

# **TO BECOME A TRANSLATOR OR TO IMPROVE LANGUAGE SKILLS? WHY DO BRAZILIAN STUDENTS CHOOSE UNIVERSITY TRANSLATION COURSES?**

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**ABSTRACT:** This article is based on a survey carried out in two undergraduate translation courses and one postgraduate diploma course in the state of São Paulo, Brazil. It examines the reasons why students choose translation courses and shows that a large number of these students do so more to improve their knowledge of foreign languages than to specifically become translators as such. The conclusions question the value of career-based undergraduate translation courses in a world where employment flexibility is becoming the norm.

**KEYWORDS:** translator's training and education; higher education in Brazil; language studies.

## **Introduction**

The first university course in Translation in Brazil was set up at the Catholic University, Rio de Janeiro, in 1968, to cater mainly for the daughters of the Rio de Janeiro upper-middle class. The opening of this course was part of a worldwide trend in the 1960s in the increase in the number of university translation courses throughout the world (see Pym:37). Now there are some 18 undergraduate courses in Translation in Brazil. The 1960s also saw a massification of higher education in Brazil. Nowadays, virtually all of the middle-class in Brazil takes a university course,

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with the obvious consequence that there is an enormous difference in level between the various courses, from the federal and state (non-fee paying) and Catholic (fee-paying) universities which have good research levels to fee-paying street corner *faculdades* with no research at all and which are run as businesses. The rapid expansion of higher education was accompanied by a number of professions becoming regulated. In addition to engineering, law and medicine, professions like journalism and bilingual secretary are regulated. In other words, in order to work as a journalist in Brazil, one must have a degree in Journalism, thus resulting in a captive public for degrees in Journalism.

The number of courses in Translation grew in the seventies and eighties, but it was impossible for courses to ensure that all students had a high initial level. This is partially due to the fact that private *faculdades* work on a profit margin which requires classes of a certain size. In addition, the university entrance exam, the *vestibular*, is a general exam, in which foreign language plays only a small part. Furthermore, knowledge of foreign languages is not widespread in Brazilian society. Thus, it is possible to start a course for a degree in translation with little knowledge of the foreign language.

In many cases, private *faculdades* have been content to offer a mediocre course for students needing a professional qualification. Indeed, it is possible to finish a degree course in a foreign language with little knowledge of that language. Thus, the actual fact of having a degree often gives no indication that the student has reached a certain level.

In the last two years, the Brazilian Ministry of Education has been grading *faculdade* courses and standards have to a certain extent improved. And certainly potential students know which are the better courses.

Over the last 30 years the traditional *Letras* course has become something of a Cinderella course. Many students who like writing are more attracted to the more professionally attractive Journalism and Advertising degrees. Professional choices for *Letras* graduates may be limited: a large number end up teaching, which, owing to poor pay in the state sector, is not a very attractive option for many. Others get jobs as sub-editors in pub-

lishing companies, but this is also not very lucrative. Thus a course in Translation may appear as a more attractive choice both for *faculdades* to attract students and for students wishing to avoid the negative associations which many *Letras* courses have.

This, then, is the background of this study, in which I attempt to look at the connection, or lack of connection between university courses in translation and the translation profession. The study was based on a questionnaire which I gave to undergraduate students in the Faculdade Ibero Americana, São Paulo (Ibero), a large private *faculdade* with both morning and evening degree courses in Translation and Interpretation, and undergraduate students in the Translation course at the Universidade do Estado de São Paulo, São José do Rio Preto Campus (RP). These BA degrees normally last for four years. A slightly different questionnaire was given to students in a postgraduate diploma course at the University of São Paulo (USP). This is a two year part-time module course.

Another informal survey was made on the Internet with professional translators. This came about as a result of a discussion initiated towards the end of 1998 when I asked translators on the Portuguese translation list what kind of training they thought best for a translator in Brazil, and what they thought wrong with translation *faculdades*. There was considerable disagreement on the best training for the translator. Some thought that it would be best to take a degree in another subject such as Law, Medicine or Engineering, and then to specialize in translation. Some of these respondents thought that an actual first degree in translation would be a waste of time, and that it would be far more practical to take short specific courses while or after taking another degree.

