

Carmen Valero-Garcés. 2014. *Communicating Across Cultures: A Coursebook on Interpreting and Translating in Public Services and Institutions*. Lanham: UP of America. 216 pp. ISBN: 978-0761861546.

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Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) relates to the language mediation activities—both oral and written—that take place in public service contexts such as healthcare centres, police stations, schools or tribunals, involving migrant populations and the relevant public service agents (doctors, teaching staff, police officers, etc.). Interest in PSIT grew in parallel with the explosion in the number of migrants resulting from globalisation. A good number of publications on the subject have seen the light in the last couple of decades, but, as corresponds to a novel field, were mostly theoretically oriented. In the last few years, though, the accumulation of knowledge and consolidation of the area have crystallized in several distinctly applied monographs (Corsellis 2008, Hale 2007, Rudvin and Tomassini 2011), including this most recent volume by Carmen Valero-Garcés.

Professor Valero-Garcés has already authored and edited a number of important monographs on PSIT. Compared with her previous writings, this book, *Communicating Across Cultures. A Coursebook on Interpreting and Translating in Public Services and Institutions*, published by the University Press of America, shows a decidedly pedagogical and international vocation. The author provides an updated and comprehensive view of the field, covering research, teaching and descriptions of the practices of translation and interpreting in a variety of settings.

The book is divided into six chapters: on translation and interpreting in general (chapter one), on the history and present state of PSIT in the world (chapter two), on the differences between translation and interpreting in the public services and other contexts (chapter three), on PS interpreting (chapter four), on PS translation (chapter five) and, finally, a comprehensive and topically-organized bibliography (chapter six).

Chapter one provides a succinct presentation of various general translation-related topics: what it takes to become a translator, different modalities of translation and interpreting (T&I), a basic glossary of T&I terminology, translation tools and resources, translation methods and procedures, T&I studies in Spain and some generalizations on the job market and future prospects.

Chapter two offers an overview of past and present PSIT professional developments in various countries. The need for PSI was felt particularly strongly after WWII, with the affluence of immigrants and refugees that needed solutions to facilitate their integration in their new societies. Since then, there have been different stages in the development of specific policies regarding PSIT: from unawareness of the problem, through denial to professionalization.

Still today, important differences in PSIT persist across countries regarding the quantity and quality of the services, the educational qualifications required and the degree of professionalism. There have been plentiful initiatives towards accreditation and a wide variety of higher education programmes are currently on offer, particularly in major immigrant-receiving countries in Europe. However, while the profession enjoys a fair amount of recognition in Scandinavia, Australia and other countries with a long immigration tradition and highly developed public services, it is still poorly recognized in Southern-European countries like Spain, and in many areas PSIT tasks are often carried out by charity organizations, NGOs and untrained individuals.

The situation in Spain is, naturally, the object of detailed analysis. Although there are two officially-recognized PSIT professional figures—including the sworn translator—most PSIT is still done by non-professionals, old-time immigrants and refugees themselves, often experienced in acting as intermediaries for family, friends and other immigrants and with a command of the foreign language, but little familiarity with the subject matter or the terminology. The book cites valuable survey data on the nature of these individuals, their concerns and their work strategies, as well as their surprisingly effective *savoir-faire*.

Chapter three presents the distinct characteristics of translating and interpreting in the specific context of the public services. The author starts by problematizing the actual role of the interpreter in the PS. There are two competing models here, those of advocacy, where the interpreter/translator takes on the role of defender of the PS user's interests, and impartiality, which sees the PSIT professional as a simple relay of messages between service providers and users.

The complex mediating activity of translators/interpreters in the PS raises key theoretical questions regarding the role of translators-interpreters in general. Rather than mere neutral bridges between codes, translators should be seen as active agents that, perhaps unavoidably, interpret, explicate, facilitate and even apply their own ethical codes in their everyday practice (Hernández-Sacristán 1994).

PS mediation covers some rather unexpected facets. In the author's words, "mediation is not only about translating words. It goes beyond that, transmitting all culturally significant nonverbal communication (smells, gestures, body movements, silence, etc.)" (82). Clearly, translators and interpreters in the public services have always been aware of the key importance of multimodal elements, such as gestures, to the success of their activity, a reality that—with some exceptions—has only recently dawned on linguistics and that we are still striving to understand. PSIT professionals

must also know how to create trust: they must infuse reliance on their impartiality and all parties must be confident that the interpreter is not privileging particular interests.

One interesting point revealed by research on PSIT is that all participants, not only the mediator, need to accommodate to the situation, in other words, need to develop the necessary skills to guarantee success in the interaction. For instance, in oral mediation, both service providers and clients should know when to make pauses to facilitate the interpreter's task, use standard language and direct speech. Similarly in written translation, service providers can contribute to the success of the task by following good practice, such as recognising when a translation is actually needed, allowing for a reasonable time delay for a translator to produce good quality work or being ready to provide clarification on content.

