

Translation, cognition, and other mishaps

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Early years

It all started with a BA in Anglo-Germanic Philology from the University of Valencia, which I finished in 1985. As I sat in Jenaro Talens' classes, in the third of my five-year program, I learned of the newly founded translation school in Granada and decided to change course. My father, still disappointed that I had not pursued architecture (and later, law), insisted that I finish my degree first, hoping I would give up, move on, and forget.

Erasmus exchanges didn't yet exist, but a comparable scheme that included an informal quid pro quo teaching assistantship brought me to the University of Nottingham for a long semester, where I learned about language variation and the miners' strike against Thatcher's policies. I went to London on the weekends to go to the theater, up in the nosebleed seats. I loved Harold Pinter's *Victoria Station* at the Duchess theater, blissfully unaware that the established critics frowned upon the play. A pity. Had I known, I might have enjoyed it even more. I finished my BA. I had not changed my mind. I did pursue a second BA in translation, and I never regretted it.

So, by the time I enrolled in Granada's new school, I had already completed a degree. I was older than most of my classmates, and better prepared. I also benefited from the short but significant experience my teachers had gained since the program's launch. Around that time, Roberto Mayoral learned that his article on constrained translation would be pub-

lished in *Meta* (Mayoral et al. 1988), and that marked the beginning of what I learned from him: “All translation is constrained production—he told me once—not only those with obvious graphic elements.” That and my own initial bafflement, bordering on daze, at the notion of *translation strategies* that everybody else seemed to use and take for granted, fostered my curiosity for translation as an object of intellectual inquiry, beyond professional concerns.

I kind of rushed through the degree to move to Munich, where I started teaching Spanish at the Spanisches Kulturinstitut, now part of the Instituto Cervantes, and the Volkshochschule while I attended first language courses (the best ever), then translation seminars at the Ludwig Maximilian Universität. The environment outside was not very welcoming for a southern European trying to eke out a living under precarious conditions. I started translating on the side with a typewriter, did some dubbing—as a voice-over actor, I mean. But those were the times when the regional government was trying to legalize the *Todeschüsse* and to enforce random mandatory AIDS testing. In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. I applied for PhD fellowships in American universities, got three offers, and left for sunny California.

My time at UC Santa Barbara was close to perfect. I arrived at the same time as my teachers and soon friends Sara Poot Herrera and Jill Levine, with whom I discussed literary translation. Sara was already dreaming of founding UC Mexicanistas but she did not know it yet (cf. Poot 2007), and Jill was about to publish her famous 1991 book. I learned computing and some Italian, and many things regarding Spanish and eurocentrism from Luis Fernando Lara, who had just published his dictionary (1986) and was there in sabbatical. I also assisted him in some aspects of the research that resulted in his “El caló revisitado” (Lara 1991) and through this work I came to understand both how language use mirrors society and how demanding and painstaking social scientific research can be.

Jill also brought Manuel Puig and Guillermo Cabrera Infante, who told me that Spaniards have lost the ear for our shared language. He was right, but life was bright. I had an apartment at Anapamu Street, a used station wagon, and regular free tickets to the Symphony Orchestra. Those two years stretched like a long summer dusk—golden, unhurried, steeped in a joy reluctant to fade away. Yet, as I passed my qualifying exam, more

or less with flying colors, it suddenly dawned on me that I was becoming a scholar—the only one in California working on translation, or so it felt—and that pragmatics would not cut it. Then I attended a meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society and decided to switch. There were also personal reasons, but they are only mine.

At Cal I enrolled in the small linguistics program at the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, where I enjoyed the support of my mentor, Milton Azevedo. I was only required to retake the qualifying exam in due time but was *allowed* to attend any course in related departments—and I couldn't get enough: Charles Fillmore, Paul Kay, George Lakoff, Robin Lakoff, Eve Sweetser, Dan Slobin, Susan Ervin-Tripp... And I missed Eleanor Rosch, Anne Treisman and Daniel Kahneman simply because back then I did not know who they were. Shame. Kay had moved to Linguistics from Anthropology, the impact of Fillmore's (1982) work on frame semantics was in an all-time high, George had just published *Women, fire, and dangerous things*, Slobin had just started with his notion of thinking for speaking (hmmm), and soon Robin would finish *Talking power*. I had struck gold.