There was greater agreement on some of the actual problems of translation courses in Brazil. They were often considered to be too close to *Letras* courses and failed to prepare students to work in the profession. In fact, all translation courses in Brazil originated from *Letras faculdades*, and many of them still resemble *Letras* courses, with a considerable amount of literature and linguistics and little technical translation. Translators criticized courses for not preparing students for the translation mar-

ket, not teaching them how to use computer software, and ignoring such professional skills as setting up small businesses and dealing with clients. This distance from the real life of translation, with few teachers having knowledge of the working conditions of the translator's life, was another general critique, though there were some dissenting voices which emphasized that the advantages of a good knowledge of the theoretical side of translation would greatly help future translators.

The other controversial point was as to whether it is really practical to have undergraduate courses in Translation. Surely, the critics say, very few students in Brazil leave these courses even with a reasonable knowledge of the foreign language, let alone as competent translators. Surely it is better to offer specialization courses when the students already have a reasonable knowledge of the language and may then be able to take their places on the translation market after taking such courses.

Defenders of the undergraduate translation course will admit the lack of readiness of most graduates to be fully-fledged translators but will say that the university translation course may offer a solid base: some students may reach a good level of language skills; the better courses will provide theoretical knowledge and skills that may be developed in more specialized courses at a later stage or in-house training. It is also important that such courses exist for the translation profession, or at least the university translation profession, providing university jobs, increasing the numbers of translation teachers, and giving translation more academic space. This is important for the recognition of translation as a separate discipline by the state and federal funding agencies. As a separate discipline, translation will get a separate budget, so getting grants and scholarships may be easier, and teachers of translation will sit on agency committees.

We can also think here of the old discussion of liberal versus specialized university courses, not just in our area of translation. How directed towards a certain profession should a university course, especially in the non-technical areas, be? If it is directed towards a certain profession, what guarantee is there that a large proportion of students finishing the courses will get jobs, or will

want to get jobs in the specific area? Can such a course where a large number of the students graduating do not follow the profession to which it is aimed be considered a failure? Does this really matter? Or should we not rethink the idea of training for a specific profession in a much more insecure and flexible work environment, where, for example, a translator will need other skills, i.e., editing, interpreting, writing in the foreign language, maybe secretarial skills, and may need to switch rapidly from one skill to the other, or combine skills, e.g., translating, editing and formatting? And many translators, myself included, combine translating with teaching. In this case, what skills should a translation course attempt to provide?

And should a translation course attempt to keep up with the market demands by providing training in the fast-growing areas of translation such as media translation and software localization? Can the university, which traditionally reacts slowly, react quickly to market demands? Should it even try to? Or is it better for smaller, more flexible institutions to offer such courses? If this is the case, can it help in any way for these courses to have some link with the university? I shall return to some of these questions at the end of the article.

## **The survey**

The Universidade do Estado de São Paulo, São José do Rio Preto (RP) is one branch of the multi-campus University of the State of São Paulo (UNESP), set in the wealthy agribusiness service centre city of Rio Preto, 200,000 inhabitants, 400 km from the city of São Paulo. Students in the Translation course study full-time during the day. Most of them come from middle-class backgrounds in the interior of the state of São Paulo. The great majority of students come straight from school. Students take two languages, English and Spanish, or French and Italian. Students also take general language classes, Linguistics and Portuguese. In the third and fourth years students carry out an *estágio*, a traineeship, which is normally a technical translation made for the RP *Oficina de Tradução* (Translation Workshop), which carries out translations for the São José do Rio Preto community,

other courses at the RP campus and other campuses of UNESP. This translation is supervised by a member of the staff. A small number of students also do their *estágio* in local companies. It is difficult for RP students to carry out their *estágio* in a translation agency or subtitling agency as the great majority of these agencies in the state are located in the city of São Paulo. When completing the course successfully, the students receive a BA degree called *Bacharelado Tradutor* (BA Translator). Staff at UNESP are expected to carry out research, and translation is one of the areas in the Comparative Literature postgraduate course offered by UNESP in Rio Preto. As in all state and federal universities, the course is completely free.

