

From professional translator to lecturer and researcher

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The beginnings

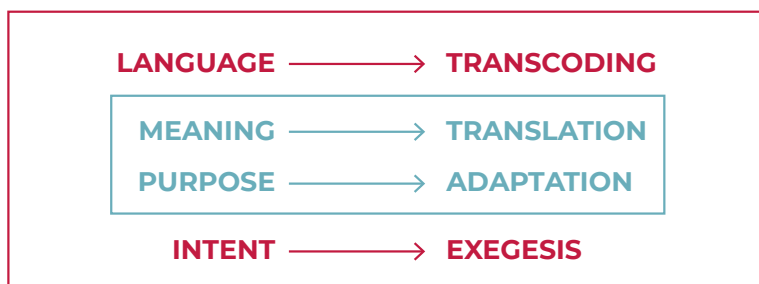
I always wanted to study modern languages. I was fascinated by English (because of the music) and I wanted to seriously approach the second language of my country, Dutch. As a teenager, I had an exchange program with a boy from a Dutch-speaking town; he spent about two weeks in my house, and I spent two weeks in his. In high school I also had contacts with German. I was good in French, I wrote poetry and my dissertations at school were very good.

I decided to study translation at university as an alternative to philological or literary studies. A professional translator inspired me and had a lot to do with that decision. My working languages in my undergraduate studies were native French, English and Dutch. In the third year, I tried to move towards interpreting, but it didn't work out because I had insufficient knowledge of my working languages, and I continued with translation. In the last year of my undergraduate studies I took a Spanish course. I graduated in 1974 from the School of International Interpreters (now the Faculty of Translation at the University of Mons, Belgium).

Life, or rather refusing to do compulsory military service, made me emigrate to Latin America as a development worker. I worked as a translator and interpreter for an international trade union organization. At the same time I worked for two years in a small company as a professional translator, and then I was hired at the School of Modern Languages of the Central University of Venezuela (1978) to teach Spanish-French translation and interpretation. The experience revealed a passion: to pass on my knowledge and experience. I became passionate about the pedagogy, history and theory of translation. At that time, my first participations in international events (especially in Latin America) and my first humble publications began.

I felt that I had to commit myself more deeply to the teaching of translation and to the development of translatology in Latin America. I discovered that a government agency was providing funding to researchers. I naively filled out the forms to apply for funding for a project on the history of translation in Venezuela and got it. I felt that there was an enormous heritage to be discovered in Latin America and Venezuela in particular in terms of translation history. Little by little I began to research the most significant milestones of this history in Venezuela. The incentive to continue was Routledge's request to write the Latin American History and Adaptation entries.

At the same time, I felt the need to distinguish myself from my colleagues with PhDs in literature and linguistics who considered translation as an essentially professional and ancillary discipline. I then decided to undertake a PhD at ESIT in Paris following Danica Seleskovitch's visit to my university in 1987. I followed Danica Seleskovitch's DEA seminar as well as the other courses and finished the thesis in 1990 under the supervision of Marianne Lederer. The thesis consisted of finishing the Spanish adaptation of Delisle's manual (started in Caracas) and defining the notion of adaptation in translation. After reviewing a series of definitions of adaptation in the bibliography, I basically defined a model with two types of adaptation, subject to numerous manifestations and to four conditions (ineffectiveness of transcoding, inadequacy of situations, change of genre and rupture of the communicational balance). The two types are: punctual (or tactical) adaptation, which only affects certain parts of the discourse, and global (strategic) adaptation, which affects the whole text. I based my teaching to beginner learners on the distinction between the following levels of cross-linguistic analysis, which could be a model of acceptability:



In this model, only the two intermediate levels “Meaning” and “Purpose” meet the criteria for acceptability of the resulting translation. Although they represent two different strategies, “Translation” and “Adaptation” are not incompatible. On the other hand, the first and last levels, “Language” and “Intent”, although necessary for the correct analysis and comprehension of the original textual material, when applied systematically to the restatement, lead to a different product that cannot be called translation but rather “Transcoding” and “Exegesis”.