There had been magic in Santa Barbara, yes, but this was another kind—clearer, more electric, as though I were standing at the frontier of thought. Robin co-supervised me and found me a little summer job transcribing recordings for Deborah Tannen. I freelanced as a translator mainly for International Contact in Oakland and I introduced my friend Gonzalo Fernández to translating. I wrote my dissertation as I was part-time teaching at Cal State San Jose, where José Cerrudo offered me to stay and develop a translation program. I was thrilled at the prospects in Silicon Valley and indebted to Joe, but I had witnessed the aftershocks of the Rodney King riots around Telegraph and Durant. I found myself confronting firsthand that the deep historical fractures in American society could result in random violence. I no longer wanted to stay. I was ready to go back home.

Building on the work by Ferrara (1980a, b), my dissertation had coined the notion of *text act*. It also offered some sharp criticisms and innovative views, but it was not much more than a nice try with an even nicer title. Still, it landed me a job at the University of Vigo, where I would frantically type lesson notes for one of my courses on my laptop as I discovered, in awe, Atlantic Spain, carved in oak and stone by rain and tide. When I revised my

course notes the following year, I realized it would be easier to get them out as a book. I did so one year later, as I was already working in what now is the University of Vic. The university publisher would get it out in Catalan but I wanted it in Spanish as well, so I first tried Ariel, which declined unimpressed, and then Teide, where Cristian Rahola himself told me he would publish it because he had leafed through it and had finally understood sociolinguistics—but he sounded like he was teasing me. Amparo Hurtado suggested the title. It was *Lingüística para traducir*.

The book that grew from those hectic notes was my answer to the challenges I saw my own students facing. I felt they needed a grasp of the reality of language use, an understanding of how meaning is conveyed, and a how-to survival toolkit, all at once. I built the book on these three pillars: It began with language variation, then moved into the intricate workings of meaning, and ended with practical text analysis. It was my attempt to synthesize everything from my own scattered journey—from Nottingham to Granada, from linguistic theory through embodied cognition to the practical demands of a translation brief—into a single, coherent guide. Still, since I wrote it so quickly, I would accept the first correct example that came up to my mind. If you read the examples out of context, you might catch glimpses of my friends and family, Spain at the time, and my own tastes in arts.

I wish I could write that all this was a well-thought plan successfully carried out, but it was really more like the title sequence of *Get smart* (just look it up on YouTube). Doors opened and closed on their own and I just happened to go through them or not. A few friends gave me a sense of anchoring, not only personally—like Richard Samson, a man for all seasons. At some point, however, I sought refuge in Granada, ducking from the crossfire of nationalisms that had begun to weigh heavily in Spanish bilingual universities.

I have long thought that disciplines lean toward certain world views. You'll often find more conservative thinking in law, more materialism in medicine. One key political difference between philologies and translation studies lies in their stance toward the world: the former celebrate what is unique—and, often, implicitly superior—in their own domains, while the latter foreground what connects us with others. Side to side. This, after all,

is the etymological root of *communication*. Think of it this way: a philologist is a second-hand car salesperson, eager to show you what makes this particular car special and best for you. A linguist is a car mechanic who will lift the hood and examine what works and what not, and how and why. And a translator? A translator is a taxi driver. You step in, name your destination, and let yourself be carried through the landscape.

Teaching

Unsurprisingly, and perhaps fortunately, teaching linguistics was a modest share of my teaching load in my real first Alma Mater, where I returned as a teacher in 1996. As a newcomer, I would be assigned pretty much what other profs would not take and I was tasked with mainly scientific and technical translation. Granada was at the time very strong in legal and financial translation, with profs like Roberto Mayoral and Catherine Way, but I joined a team with Maribel Tercedor, Clara Inés López, Bryan Robinson and Miguel Vega and I humbly think this team made a great job too.

Yet, in a way, my courses were always mainly about freelancing. I apparently asked for enormous workloads but most students enjoyed the challenge and even more the jokes they would make about it even decades after. I would not say it was PTSD. I have had the honor of learning from a very large number of young people who became excellent professionals—including many translator trainers in several countries. I cannot risk offering you a few names because I had about 100 students per year and because from many I know naught. In a way, educators work with smoke: you talk and write to people you listen and read, and then they go (nearly) never to come back. In the twilight, sometimes you wonder what effect did you have in their lives, in their careers. It is an itchy kind of hope.

