information had to reach all citizens, vaccination campaigns were set up in many different languages, including languages that do not enjoy official status in the countries concerned. But, again, translation and interpreting were part of a much larger array of solutions put forward to tackle barriers to communication in superdiverse societies.

We also need to explore the opportunities that technology creates. The success of remote simultaneous interpreting created completely new jobs for interpreters: scores of interpreters and interpreting graduates were hired by platform providers to recruit and train other interpreters. Continuing professional development boomed during the pandemic. It is important to tell students that there is a derived labour market of services provided for the benefit of translators and interpreters.

C.V.G. How do you think translation training should be adapted in the light of technological developments?

I think universities are already doing a lot, but they are doing it mostly from a which-button-to-press perspective. Students are taught how to work with tools. To benefit from the opportunities technology creates, we will have to include other perspectives. First of all, a research perspective: many available tools were developed without a clear user perspective. Their ergonomics are poor, precisely because their developers did not include translators in the development process. A lot of work is currently being done on post-editing, with scores of practice searchers involved. This I think sets a good example for technological development. Secondly, we need to make our students knowledgeable in the area of technology. I am not saying they have to become specialists, but they need at least to be empowered in their relation to technology. Recent research has shown that an important factor in translators' reluctance to technology is a lack of self-determination. Self-determination can only be based on knowledge; Only that knowledge can ensure that translators' and interpreters' voices are heard and that they can steer future developments, while defending their interests. Finally, universities also have a duty to make their students understand the ethical issues of translation and interpreting technologies: how to ensure equal access to technologies in a dual market such as interpreting? How to enforce safe and fair handling of data?

C.V.G. What can we do to improve awareness of the profession of translator and interpreter in public services in today's society?

There is a number of things we can do. We should first and foremost educate our institutional clients. Scores of professionals depend on our services. At the time of writing, the judicial system in the Netherlands is partially paralysed due to a strike declared by sworn interpreters and translators. They went on strike to claim a pay rise. For the moment, the Dutch government still refuses to hear their grievances, but the pressure is building and judges and lawyers are stepping in to support their interpreters and translators. In 2021, interpreting free of cost in mental health care will soon be reinstated in the Netherlands after years of protests coming from health care providers. Costs will be covered by the health insurances. These are examples of support given by professional groups who understand how important our services are. We need to better inform these groups in all our countries; we need to insist that they take a training on the importance of professionally trained interpreters and translators, on how to communicate via interpreters, on how to fairly assess the work of translators and interpreters. The more we educate clients about our work, the more they will become convinced of its necessity. It is better to start this process early on in their careers. At Ghent University we developed a programme where aspiring medical doctors, police officers, magistrates and school teachers take a crash course on interpreting and then engage in joint exercises with students of interpreting. The teaching staff of the interpreting programmes organise roleplays where students of the client group conduct multilingual consultations, court

cases, police interviews and parents' evenings with us as patients, suspects and parents, while our students interpret the encounters.

It is also important to let people experience what it is to communicate with a person they do not share a language with, especially if the language of the other is the institutional language of the country. Some schools in Belgium offer their pupils immersive experiences of asylum procedures, in which information is only provided in a foreign language, in which the asylum interview is conducted in a foreign language. These experiences radically change pupils' perspectives, not only on what it means to be a migrant, but also on the importance of the language component (and they occasionally earn us students for that particular reason).

C.V.G. What role can CIUTI play in making translators and interpreters more resilient to market changes and promote interpreting and translation?

CIUTI is a global organisation with some of the finest training programmes in the world. It possesses enormous resources in terms of training and research in a very diverse landscape. CIUTI had in the past shown that it can pool these resources and put them at the disposal of its members institutions. One of CIUTI's most important aims, as described in our policy statement (www.ciuti.org/about-us/policy-statement) is to promote multilingualism and translation and interpreting as essential gears in cross-cultural communication processes.

Practically, we hold exchanges of good practices in training very important. A section of our website (www.ciuti.org/education-training/best-practices) is dedicated to best practices, including detailed training modules. A chapter of our annual General Assembly is also dedicated to member projects in translator and interpreter training. Many of these projects regard training in public service interpreting and translation and are the fruit of intense cooperation among members.

Furthermore, CIUTI actively promotes research in those areas, because we hold evidence-based training extremely important. Universities need to adapt to a rapidly changing environment in order to ensure the employability of their graduates, but they need to do so methodically. Not all technology is progress; universities are the places *par excellence* where the wheat is separated from the chaff. CIUTI is an important forum where universities share their research results, especially the ones generated by student and early-career researchers. CIUTI organises each year competitions for the best Ma thesis and the best PhD in translation and interpreting studies.

With an eye on the future, I think it is very important that the association mobilises even more the membership beyond the official representatives of the member institutions. In the classical sense of the word, a *forum* was the place where all citizens gathered to discuss the *res publica*. This function should be at the heart of our future activities. We would like to foster the creation of networks of specialists to work on particular projects which are of particular interest

to all members. In 2020, in the middle of the pandemic, we launched a contest to encourage RSI-platforms providers to offer technologies that were education-friendly in terms of both platform features and pricing. An ad-hoc panel of specialists assessed all submissions and awarded substantial prize money to the winner. This is a template for future work: identify pressing needs that cannot be fulfilled individually by universities and organise a collective effort to fulfill them. In the area of PSIT, I could very well imagine universities pooling their resources to develop short modules for the benefit of the professional groups that depend on services provided by translators and interpreters, as mentioned in the answer to question 4.