Overall, the chapter suggests that PSIT is a distinct profession, therefore with specific training needs. Professor Valero's words conveniently summarize the complexity of the tasks involved: "I am not alone when considering that mediators are something more than 'traditional' translators/interpreters. They interpret both verbal and nonverbal languages. They must be immersed in both cultures, both that of the immigrant and that of the host country. They must know expressions, nonverbal communication, and body gestures, as these cultural elements provide a lot of information about a person's mood, attitude, or reaction in a certain situation" (84).

The author cites evidence that investing in promoting professionalism in PSIT eventually pays off and leads to important gains in terms of the professional satisfaction of the public service provider, as well as personal satisfaction of the users, both with the services and with their new country in general.

Chapter four deals with interpreting in the PS. It starts with an introductory section on different forms of interpreting. Most of this information probably rings a familiar bell for the advanced student of interpreting in the PS: after all, issues such as the distinction between consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, the basic skills in the interpreting profession, such as voice, fluidity or note-taking, constitute recurrent topics in all practice-oriented translation manuals.

The rest of the chapter delves into the psychological impact of PS interpreting on practitioners. The overall picture is one of a profession where the personal and the professional elements constantly overlap, and where the activity often takes a toll on the mental well-being of interpreters, with anxiety, insomnia, lack of appetite and anti-social behaviour figuring amongst the most recurrent symptoms. As members of the same cultural/ethnic group as the service users, or as someone that may have lived through similarly dire situations, interpreters frequently experience an emotional attachment to the PS user's cause, which "can make it difficult to maintain a professional code of neutrality" (131).

In view of these findings, the author claims, the psychological component should occupy a privileged position in the training programme of future PS interpreters.

Flexibility, resilience, empathy as well as strong personal and professional ethics should be part of the personal/professional traits of any PS interpreting professional.

Chapter five is devoted to written translation. The author opens with a few generalizations on the requisite skills (linguistic, cultural, intellectual, attitudinal, etc.) for the job, the tools of the trade and practical advice for starting in the profession. Although this information can be found in most practically-oriented textbooks, it is still worth being reminded of it.

Then the author zeroes in on translation in the PS, with a long account of current practices, mostly in the Spanish Madrid area. The approach is rather factual and there is little explicit discussion of the specifics of PS translation as compared with translation in other contexts. The strategy consists in giving a full description of several case studies, letting readers draw the relevant conclusions by themselves.

The final chapter is a comprehensive bibliography on translation and interpreting in the PS, which constitutes invaluable information for practitioners, students, teachers and researchers on the subject. The list of titles is organized into four sections, naturally with a great deal of overlap between them: PSIT in general, intercultural mediation, translation in the public services and institutions, and PSIT in law, administration and healthcare.

Professor Valero-Garcés is one of the most prominent figures in the field of PSIT internationally, which is reflected in both the comprehensive coverage of the topic that the book offers and the impressive number of cited references. The book will satisfy the interests of the translation and interpreting scholar, but especially those of practitioners seeking a solid theoretical basis for their activity and students specializing in PSIT. The volume has a decidedly pedagogical orientation. All the chapters contain a long final section with a lot of varied practical activities, which encourage students to critically appraise the content of the chapter, reflect on their own experience or do research work. Most of these activities have a clearly practical intention and confront the reader with real-life situations and real decision-making processes. For all of them, the author draws directly on her deep knowledge of the many facets of the topic, as well as on her long teaching experience, which means that many of the exercises have already been put to the test.

Naturally, the book contains some less successful features, which a second edition might consider revising. In some sections (for instance, chapter one) the style is unexpectedly haphazard. Also, the author's citation style is somewhat unconventional and inconsistent throughout the whole text. Finally, some section titles can be either misleading or give a poor indication of the actual content of the sections: for instance, a section entitled "Advances towards professionalization" contains a review of websites, mainly from the US, with translated materials for the immigrant population, but no actual evidence of professionalization.

As for the book's content, despite its vast coverage of the topic, it is slightly biased towards the situation in Spain. This is natural, given the author's background, but

a possible liability in a book with a purportedly international vocation. Similarly, regarding the treatment of the different topics, while some are clearly overdone, others are dashed off a bit too quickly, chapter four on interpreting in the PS being a case in point: here, the author devotes thirteen pages to the psychological impact of the activity, but a mere couple of pages to major procedural skills like fluidity, voice and good memory (incidentally, nothing is said about basic documenting skills). Finally, despite its undeniably updated account of the topic, no mention is made of some recent events that may have had a great impact on PSIT: seemingly, the budget cuts of the late two-thousand's and their consequences for PSIT are too recent to appear in the picture.

All these issues notwithstanding, the book undoubtedly provides an invaluable source of information on every facet of translation and interpreting in the public sector. No aspect of this complex activity is neglected: linguistic, cultural, gestural, economic, social, psychological... all are considered with a decidedly pedagogical vocation that translates into a myriad of practical activities. All in all, the book constitutes a new benchmark in thoroughness and pedagogical value in the field of PSIT.

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