I soon shared my concerns about compartmentalized training with my friends Lola Olvera and Rosa Castro, and together we created the group Aula.int to study translator training and improve it. Our core idea was that trainees were being taught isolated skills—such as documentation or terminology management—without understanding how these fit into the more complex task of translating. To address this, we formed cross-course teams of trainees for translation assignments, with each member contributing in

a role aligned with their course (see, e.g., Olvera et al. 2007). And it worked, thanks to the leadership of Lola, who also succeeded in securing funding for a long series of teaching innovation projects.

From the very same concerns, I chose to teach literary translation as well. I had more experience in creative writing than in translating literature, but I believed that in that classroom I would be more a reader than a leader—and I could read. My goal soon became to show how challenging and fascinating translating can be, and how much it demands that we attune ourselves to how others feel and understand. I then found myself with a copy of *Trainspotting* and realized that this was precisely the kind of challenge I was seeking, ken? In groups, my students would translate the voice of a particular character in the novel and review the translations produced by other groups. We also tackled *Porno* and *Ecstasy*, and tried other authors, but no text engaged the students (and myself) as deeply as Welsh's. So we kept coming back to *Trainspotting* and its companions.

The learning came not from producing a perfect final draft, but from the process itself. After all, you don't really learn how to translate; rather, you learn how to do it professionally. It is a process of socialization. In my view—beyond language command and knowledge stock—this often means learning how you think, and acting on that thinking to steer your performance to meet expectations. This is what Shreve (2006) described as metacognitive awareness and self-regulation. Yet, even today, many of my students' full translations of Welsh's novels still strike me as superior to the published versions, which often feel too flat. The translator of those editions countered that my students' versions over-characterized the texts. Fair enough. I still keep only one of those translations, in case anyone would like to compare, and would like to use these lines to invite my former students to share their versions with me they may have kept.

Gonzalo reentered my life as vice director of the new School of Translators of Toledo. He invited me to teach a course on translation theory at a summer school, where I met the other faculty—the best Arabists in Spain: a group of young dissidents, including Salvador Peña and Manuel Feria, who were passionate about contemporary Arabic, translation, and much else besides. Around that time, Catalina Jiménez (still more of an acquaintance than a friend) casually handed me her habilitation thesis—a required and

deeply personal requisite in the viva-style evaluation for my appointment as Associate Professor—simply because she sensed I had no idea where to begin. It must have been written all over my face. Gerd Wotjak and Heide Schmidt volunteered to read my draft.

Salvador served as secretary of the committee that ran the show. He opened his remarks by saying, “This is my personal *enmienda a la totalidad*, if you will—I’m not buying any of this.” Some colleagues in the audience were horrified, but I took up the gauntlet, even flattered. For the record, I got the job—unanimously. Those were times when you could disagree and still respect and like each other, and I was happy to give Salvador a square silver dirham from the Almohad Caliphate as a token of appreciation.

You never know what echoes your minimal actions might find in brilliant minds. Four years later, a treatise on Andalusian numismatics saw the light (Vega, Peña & Feria 2002)—the first in a long series of works on the subject. On my side, I had never realized I was always thinking in terms of major world languages, and now I recognized the need to improve the training of translators of languages other than the usual suspects. So, when I became the head of the department, one of my priorities was to introduce Arabic as B language. I succeeded, with the firm support of José Antonio Sabio, then our Dean. To date, and to the best of my knowledge, Granada is still the only translation school in Europe to have that.

Over the years, I’ve also taught quite a few PhD seminars—mostly on how cognition ties into translation, and on how to do research that holds up. Titles shifted, formats changed, but the core remained the same: helping researchers ask sharper questions, choose clearer tools, and gain a better sense of where they’re headed. These courses were less about content than about perspective—about breaking habits, blurring the usual lines between theory and method, between translation and interpreting, between philosophy, linguistics, and psychology. I tried to create room for critical thought, for noticing and challenging things we too often take for granted. In the end, PhD seminars have always felt like a natural extension of this shared thinking—just like supervising doctoral work.