The same questions were also asked to students in the Translation and Interpretation course at the Faculdade Ibero-americana (Ibero), located right in the centre of São Paulo, one of the largest cities in the world, with approximately 16 million inhabitants in the Greater São Paulo area. Ibero offers BA courses in Business Administration; International Relations; Tourism and Hotel Studies; and the Spanish and English Translation and Interpretation course, officially known as *Curso de Letras: Habilitações: Tradutor e Intérprete* (Letters Course: Skills: Translator and Interpreter). Although no research is carried out at Ibero, staff must have or at least be taking an MA in a related area. Ibero also held a highly successful international conference in translation in May 1998 and will hold a second conference in May 2001. The students interviewed were all from the evening group, and most of them work during the day. The course contains a large amount of language work, together with translation to and from both foreign languages. As at RP, students at Ibero must also carry out the *estágios* in the third and fourth years. This is a requirement of the Ministry of Education for all career-based courses. It is difficult to place such a large number of students, over a hundred a year including both morning and evening students, with translation agencies or in translation sections of companies. Students may find their own *estágios*, often in the companies where they work, but for most students, the *estágio* is a translation of a technical text plus a glossary, supervised by a specialist in the area. In the third year, the text will be approxi-

mately ten pages long, and may be done in small groups. In the fourth year it is longer and must be done individually. The fees for the course are approximately US\$260 per month.

Both questionnaires were given to students in Portuguese.

**Questionnaire for students in undergraduate translation courses**

Name

Address

e-mail

Fax

Age

Course and year

Academic background

Why did you choose this undergraduate translation course?

Which professional career do you intend to follow?

Are you working / Have you worked with translation/ interpretation? Which types? Please give details.

In which areas of translation would you like to work in the future?

In which areas will this course most help your skills as a translator?

How will this course help you in the translation market?

What are the other positive effects of the course?

Can we contact you in future for a further part of this survey?

Thank you very much

A slightly different questionnaire was given to the students in the *Especialização em Tradução* (Specialization in Translation)

course at the University of São Paulo (USP). This course, the equivalent of a British postgraduate diploma course, first given in 1978, is a two-year course in which students have to complete the following obligatory courses: Translation Theory; Comparative Terminology; Contrastive Linguistics I and II; Text Production and Reproduction in the target language; Technical, Legal, Journalistic and Literary Translation practice; and Topics in Translation Practice.

In order to enter the course, students must have a first-degree and pass a translation test and an interview. 25 places are opened for the course every year for each language offered. Most courses are held in the afternoons. The questionnaire was given to the group studying English, but there are also modules for French and German. The majority of students taking the course have professional experience in one area or another, though, as the results below will show, not so many work in the area of translation. Few students take the course immediately after their undergraduate course.

The USP course began as an elective undergraduate area from the third year onwards in the 1970s, and produced its first graduates, but then, due to internal political problems, was discontinued as an undergraduate option and immediately revamped as a Postgraduate Diploma.

Although there is no undergraduate Translation programme at USP, a large number of students (approx. 50) in the Modern Languages, Literary Theory and Comparative Literature, and Linguistics Departments are writing MA dissertations and PhD theses in the area of translation. The *Letras* building also houses CITRAT, the Centre for Translation and Terminology, which publishes the highly successful journal *TradTerm*, amongst other publications, and is the current base of ABRAPT, the Brazilian Association for Translation Researchers.



**Questionnaire for students in the USP diploma  
translation course**

Name

Address

e-mail

Fax

Age

Course and year

Present Occupation

Academic background

Why are you taking this "Especialização" course in translation?

Are you working with translation / interpretation? Which types of translation? Please detail.

Do you intend to work with translation in the future? In which areas of translation?

In which areas will this course most help your skills as a translator?

How will this course help you in the translation market?

How will the course help you professionally?

What are the other positive effects of the course?

What is your opinion of undergraduate courses in translation?

Would you have taken an undergraduate course in translation? Why?

Can we contact you in future for a further part of this survey?