In 1996 I spent a sabbatical year at the University of Montreal where I ended up staying for 25 years as a professor in the Department of Linguistics and Translation (from 1998 to 2023). At present, I am still an associate professor, i.e. with no academic load.

First conferences

In 1980 I participated in an international meeting that had a great impact on my career: the ACT congress at Glendon College, York University (Toronto) where I attended, among many others, a lecture by Jean Delisle on his recently completed ESIT PhD thesis: *L'analyse du discours comme méthode de traduction*. This lecture showed me the way forward. I started by adopting his interpretative approach to translation in my classes and then adapting his manual to my Spanish-French translation classes. This adaptation then led me to my PhD, several conferences and publications. I made “Delisle-style” pedagogy the center of my concerns, an approach that has accompanied me throughout my career.

Another conference that had an impact on my career was the Translation History Conference organized in León by Julio-César Santoyo in 1995. At these conferences I was contaminated with the history virus by listening to renowned translation historians and learning about projects in other latitudes. The paper I presented (about my first work done in Venezuela) was well received and motivated me to make the history of translation my other focus of interest, research this time.

For some colleagues, conferences are the place where they publicize their publications; for me, it was the opposite: conferences were the places where I could discuss my ideas or projects and then work on them for publication.

First publications

i started teaching translation and interpretation at the Central University of Venezuela (UCV) in 1978 without having a doctorate or any research experience. At that time, publishing was an unattainable horizon. But little by little I became convinced that it was necessary to deepen the pedagogy of translation, which was done in a very poorly reasoned way. When I learned about Delisle's interpretative approach, I wanted to disseminate it in Venezuela and Latin America, where translation bibliography was scarce. Together with my colleagues at the UCV, we created a journal, *Núcleo*. It was the perfect platform for me. I contributed articles to the first two issues on translation methodology in 1983.

Then came my doctoral thesis on adaptation which was published in 1997 and which allowed me to publish in different journals on the subject, starting in 1990 and in 1998 in the Routledge Encyclopedia. My first publications in translation history were in the Spanish journal *Livius* in 1996 and then in 1998 in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*.

Teaching experience

For 20 years, I taught a variety of Spanish-French translation (general, economic and legal) and interpreting (consecutive and simultaneous) courses at the UCV at different undergraduate levels. I was also in charge of the course Note-taking for Interpreting and Initiation to Translation (methodology and theory).

Then, for 25 years, I taught general translation, editing and proof-reading at University of Montreal (UdeM), both in the English-French undergraduate and master's programs. In the postgraduate program, I was in charge of the doctoral seminar on Directed Readings in Translation.

In my practical teaching (specialized undergraduate and professional masters), regardless of the study cycle, I give priority to two fundamental principles: teaching by example and valuing success, and a personal conviction: the defense and illustration of a quality French language.

Teaching by example consists, first of all, of putting oneself at the student's level of knowledge and experience, i.e., designing the subject to be taught according to his or her knowledge, posing the questions he or she is likely to ask

and proposing practical exercises that are within his or her reach. This pedagogy consists of the teacher breaking down the problem-solving process based on his or her own experience. In my opinion, the teacher should always undergo the exercises he or she proposes beforehand. He or she must be self-critical of his or her own approach, failures and successes, and present them to the class in all simplicity (and humility). What can I do with my knowledge? What does my experience consist of? What advantages (or disadvantages) do I have over my students? How can I get them not to reproduce my process of analysis, interpretation or problem solving, but to use my example as a starting point for developing their own process? This is where I put most of my energy. In class, I practice translation as and with my students.

Value success. You cannot learn how to walk by watching a paraplegic. Likewise, you can't teach translation by analyzing mistakes. The courses I teach are not "subjects" made up of knowledge, but workshops designed to help students acquire skills. Again, skills are not acquired by analyzing mistakes, but by analyzing successes. When students analyze a successful approach, they can deduce the elements they need to succeed, based on their own experience. I like to show on screen the exercises students have done and show them what they did well (and what they didn't) and help them figure out why. The second aspect of this principle is positive evaluation. In 2000 I published an article in *The Translator* vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 231-245 entitled "Evaluating Beginners' Re-expression and Creativity: A Positive Approach", in which I outlined how students' successes and discoveries are taken into account in my translation evaluations.