PhD training and supervision

In 1999 I designed and led a PhD departmental program in Granada called “Language and Cognition.” It was successful in its modesty—I always strove to keep the number of students down to the minimum to guarantee a very good training for very good students. So, in 2002, I modified it to make it interdepartmental and international, and welcomed Teresa Bajo, Pedro Maticzo, and other researchers from experimental psychology; Marisa Presas, from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona; and Gerd Wotjak and other translation scholars from the IALT of the University of Leipzig. The new program, entitled “Translation and interpreting processes,” welcomed visiting professors such as Daniel Gile, Gyde Hansen, Donald Kiraly, Paul Kußmaul, Hanna Risku and Gregory Shreve, and researchers such as Talmy Givón and Zoltán Kövecses gave our annual inaugural lectures. This doctorate received uninterrupted quality distinctions from the Ministry and disappeared when regulatory changes sacrificed it, together with many other programs. In general, the training of researchers in CTIS continues to be a pending subject that is difficult to solve. More about this, below.

As time went on and the new program matured, I found myself supervising several doctoral students, whose questions and perspectives helped fuel my own urge to make sense of all this we are doing. I was struck by the insights of the conduit metaphor (Reddy 1979), as explained by Lakoff & Johnson (1980), refined by Grady (1988), and tested by Gentner & Gentner (1983). Celia Martín had just translated Reiß & Vermeer’s (1996) foundational book and wanted to analyze translational functionalism from a cognitive perspective. That is how her excellent meta-theoretical analysis came to be (Martín 2003).

Cristina Lachat (2003) and I wanted to know more about how novice and advanced translator trainees and professionals perceived, mentally represented, and solved translation problems. We tracked actual translation behavior with Translog 2000 and found that training fosters shared behavioral patterns, whereas professional experience leads back to more individual and varied styles. Bart De Rooze (2003) also keylogged advanced trainees and professionals under three levels of time pressure to scrutinize influences on translation processes and product quality. Unsurprisingly, he found that time pressure increases errors and revisions. More interestingly, there was a

clear tendency for one error to trigger subsequent ones, and one fourth of the students actually performed better under moderate stress. Just as I was getting close to the Copenhagen TRAP group—I would later be an external affiliate of Jakobsen's CRITT center in its first period—the rosy account of problem solving as linear and expertise as steady growth was already beginning to show some cracks.

María Jesús Blasco (2005) was an old friend and already training interpreters when we set out to examine how interpreters develop and deploy listening comprehension skills, and how comprehension processes affect overall interpreting performance. She showed that targeted training can foster more effective listening and improve interpreting performance. One day, as she was working in her office in Castellón, a retired Brian Harris dropped by to introduce himself and just say hello. Overnight he became a sort of informal co-supervisor in the background and honored us with many insights over the years. I felt once again that my career was moving from one serendipity to the next, as if I were playing the Game of the Goose.

Reading Harris & Sherwood (1978), and having Harris nearby to clarify that *innate* just meant 'untrained' and could be developmental, I became persuaded that he was right about natural translation. So when Maribel Gómez asked me to help her find out whether bilinguals actually translated better than translation trainees at the time, all the pieces fell into place. Gómez (2005) linked bilinguals' apparent superiority to language command—no thrills and spills—but in doing so, she also helped to expand our view of translating as a deeply human, socially mediated, and cognitively grounded practice.

At the department, we had been approached by Kora Basich and Ana Gabriela Guajardo, then leading the translation school at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California in Mexicali, to offer them a PhD program tailored to jump-start research among their faculty. Pamela Faber took the lead, and we thus initiated a decade-long collaboration where, under the pretext of teaching, we would go and learn about dignity, public service, and the everyday bilingual life at a frontier that is really a buffer country between Mexico and the US. Basich honored me by asking for my support with a dissertation she did not really need—she was the Dean and nearing retirement. But she aimed to set an example and found the time to thoroughly

examine how translator training at UABC could be strengthened through a careful assessment of local institutional circumstances, faculty realities, and market demands. Basich (2009) emphasized the importance of adapting faculty development and teaching strategies to the specific constraints and opportunities of the local context, in order to build a realistic and sustainable model for excellence in translator training. I wish all translation programs had such Basich approach.