Thank you very much

The initial question asked why students had chosen their particular course. The answers from the RP students were as follows

**Table 1a: Reasons for choosing course – Rio Preto<sup>1</sup>**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Course qualities	4	11%	3	7%	6	17%	11	45%	24	17%
Language skills	19	53%	27	61%	16	46%	6	25%	68	53%
Free public univ.	-		1	2%	6	17%	4	16%	11	8%
Not to teach	-		3	7%	1	3%	2	8%	6	4%
Near home	2	5%	-		2	6%	1	4%	5	4%
To be translator	10	28%	6	14%	3	9%	-		19	14%
Others	1	3%	2	4%	3	9%	-		6	4%
Total	36		42		37		24		139	

The most popular choice, except in the final year, was connected with language skills, e.g., to have contact with the foreign language and culture, to improve language knowledge. In second place were the qualities of the course. This was the most popular reason for the final year students. A number of students mentioned that they had come to Rio Preto because of the high mark the course had gained in the students' handbook, *Guia do Estudante*, second only to PUC (Catholic University), Rio de Janeiro, in the ranking of Translation courses. Only 14% of students mentioned that they chose the course because they wanted to translate or become translators. This percentage decreased throughout the course and was not mentioned by the final year students. A small number of students mentioned that they chose the course because the university was near their home or they did not want to teach.

**Table 1b: Reasons for choosing course – Ibero**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Course qualities	-	-	5	17%	8	10%	3	7%	16	8%
More job opportunities	4	9%	-	-	3	7%	-	-	7	4%
Language skills	28	62%	13	45%	52	63%	27	66%	120	62%
Part of job	-	-	5	17%	5	6%	-	-	7	4%
To be translator	6	13%	1	3%	8	10%	5	12%	20	10%
Others	7	15%	5	17%	7	8%	6	15%	23	12%
Total	45		29		83		41		193	

<sup>1</sup> Here, as in a number of the other questions, respondents often gave more than one choice.

As in RP, the majority of students chose the course in order to improve their language skills, and an even lower percentage than RP chose it specifically in order to improve their translation or become translators. A number of students gave professional reasons for choosing the course, that translating was part of their job, or that they could improve their professional possibilities by taking a translation university course. A lower percentage of students were at Ibero simply because of the course. Many students had probably chosen other non-fee-paying universities in the *Vestibular* as first choices and Ibero had only been a second or third choice.

Let us now look at the areas in which the students wished to work.

**Table 2a: Preferred areas of translation to work in – Rio Preto**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Commercial	3	6%	1	2%	6	17%	1	3%	11	7%
Technical	1	2%	4	9%	6	17%	7	24%	18	11%
Media	12	26%	12	27%	4	11%	7	24%	35	22%
Interpreting	14	30%	7	15%	3	8%	4	14%	28	18%
Literature	9	19%	12	27%	5	14%	5	17%	31	20%
Research	1	2%	2	4%	-	-	2	7%	5	3%
Medicine	-	-	3	7%	3	8%	2	7%	8	5%
Sworn	4	9%	-	-	2	5%	-	-	6	4%
Journalism	3	6%	-	-	2	5%	-	-	5	3%
Others	1	2%	4	9%	5	14%	1	3%	8	5%
Total	47		45		36		29		158	

There is no one single area which is preferred by RP students. However, some comments can be made. The number of students intending to work in the technical, medical and commercial areas significantly increases through the course, while the number of students wishing to work in literary translation decreases. The most popular career choice for fresher students is Interpretation. However, Interpretation is not part of the Rio Preto programme, and this percentage substantially decreases in the latter years.

**Table 2b: Preferred areas of translation to work in - Ibero**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Commercial	3	5%	1	4%	6	7%	2	5%	12	5%
Technical	6	10%	5	19%	18	20%	8	20%	37	17%
Media	19	30%	3	12%	15	16%	6	15%	43	19%
Interpreting	11	17%	3	12%	6	7%	1	2%	21	9%
Literature	19	30%	8	31%	21	23%	15	37%	63	28%
Medicine	-		2	8%	10	11%	3	7%	15	7%
Sworn	1	2%	1	4%	3	3%	2	5%	7	3%
Journalism	1	2%	-		4	4%	-		5	2%
Others	3	5%	3	12%	18	20%	4	10%	28	13%
Total	63		26		91		41		221	

The figures for the two schools are similar. The two most popular areas to work in, Literature and Media, are the same in both schools, Literature in first place in Ibero, and Media in first place in RP. Technical was in third place in Ibero and in second place in RP, though Technical Translation does increase in popularity throughout the course. As will be seen in the next section, a greater number of Ibero students had experience in translation and were thus more aware of the greater professional possibilities in technical translation. Interpretation decreases throughout both courses, though at a much greater rate at Ibero than Rio Preto. At first sight, this may be surprising, particularly because the students at Ibero are being trained in Translation and Interpretation. This fall may be because students begin to realize the enormous difficulty of entering the Interpretation market and the skills necessary in order to be a professional interpreter as they progress in their course.