The defense and illustration of a quality French language. Language professionals, such as translators, proofreaders and terminologists, play an essential social role. I cannot imagine a future language professional who does not seek to develop a keen linguistic awareness, who is not attentive to the quality of his or her language and who does not strive to promote it in his or her environment. I make a point of telling them, showing them (always by example) and getting them to put it into practice, not only in their written work, but also in their oral presentations and even in their classroom interventions. All my evaluations include the quality of the language as a primary criterion, and in many cases this criterion is exclusive, as in translation and writing exercises.

In the *Directed Readings* seminar at the doctoral level my teaching is also “theoretical”. Theoretical in the sense that my mandate is to prepare students for the first part of the doctoral exam, which is a knowledge test. I have to make sure that they assimilate the various concepts and theoretical approaches to translation studies. But insofar as I also have to initiate them to a method of reading and critical reflection, the two principles outlined above remain valid. I read and critique like them and with them, and I attach great importance to their successes.

This vision of teaching and the contribution of classroom work have made me reflect on the role of the teacher and the best way to perform it successfully. For example, I dedicated myself to deepen the best way to perform the onomasiological phase of translation, that is, rather than insisting on the analysis of the text to understand it (semasiological phase), it is about following the stages of a process of re-expression that starts from the sense or mental image to the realization of a well-written text (onomasiological phase). Another example is the importance I attach to self-revision, be it in translation or writing. I have integrated several revision models in order to explain the fundamental role played by self-revision and have devised a series of exercises that draw attention to the most frequent difficulties in writing.

In my teaching of the very theoretical doctoral seminar, I attached primary importance to critical reviews of readings, a basic element of the seminar evaluation. The method consisted of giving clear instructions, commissioning a critical review of a book, book chapter or scientific article, individually and collectively correcting the papers, and commissioning a final version to be evaluated.

Leadership and coordination

During my university career at UdeM, I supervised 16 doctoral theses and about 20 master’s theses. The topics are very varied: the history of translation in Latin America, Morocco and Lebanon, translation theory, translation of musicals and advertising, among others. In some cases, the supervision is fast because of the candidate’s knowledge and competence; in others, the supervision consumes considerable time and energy to the point where the

thesis has to be completely rewritten. In any case, supervising a thesis is a great and enriching experience.

Since 2004 I have directed the Histal Research Group, and the Histal website (www.histal.net), which aims to be a showcase and platform for the study of the history of translation in Latin America. Numerous students and colleagues from countries such as Colombia, Venezuela, Belgium, Spain, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Cameroon and Morocco have participated in the group. I was responsible for preparing the grant applications to the CRSH/SSHRC (the Federal funding institution for research) and then managing the amounts received. Histal operates in a large room at the UdeM equipped with computers, printer and scanner, open all year round and accessible to anyone who wants to collaborate.

At UCV I was head of the Department of Translation and Interpretation (we were about 10 professors) for 3 years before emigrating to Canada.

From 2009 to 2013 I was director of the Department of Literature and Modern Languages at UdeM. That Department had a Hispanic Studies section and a Germanic Studies section offering programs from undergraduate to PhD, as well as a section composed of languages such as Italian, Portuguese, Catalan and Modern Greek with short term programs. In total, the department had about 20 professors. The administrative work is sometimes heavy, but it gives an insight into the workings of the faculty. The most rewarding thing about a job as a department head is the human relations in close contact with colleagues.

From 2014 to 2024 I was editor of META journal. I was well acquainted with the operation of the journal as I was editor from 2010 to 2014. META is the oldest translation studies journal and among the best in the world. It publishes 3 issues per year of an average of 10 articles and 5 reviews, each article has 7,500 to 11,000 words. It means that the work is far superior to any other journal of the same level. About a hundred articles per year are received and evaluated by two experts on the subject and the languages involved, and there are cases in which there are up to three evaluators. The basic layout of the journal is done internally with three students, then the journal's publisher, the PUM, takes care of the final layout, printing and subscriptions. *Érudit* (the platform that brings together mainly Québec journals) is in charge of the electronic version. For me, it has been a very rich 10

years because of the close contact with the best translators in the world and the contact with the most diverse topics in the field of Translation Studies. This richness amply compensates for the amount of work involved in the management of a journal.