As my understanding grew of what would later become my situated approach to translating and my theoretical unease waned, my methodological concerns waxed. No complaint—I knew this never ends. Quality assessment cuts across market, training, and research scopes, so it was a priority. José Tomás Conde Ruano tackled it from a cognitive perspective. Conde (2009) examined how professionals, trainers, trainees and targeted readers assess translation quality, and one of his most surprising findings was that end users with no training produced global quality judgments that closely matched those of trained evaluators, though they were more lenient. He also found a clear learning effect in the evaluators, who became more selective and efficient (their assessment, unchanged) as the serial task progressed. Perhaps most intriguingly, the most salient errors often had less impact on global quality judgments than subtler issues that fewer evaluators noticed.

How cognitive processes become automatized was also moving to center stage in my work, for practical reasons and because automation itself has cognitive effects: it shifts attention and reshapes the distribution of cognitive effort. This was precisely the focus of José Ignacio Perea Sardón, who explored how computer-assisted revision can offload repetitive tasks and allow revisers to concentrate on higher-order decisions. Perea (2010) developed and tested PETRA REV, a tool designed to support the revision of localized software (Ubuntu), automating the detection of inconsistencies, format errors, and omissions. He showed how such automation not only improves efficiency and quality, but also reshapes the way revisers approach texts—changing their strategy, attention patterns, and engagement with revision tasks.

I decided to move to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. I don't think I have ever lived more than 10 years in the same place. No PhD program was offered at ULPGC in translation, and I took the opportunity to start publish-

ing my work in English and editing colleagues' works, as a way to help steer the field, given that I was notoriously bad at raising research funds. But not so bad that I couldn't secure some funding to try and develop a system to analyze the potential cognitive demands that texts may tend to pose when being translated. Then, I was invited to join the University of Bologna, Forlì campus. I accepted, and this brought me back into doctoral supervision.

One of the first PhDs I supervised in Forlì was that of César Andrés González Fernández. He tested whether translators' choices can be systematically analyzed through Campbell's (1999) Choice Network Analysis. In a way, it was Lachat's problem solving, second round. Campbell's basic assumption was that the greater the variation in the renderings of a certain target stretch, the more difficult the corresponding source-text stretch was. This, González (2023) found in his keylogged data, turned out to be incorrect: the number of options found in a group of informants is not related to the difficulty each person in the sample may experience. More interestingly, César successfully argued that latency in reaching a solution may sometimes be due to difficulty—but at other times it may result from the procedure itself being intrinsically laborious, as with transliterating names.

I co-supervised Petra Klimant with Hanna Risku. Klimant (2023) explored how prolonged work sessions affect both translation behavior and results. Her keylogged data showed that mental fatigue clearly modulates translators' behavior and output: longer sessions led to increased pauses, errors, and interference effects, especially in less experienced translators. This may not come as a surprise, but it has clear methodological implications: very short texts, as customarily used as prompts in many translation research projects, may distort reality in that they do not induce any cognitive fatigue and often actually prompt informants to artificially alter their processing patterns and task behavior—for instance, by reading the entire source text in advance and holding it in mind as a whole. As I have mentioned elsewhere, in the last 30 years, rather than building a translation theory, we may have unwittingly contributed to a theory of how people start to translate.

Multimodality and multitasking are nowadays coming under the spotlight. For too long, we have focused on features that distinguish interpreting—especially simultaneous interpreting—from translation—especially

book translation (yes, and vice versa). This has swept under the rug many commonalities. Furthermore, we now have the means to capture complex behaviors in more naturalistic tasks. Co-supervised by Victoria Lei Lai Cheng and myself, Du Zhiqiang studied documentation behavior during the preparation for remote simultaneous interpreting and at the booth itself. Du (2024) confirms that using CAI tools improves accuracy in certain typically problematic units, but the picture that emerges is more complex: our approach reveals drawbacks and interactions that had remained undetected with other methods and strategies.