**Table 3a: Number of students who had already worked with translation - Rio Preto**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
No	24	83%	25	90%	4	17%	3	16%	56	57%
Informally	5	17%	3	10%	16	67%	12	67%	36	36%
Yes	-		-		4	17%	3	16%	7	7%
Total	29		28		24		18		99	

**Table 3b: Number of students who had already worked with translation – Ibero**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
No	28	82%	15	75%	48	67%	26	65%	117	69%
As part of job	3	9%	1	4%	8	11%	6	15%	18	12%
Informally	1	3%	3	12%	6	8%	-	-	10	6%
Working as translators	1	3%	1	4%	10	14%	8	20%	20	13%
Working as Interpreters	1	3%							1	1%
Total	34		20		72		40		166	

Again the figures are very similar. The majority of students have no experience of working with translation. Students at both schools have to carry out their *estágio* in the third or fourth years, but it seems that Ibero students do not consider this to count as “work with translation”. The percentage (65%) who have never worked with translation is not much lower than the first year (82%). A small percentage, 7% at RP and 13% at Ibero, are actually working as translators. The figure is higher at Ibero as the majority of Ibero students are working in full-time jobs. A number of these also translate as part of their job, though they are not employed as translators.

**Table 4a: In which areas does the course most help you to improve your translation skills? – Rio Preto**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Translation practice	2	18%	9	31%	6	37%	4	25%	21	29%
Literature	1	9%	12	41%	0		1	6%	14	19%
Portuguese	2	18%	3	10%	0				5	7%
Technical	1	9%	2	7%	2	12%	10	62%	15	21%
Language skills	4	36%	1	3%	2	12%			7	10%
Others	1	9%	2	7%	6	37%	1	6%	10	14%
Total	11		29		16		16		72	

**Table 4b: In which areas does the course most help you to improve your translation skills? – Ibero**

	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		4th year		Total	
Translation practice	11	41%	15	60%	11	19%	7	20%	44	30%
Literature	0		2	8%	15	25%	9	26%	26	18%
Portuguese	3	11%	3	12%	1	2%	1	3%	8	5%
Grammar	4	15%	4	16%	1	2%	1	3%	10	7%
Technical	0		0		6	10%	7	20%	13	9%
Teaching	0		0		3	5%	4	11%	7	5%
Interpretation	3	11%	0		6	10%	2	6%	10	7%
Language skills	6	22%	1	4%	4	7%	0		11	8%
Others	0		0		12	20%	4	11%	16	11%
Total	27		25		59		35		146	

Translation practice scores the highest marks in both schools. Literature scores a percentage of just under 20% in both schools, though it varies considerably from year to year. Probably students, when taking a literary translation course, feel that that specific course is helping them. The same can be said for technical translation, which is only introduced into the RP curriculum in the final year, when it scores by far the highest mark. Language skills, and at Ibero, Grammar, receive a sizeable minority of answers, reinforcing the fact that these translation courses are often seen by students as language training courses. A small percentage at Ibero (5%), all third and final year students, consider that the course provides teaching skills. Although teaching skills are not a part of the programmes, a number of students at both schools will move into teaching. Maybe in the second half of the course the students have decided they prefer teaching to translating or realize they do not have the exacting skills which translating requires.

### **The USP survey**

As the USP course is a postgraduate diploma course, with a large number of mature students, the first question asked for the professional backgrounds of the students.

**Table 5: Profession of USP translation students**

Profession	Num.	%
Translator	16	25%
None	9	14%
Teacher	29	45%
Others	10	16%
Total	64	

Students in the course come from a large number of professions, among them a journalist, secretary, company owner, theatre director, psychologist, but the most common profession by far is that of teacher. This is partly due to the fact that the course is given in the afternoon, when teachers, with a more

flexible timetable, may be free. Also, many of the teachers may be working just part-time. A number of students combine translating and teaching.

The next question asked about the academic background. Students applying to take this course must have a first degree.