I have always considered it essential for an academic to belong to his or her guild (in my case OTTIAQ) and/or association. I am a member of the Canadian Association of Translation Studies (ACT-CATS) of which I was first secretary and then president from 2006 to 2010. I was also president from 2014 to 2022 of the Canadian Association of Translation Schools (ACET). In this capacity, I have been involved in writing grant applications and organizing conferences and seminars.

I am Co-editor of the Cambridge Studies of Language Practices and Social Development, *Cambridge University Press*, since 2020.

I am a member of the scientific committee of *Benjamins Translation Library* (since 2018), the journals *Chronotopos* (since 2018), *Interculturality and Translation* (since 2002), *Trans* and *Hermeneus*, (since 2009), as well as numerous colloquia and conferences.

I co-founded the *Nucleo* journal of the School of Modern Languages of the UCV (1983), was a member of the editorial board of the *ÍKALA* magazine, Medellín, Colombia (2006) and of *TTR* from 2006 to 2010.

Finally, I have been an OTTIAQ-certified translator since 2004 and I still accept small translation contracts, especially official documents.

Main research contributions

In the field of research, I have followed two distinct paths: that of pedagogy and that of history. These paths converge in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, the first edition of which dates back to 1998. At the request of Routledge, I contributed two entries, one on “*Adaptation*” and the other on the history of translation in Latin America entitled “*Latin America*”.

The first, on adaptation, was widely accepted by colleagues interested in the subject and has been abundantly cited. Its merit consists in defining a concept that is very widespread and used but has not been problematized. My model, which is based on multiple manifestations, is composed of four conditions and two types and has been reproduced and adopted in articles, book chapters and master’s and doctoral theses internationally. It is certainly

a theoretical model, but it has consequences for translation pedagogy insofar as it forces the translator to opt (or not) for a “cibliste” approach and thus stimulates his or her creativity. I later published several articles on the pedagogy of re-expression, i.e. the onomasiological approach, which derive directly from my concept of adaptation. This stage of the translation process proves to be the most difficult for students to perform, and therefore most of the pedagogical efforts should be devoted to it. A topic closely linked to re-expression but also to the translation process as a whole is self-revision. As far as I know this activity is not the subject of any course at any university in the world. I have dealt with this subject in several publications, but also in my classes, conferences and workshops (in different countries) as well as in the OTTIAQ training program.

My thesis was published at the UCV under the title *¿Traducir o adaptar?* (1998) as well as the Spanish version of Jean Delisle’s manual entitled *Iniciación a la traducción. Enfoque interpretativo. Teoría y práctica* (2^eed.) (2006). It has been very well received in Latin America as well as in Spain.

The second entry in the Routledge Encyclopedia is Latin America. It is the first outline of the history of translation in Latin America. Although it is very general, it gives a fairly accurate idea of the main milestones of such history. Above all, it provided an opportunity to delve deeper and investigate more circumscribed topics. In 2004, the Latin American history research group (www.histal.net) was created at UdeM. Its website had a great impact among Translation Studies Scholars and historians from Latin America and elsewhere. We started from nothing and little by little different colleagues joined us to collaborate with the site. I can affirm that Histal was the initiator of a network of Latin American historians and of many works in this field.

Four macro projects were carried out within the framework of Histal: «Le rôle de la traduction dans le processus d’indépendance du Venezuela (1780–1830)», «L’impact de la traduction sur les questions identitaires dans la presse coloniale du Venezuela (1808–1822)», «La traduction et la conquête spirituelle en Amérique hispanique (1492–1810) and «Le regard de l’Autre : les récits de voyage en traduction au Venezuela et en Colombie aux 18^e et 19^e siècles », all funded by the CRSH/SSHRC.