One more PhD student has not finished yet, Sara Puerini. Iris Schrijver and I are co-supervising her progress. She is trying to capture behavioral differences potentially correlating with cognitive processes across several typing tasks, in order to single out translation-specific behavior. Sara has implemented and is refining my own Task Segment Framework to study translation behavior as keylogged (Muñoz & Apfelthaler 2022). If you would like a taster, read Puerini (2023), which summarizes her M.A. thesis on the same topic. This is not a CV, nor do I aim to be exhaustive, but I cannot conclude without mentioning some of the authors of other M.A. theses I supervised, such as María Castro Arce, José Jorge Amigo Extremera, José Cortez Godínez, Irina Filatova, Álvaro Marín García, Carolina Smith de la Fuente, Giulia Togato, Nereida Betancor Sánchez, Carlo Branchini, and Bouella Lehib Breica, who came directly from the Saharawi refugee camps in Tindouf.

All my students had very demanding projects that took a lot of time, not least because they had to acquire a foundation in cognition and empirical research that institutions do not often provide. The European reform of PhD programs has all but killed them, and has often turned early-stage researchers into remote-controlled cheap labor for PIs. That is how I came up with the biennial Summer School on CTIS. We have thus far held three editions: in Forlì, Italy, in 2021 (really online, due to the pandemic); Cartagena, Spain, in 2023; and Poznań, Poland, in 2025. If everything goes as planned, the fourth one will be in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in 2027. It is a modest initiative, but it allows us to foster the kind of deep, methodologically sound, and collaborative research culture that so many formal programs no longer guarantee. It is also a great place for networking, to enhance a sense of belonging to a scattered scientific community—one that is more like an *invisible college*.

Research

When I returned to Spain, I felt a kind of marshland loneliness: the horizon was wide and promising, but there was little in the foreground to catch the eye. Amparo Hurtado was gaining prominence, but I had been raised in a different tribe within cognitive science. My research truly began once I secured a position at Granada—just in time to read Shreve’s *Cognitive Processes in Translation and Interpreting* (Danks et al. 1997). I saw the light. There I was, 35 years old and discovering interdisciplinary empirical research. I tried to join efforts with my PhD students and created the group Expertise and Environment in Translation (PETRA, Spanish acronym). The title was not a declaration of war but rather a letter of secession: we would embrace cognitive-psychological constructs like expertise, rather than deductive linguistic notions like competence. And we were committed to views of cognition that were embodied and embedded.

We saw *embodied cognition* as key to understanding how meaning emerges from our physical experience of the world, while *embedded cognition* reminded us that thinking is not something that merely governs interaction with our environment—it is shaped by it. We do steer our thoughts, but it’s a two-way street. Soon, we welcomed other challenges to the classical information-processing model. *Enacted cognition* pushed embodiment further: meaning is not stored or received, but enacted through perceptual and motor engagement. The mind is brought forth through doing. *Extended cognition* argued that if something functions as part of a cognitive process, then it is part of the mind—whether it’s a tool, a notepad, or another person. *Affective cognition* dismantled the myth of pure reason: emotion is not a disruption to thought, but one of its driving forces. Feelings guide attention, shape relevance, and give meaning its affective weight.

I couldn’t keep up with all the letters added to the model (4EA and counting), but most of these were frameworks *ex negativo*: legitimate critiques of classical cognitive science rather than fully developed alternatives. At times, it felt like the *Life of Brian* scene with the People’s Front of Judea, so I tried to trace a coherent path toward a homogeneous view. That effort became situated cognition as a framework for cognitive translatology, as I attempted to outline in my second book (Muñoz 2023). I’m hoping to find time to write a lighter version in English.

PETRA's overall plan was to have one PhD take up one aspect of the translation process to be able to map out our views and contrast them with hard data. María Castro Arce focused on reading and comprehension; Lachat explored problem solving; Conde addressed evaluation, and so on. Lack of PhD support and some academic setbacks humbled our project, but we really learned a lot, and people started taking us somewhat more seriously.

Susanne Göpferich invited me to two meetings she organized with the funding from her project Transcomp (Graz 2009, Giessen 2011), which she called *Translation Process Research Workshops*. They were summit-like symposia that managed to make me feel like an amoeba—but I was young and unbothered. So, when Susanne announced she was done with it, I asked her for permission to keep the name and the spirit and organized two more in Gran Canaria. Others would follow, with my support. Meanwhile, Amparo founded our star network, Translation, Research, Empiricism, Cognition (TREC), and a golden age for TPR ensued. That early loneliness, and the pathways it opened, turned into a networked landscape of ideas, collaborators, and questions still worth pursuing.