**Table 6: Academic background of USP translation students**

Area	Num.	%
<i>Letras</i>	31	54%
Economics, Business, Accountancy	5	9%
History	3	5%
Psychology	3	5%
Applied Science	3	5%
Others	13	22%
Total	58	

Two facts stand out here: firstly the fact that the majority of students came from *Letras* courses; and secondly, the wide range of backgrounds of other students. Most university courses were represented: in addition to those in the table, Chemistry, Architecture, Orthopedics, Advertising, Music, Journalism, Dentistry, Social Sciences, Computer Studies, Law, and Forestry. Until 1993 the *especialização* course was only open to students who had a degree in English Language and Literature. Now, a degree in any area is accepted.

The next question asked the main reason for taking the course.

**Table 7: Why USP students are taking the course**

Reason	Num.	%
To improve translation	23	33%
Theoretical knowledge	5	7%
To write dissertation	2	3%
More job opportunities	27	39%
To improve English	7	10%
Others	6	9%
Total	60	

It seems that the *especialização* course acts in some ways as a retraining course to give people, many of them, as seen above, teachers, the possibility to find another source of income. A lower proportion were actually taking the course for the specific reason of improving their translation skills. Most of these were already working in the translation area. As in the undergraduate courses, a number of students were taking the course to specifically improve language skills, though the percentage here is much lower than in the other courses (RP 53% and Ibero 62%). Although the course has a very practical base, seven students are specifically taking the course to gain either theoretical knowledge or to eventually write a dissertation. In fact, a considerable number of students have gone on from the *especialização* course to take an MA afterwards. The course has often been considered to be a way of "getting a foot in the door".

**Table 8: USP students regularly working with translation**

	Num.	%
Publishing houses	4	7%
Technical	11	18%
Casually	26	43%
Other	3	5%
No	16	27%
Total	60	

Thus only one quarter of the students regularly work with translation, though a large number have in the past done some casual translation, either as paid employment, or for friends or classmates. A large number (27%) have never done any kind of paid translation.

**Table 9: Preferred areas of translation to work in**

Area	Num.	%
Commercial	2	3%
Technical	15	20%
Media	7	9%
Interpreting	3	4%
Literature	11	15%
Medicine	10	13%
Sworn	3	4%
Journalism	6	8%
Legal	2	3%
Others	14	19%
Total	75	



Students wished to work in a variety of areas, with technical and commercial areas generally predominating. This would tie in with the intention of students to use the course as a launching pad for another career and to try to improve their income. Technical and commercial translation are much better paid than literary translation and would therefore be more attractive. However, there is considerable interest (15%) in literary translation, and 9% of students would like to work in media translation. Although Interpretation is not part of the course, 3 students (4%) would like to work in this area.

**Table 10: Students who would have taken undergraduate translation course**

	Yes		No		Don't know	
Students	29	54%	24	44%	1	2%

This question repeats the point discussed earlier: whether it would be advantageous to have an undergraduate course in translation. The arguments repeated by the respondents in favour of this choice were the possibility, if they had taken an undergraduate Translation course, of having been able to enter the Translation market much earlier in a more advantageous position. Of course, one does not actually know whether the respondents would actually have chosen translation, or whether these students would have been ready to enter the market, but I'm sure, if such a course were available at USP at the undergraduate level, it would be a popular choice.

I then examined the answers of the respondents to the last question according to academic background: *Letras* and non-*Letras*. The results were as follows:

**Table 11: Students who would have taken undergraduate translation course: *letras* and non-*letras***

	Letras				Non-Letras			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
Students	22	73%	8	27%	8	32%	17	68%

The two sides of the table almost mirror each other. More than two-thirds of those who took *Letras* courses would have taken an undergraduate translation course if they had had the chance. By contrast, 68% of those who are from outside *Letras* would not have taken such a course. Thus, those from outside *Letras* prefer the present USP system, specialization in translation after a specific degree in another area; and those from *Letras* would have liked to have had the chance to have taken an undergraduate translation course.