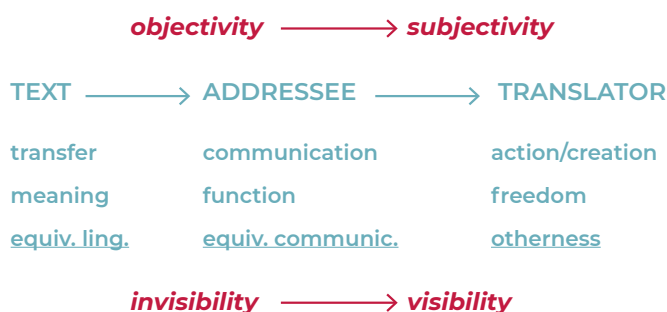
Several of my publications derived from these projects had a high visibility at the international level such as Translation, Resistance and Ac-

tivism (2010), *Diccionario histórico de la traducción en Hispanoamérica* (2013), *Handbook of Spanish Translation Studies* (2019), *World Atlas of Translation Studies* (2019) and *ENTI Encyclopaedia of Translation and Interpreting* (2022), all co-authored with my first PhD student, my tireless colleague and my faithful friend, Álvaro Echeverri. Special mention should be made of my 2017 article *Eurocentrism and Latin Americanism in Latin American Translation History*, *PERSPECTIVES: Studies in Translatology* (25-2) (pp. 260-272) in which the Eurocentrism of a translation historian was denounced.

Theoretical and methodological models of reference

I grew up, so to speak, in Seleskovitch and Lederer's interpretative theory (*théorie du sens*) during my PhD and before that, with Jean Delisle's manual. I am still convinced that one must believe in deverbalization as a fundamental part of the translation process, and I think it makes sense to insist on it in translation classes. I often used the Seleskovitch triangle in my classes. Delisle based his translation pedagogy on that interpretative model. He proposed a manual, now called *La Traduction raisonnée*, based on the learning-by-objectives method. His manual has been translated into several languages and adapted by me into Spanish. I have used it over the years and it is still used in many universities. But it has some drawbacks. Just as Seleskovitch and Lederer offer examples to illustrate their discourse that are too "perfect", "ideal", Delisle proposes solutions to his examples that are too elaborate. A student will never reach many of the translation solutions proposed by Delisle. The texts he proposes, on the other hand, are quite difficult for beginners who must learn a working methodology: they must learn how to translate, not how to solve the difficulties of professionals. The method by objectives has a defect: it gives very good recipes, which I would call translation reflexes, but which are quickly forgotten when confronted with the overall text. Another criticism of the interpretative theory is that it considers the re-expression phase as something automatic, natural, spontaneous. They refer to Boileau «Ce qui se conçoit bien s'énonce clairement et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément». Nothing could be truer! It is necessary to explain, to illustrate, to demonstrate to the student how to arrive at an acceptable re-expression. Nord's functionalism allowed me to go

beyond the interpretative theory. It allowed me to put my students in real communication situations. Functionalism considers all the agents involved in the translation process, especially the original assignment and the final function. Functionalism leads naturally to adaptation. The purpose (*visée* in French and *propósito* in Spanish) gives rise to adaptation, be it punctual or global. From there to interventionism is only one step. The history of translation in Latin America has shown me this clearly. I believe in the translator's interventionism when he or she, and only he or she, decides, and justifies it, for cultural, ideological, religious or political reasons. I can explain this position in favor of interventionism in the light of the evolution of the object of study in Translation Studies, which has progressively and schematically passed from the text to the translator, passing through communication. To my mind, in the 1950s and 1960s, the approach was almost exclusively linguistic, with no concern for the author, the addressee, much less the translator. In the 70s and 80s, with the advent of communication theory, the translator becomes more present alongside the other factors of communication. From the 1990s onwards, greater attention is devoted to the translator's context, to his or her freedom and creative capacity, without forgetting the paratext. The analysis is then much more subjective insofar as it tries to underline the translator's visibility and active role (agent) in society. This evolution can be represented schematically as follows:



For my part, I am very interested in the translator's deliberate interventions.