I closed PETRA when I moved to Italy, where I founded the laboratory for Multilectal Mediated Communication and Cognition, the MC2 Lab. At the beginning it had a strong local component, linked to a grant, but once it was over it recovered the spirit of loose network that had characterized PETRA, only that now it is much more international. The PhD branch, the Bertinoro Translation Society, is in charge of organizing the symposia, now *BTS meetings*.

I still work on keylogging—currently developing a new research application suite called Big Sistah. Lately, I've become increasingly aware of the need to go multimodal, and have begun exploring interpreting as well. I'm also more convinced than ever of the university's growing inadequacy—not just as a training ground, but as a space for research, and not only because of this soul-crushing neoliberal drift. This son of a hairdresser and a postmaster never thought he'd end up navigating academia, let alone pushing for its critical reform. As the song goes, I've had my share of losing—but who hasn't? It was always the becoming I dreamed of, never the being. I realized early on that my real vocation was learning—that's what I do best. The rest, I suppose, is scattered across my publications—and still in progress. All intellectual work is. Work in progress, I mean.

Para-research

Alongside this, I have always been involved in what could rightfully be described as para-research activities—initiatives that support, connect, and give shape to our field beyond individual research projects. These efforts rarely make it onto a CV, but they are simply the right things to do. They help keep the field alive and, honestly, help me sleep at night. One of my first such moves was co-founding the Iberian Association for Translation and Interpreting Studies. Roberto Mayoral and Francesc Parcerisas had fostered meetings of deans and heads of departments of translation and interpreting, but in research there was nothing of the sort—let alone for cognitive approaches. In 1996 and 1997, I surveyed, compiled, and redistributed a disciplinary guide with emails, URLs, and phones (yes, landlines) of translation scholars not only in Spain, but also what they taught and what their research interests were. But that was not good enough.

I convinced several colleagues to enter into talks and we formed a provisional management committee. I do not want to be exhaustive, but in the minutes I read the names of friends such as Ovidi Carbonell, Susana Cruces, Luis Pegenaute, Celia Rico, and Christopher Waddington. We learned of an unsuccessful prior independent attempt at the I Congresso Ibérico sobre Tradução, held at Universidade Aberta de Lisboa on 28–29 November 2001, and presented our project during a meeting of translation deans and chairs at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) on 1–2 February 2002, to ask for their support. We finally created the association as we celebrated its first conference in Granada, from 12 to 14 February 2003. Last summer, the biennial 11th conference was held in Vitoria-Gasteiz.

I edited the proceedings of that first AIETI conference and, guess what, I enjoyed it. I realized that it was a discreet way to learn what was cooking in many places. Meanwhile, Planeta-DeAgostini knocked at the door of the department to ask if someone would take up the challenge of translating UNESCO's eight-volume encyclopedia *History of Humanity*. I was the only volunteer, for I saw an opportunity to work with many of my former students, now seasoned professionals. With the help of Miguel Vega, we set up a team of 25 people, where four revisers would review the translations of the others. I also translated some difficult texts, so I actually wore three

hats: translator, reviser, and project manager. The publisher changed our excellent editor, and the new one gave us a hard time.

We had been forbidden to consult the first edition, which was deemed Western-centric and insensitive toward diversity. This created unexpected challenges. Once, I faced a table listing the first domesticated plants from 10,000 BCE, but only as abbreviations—I could find the full names nowhere. After one week, I looked for and located a paleo-botanist in an American university, somewhere in the Midwest. I emailed him and laid out my case, and he gracefully replied in a couple of hours with the full list. I marveled at his knowledge, thanked him, and asked him for the reference, to avoid pestering him again. “I got it from the *History of Mankind*,” he explained. He had just consulted the first edition! After 18 months, we managed to get the encyclopedia done. That was the summer of 2004.

Around that same time, I was involved in another kind of challenge: drafting the national guidelines for BA translation programs for the accreditation agency. As part of a national committee led by the new school’s Dean, Eva Muñoz, I was tasked with drafting the official guidelines for BA translation programs in Spain. A few experienced schools, including Granada’s, argued for a three-year generalist BA to build a wide foundation and support a wider range of business sectors, and a two-year specialized MA to forge all-round professional translators and interpreters. The prevailing view was different and, by the end, mine had become a lonely, quixotic fight—but I still managed to squeeze the proposal into the white paper as an alternative (ANECA 2004). Looking back at how the professions have evolved, I am more convinced than ever that this was the right path. It still is.