## Conclusions

i) The majority of students taking all the RP and Ibero courses who replied to the questionnaire were taking the course in order to gain and/or improve language skills and to have contact with foreign cultures. Only a minority of students were attracted to the course specifically because they wished to become translators and/or interpreters, or because they wished to improve their translating skills. Due to the low prestige of *Letras* courses, and the limited attractiveness of teaching in the state school system, translation courses have a higher profile and are seen as more pro-active undergraduate language courses. Indeed, the contrastive methodologies used by translation courses may be an attractive way of learning a language. At Rio Preto the entrance requirement for the translation course is stiffer than that for the *Letras* course. Translation students also tend to come from wealthier backgrounds and have a better initial knowledge of foreign languages.

ii) Although there was no agreement on whether it was best to take a degree in translation or another degree before entering the translation profession, there was a consensus in the informal Internet survey on the lack of connection between universities and the translation profession. It was mentioned that few of the teachers employed to teach practical translation have ever worked as translators. Indeed, it is very difficult to find translation teachers with wide experience of translation, especially in the technical areas. In many cases, suitable people are not adequately quali-

fied or are not interested in giving up (part of) a lucrative career to join the academy. Another problem is that the *estágio* may often be no more than the translation of a technical text from another area in the university, and the student will not gain experience of working under professional conditions.

Translation in Brazil is not a "registered" profession. Differently to journalism, in-house translators (of whom there are fewer and fewer) need not have a degree specific to their profession. Thus the candidate for employment with a degree in translation may have relatively few advantages. Many potential employers, aware that the language and skills of degree holders in Translation may not be that high, may simply ignore the fact that the candidate has a degree in the area. Moreover, the candidate's translation ability can very easily be checked through translation tests.

iii) Ironically, many translation students end up teaching. Right throughout Brazil, there is great demand for language teachers, particularly in English and Spanish. It is relatively easy for a language student to get a job teaching basic language skills at a private language school in the major Brazilian cities. In Rio Preto, language schools even prefer to employ students from the Translation course rather than the less prestigious *Letras* course as the foreign language level of the Translation students is higher and they are seen as generally more competent.

iv) The USP *especialização* course has, to a certain extent, taken on the characteristics of a retraining course, of offering the possibility of entering another profession to mature people from other areas, especially teachers. It does not attract a large number of translators. One of the reasons may be that it is held in the afternoon, when in-house translators are usually at work.

### **Further comments and suggestions**

Is the Brazilian university the best place to train translators and interpreters? Are not undergraduate courses, where the university has little or no control over the intake and even *especialização* courses, inappropriate for training for a very spe-

cialized profession? The one translation school which was praised by a large number of the translators in the Internet survey was *Associação Alumni*, an English language school which has a Translation and Interpretation section. In order to get on the course the student must take a special test and get through an interview, and then pay the heavy course fees. The two-year course provides hands-on training, translation and terminology practice. Alumni has links with APIC, the Brazilian Association of Conference Interpreters, and may find employment for its top students.

On the other hand, one can ask whether it really matters that a relatively small proportion of students go on to work in the translation profession? Indeed, could a highly specialized market absorb all the graduates of translation undergraduate programmes? Hopefully, a further study will examine the actual numbers of students from these courses that actually go on to work in the profession.

Have not translation schools throughout the world produced their own very successful self-propagating systems? The number of translation degree courses in Spain has rapidly increased in the last 20 years, as has the number of postgraduate translation courses in the UK. To many students of these courses, an undergraduate or postgraduate degree in Translation is an excellent way to gain and/or improve foreign language skills which **may** also lead to translation work. And there is now a large body of teachers specialized in teaching translation, who themselves need to take courses, improve methodology, etc. These teachers may seldom or never actually do translations *per se*.

Finally, I would like to question the value of courses which train for a "career", in a world where "jobs for life" are fewer and fewer. I have already mentioned that in-house translators are becoming a dying breed. Many translators now open up their own small businesses, and combine translation with another professional activity, frequently teaching, sub-editing, desktop publishing or journalism. In the survey we saw the large number of teacher-translators and that only a minority of those taking university translation courses would become full-time professional translators. Might not university translation courses look more

at the versatility and skills that are required from students who may soon work with translation, but not exclusively, and who will also have various other professions and who will be regularly switching from one skill and job to another, or combining skills in the same job? Short courses in suitable computer programmes, desktop editing and managing small businesses might be welcome additions to both undergraduate and diploma Translation courses.

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