“A personal assessment of the state of translation research and its relationship with methodology: past, present, and future perspectives”

It is clear that a number of technological tools have impacted the work of the researcher. What 20-30 years ago meant working through a corpus by hand, page by page to find what we were looking for, has changed radically.

The researcher is now increasingly part of a team, of a project involving several actors. Projects are increasingly interdisciplinary. Funding for such projects in many parts of the world has grown and facilitated the hiring of research assistants.

In the field of translation history, the research methodology, which was merely descriptive when I started, has been enriched by new concepts (e.g., postcolonial, gender, micro-history) and new approaches (translation as *transfer*, complexity theory, the biosemiotic approach, the ecological approach, the network approach, etc.). Moreover, the history of translation has gradually been accompanied by critical discourse analysis in various fields. History has established itself as an essential branch in Translation Studies and the multiplication of researchers, journals and national and international meetings, so that the future is promising on condition that it does not fall into Eurocentrism.

In the field of translation pedagogy, I started in the glory days of Vinay and Darbelnet, whose *Stylistics of French and English* dates to 1958. Fortunately, Jean Delisle came along and questioned this method and proposed his interpretative vision, born at the Esit in Paris. Studies based on the Think Aloud Protocols began, followed by Christian Nord's functionalist method, followed by Don Kiraly's constructivist approach, which has become widespread. The APP (Learning by Problem) and project-based learning have also gained ground. Douglas Robinson proposed a somatic approach. In short, the translation teacher has multiple options at hand to think about and deepen his or her teaching task.

The latest technologies derived from artificial intelligence are impacting translation pedagogy. Although I have not been able to know them in practice since I have not been teaching for years, I think that tools such as Linguee and DeepL (among others) and even more artificial intelligence in all its versions and applications (ChatGPT, Copilot, Gemini, etc.) have

radically changed the way of teaching professional translation. These tools are here to stay and will be improved very quickly. Our students and graduates must use them, just as we are using them. Therefore, it is not a question of banning these tools; in our universities, we must teach students to use them without leaving out their ability to evaluate and criticize. There is also the issue of plagiarism. In daily practice, some colleagues choose to do evaluations as they did 25 years ago with paper and pencil. This is effective for measuring students' translation competence, but it seems to me to be totally anachronistic. Others allow the use of machine translation, but with a reasoned commentary on which parts were used, which parts were not used, and which parts were modified. This form of evaluation seems to me to be more appropriate. The paradox lies in the fact that future translators will most probably not have to translate but post-edit. But to post-edit, one must know how to translate and write, so we must continue to teach how to translate, with the best possible method, and teach how to write in the mother tongue in a "human" way, i.e. with common sense, with style, with feeling, with creativity, with identity.

Finally the above does not belong to me only, it also belongs to my students, some colleagues and my family: my wife Mayra and my children Axel and Gaëlle.

From professional translator to lecturer and researcher

Abstract

This testimony begins with an account of my academic training at the graduate and postgraduate levels in Europe, highlighting my PhD dissertation on the notion of adaptation, which emerged from my adaptation of Delisle's Handbook (1980) into the French–Spanish working languages. It then offers a brief overview of my first conference presentations, which proved formative and inspirational for my subsequent research. My years of teaching in Venezuela and Canada were guided by two core principles—teaching by example and valuing success—as well as by a personal conviction: the defense and promotion of high-quality French language use. Special attention is given to my supervisory activities and my involvement in a Montréal-based research group (www.histal.net), as well as to my experience as editor-in-chief of the journal *Meta* and my presidency of ACT-CATS and ACET. I then seek to illustrate the significance of my major research contributions. The testimony concludes with an overview of the theoretical and methodological models that have guided my work.

Keywords

Adaptation, pedagogy, translation history, writing, revision, Latin America

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How to cite

Bastin, Georges. 2026. "From professional translator to lecturer and researcher." *MeTI: Methods in Translation and Interpreting* 0: xxx-xxxx.