Back to editing. Before the proceedings of AIETI I, Teresa Julio had invited me to co-edit *Textos clásicos de pragmática* (1998), and, with Frederic Chaume, I also co-edited the special issue 7(2) of *Perspectives*, devoted to “Hispanic Translation Studies.” Whatever that is. I’ve never seen much use in waving disciplinary flags (or any flags, for that matter). Such labels and other inflated designations for subfields always struck me as unscientific and unnecessary. However interesting and necessary corpus-based research is in CTIS, terms like “corpus-based translation studies” make no more sense to me than “microscope-based medicine” or “notebook-based historiography.”

“Why, Mr. Labeler has spoken. Didn’t you coin or support Cognitive Translation & Interpreting Studies, Multilectal Mediated Communication, Cognitive Translatology?” Touché. But it is not the naming I resist, but what they mean. *Translation process research* tended to focus on linear, passive problem-solving in the minds of translators (not interpreters). CTIS comprises all mental activities of any party involved in communication. Not just the mediators and not just any communication, mind you. We can no longer sustain narrow, prescriptive, essentialist definitions of our object of study, especially as the list of relevant activities and services keeps expanding. *Multilectal mediated communication* covers them all. As for *cognitive translatology*, it seeks to include not only my views but also those of other researchers who stress different aspects of post-computational views of the mind, like Greg Shreve, Erik Angelone, Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow, Sandra Halverson, Don Kiraly, Jan-Louis Kruger, Álvaro Marín, Sharon O’Brien, Hanna Risku, Elisabet Tiselius, Bogusława Whyatt...

I co-edited a collection of papers by the PhD students in my program (Fernández & Muñoz 2008), and that experience made me realize that curated books might actually serve the field better than journals—at least in areas in permanent need of structure. Or not. Disciplines themselves may be on the way out, and perhaps the best thing for intellectual advancement is that the field isn’t so rigidly structured that it nips new ideas in the bud. The next volume, technically a special issue of *MonTI* (Muñoz 2014), proved the point. It also came with the wonderful surprise of befriending Javier Franco Aixelà, one of the most generous translation scholars I have ever met. In recent years, we have been co-editing the open-access *Encyclopedia of Translation & Interpreting* for AIETI.¹

Then Greg Shreve invited me to join *Translation Spaces* as a track editor. Before long, we started receiving proposals for special issues, and I was promoted to co-editor to take care of them. It was a generalist journal, but with Greg and me on the masthead, it was no surprise that proposals for cognitive volumes lined up at the door. After three years, Greg spoke with Isja Conen at John Benjamins, and we submitted a proposal for *Translation*,

¹ <https://www.aieti.eu/en/encyclopaedia/home/>

Cognition & Behavior. It didn't take much convincing. But after a while, you realize that journal editors must rotate—and around that time, I was also discovering open science. We now have a venue that helps vertebrate the field. My job was done.

I could mention at least seven other edited books and special issues, but I'll just highlight the latest one: a collaborative effort by 44 scholars to assemble a reference guide to research methods in CTIS (Rojo & Muñoz 2025). Two more are already in the works but, at some point, you must stop editing the field and start trusting the silences. That's when you drop the mic.

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Translation, cognition, and other mishaps

Abstract

I reconstruct my scholarly trajectory as a way of making sense of the emergence of cognitive translation and interpreting studies as a domain, and of cognitive translology as a framework within it. Work as a translator and early studies on language variation gradually opened into empirical research on translators' behavior and expertise. Linguistic models proved insufficient and yielded to perspectives grounded in situated cognition, in which embodiment, environment, and task conditions shape translation activity, and eventually expand toward multimodal, multitask, and increasingly technological forms of professional and non-professional communication alike. Translator training, researcher training, and research methods remained tightly intertwined over decades, under institutional constraints that both support and distort them. The resulting view frames cognitive translology as a moving target rather than a settled domain, defined less by boundaries than by its attempts to understand multilectal mediated communication.

Keywords

Cognitive translology, translator training, expertise, multilectal mediated communication, multimodality

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