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Research Article

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That damn financial crisis: A turning point in the linguistic integration of the migrant population?

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Abstract: Spain's sluggish recovery from the financial crisis of the past decade, changing domestic and international politics, armed conflicts and natural disasters, all constitute factors that prompt migration and lead to significant changes in the composition of society. The main objective of this article is to compare and contrast the level of linguistic integration of the migrant population at two different moments during the twenty-first century. The study is focused mainly on central Spain and two specific public-service settings: police and health care. A descriptive–comparative method is used to observe, collect and analyze data and describe and compare them to previous studies. A quantitative and qualitative approach is followed. The results indicate that the situation has changed only slightly over the past two decades. Communication between immigrants and public-service providers is still far from fluent, and the financial crisis has negatively affected the development of public service interpreting and translation.

Keywords: migration, intercultural communication, interpreting, PSIT, financial crisis

1 Introduction: Migration in Central Spain in the twenty-first century

A brief review of the evolution of the migrant population in Central Spain since the year 2000 indicates that the foreign population has undergone drastic changes. Data from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística* (in Spanish INE) – *Portal de Migraciones* (Portal de Migraciones) – show a steep rise in the number of immigrants arriving in Spain between 2000 and 2010 and a successive drop over the following years.

This phenomenon began in the region of Madrid (*Comunidad Autónoma de Madrid*, CAM) around 2010 and in *Junta de Comunidades de Castilla la Mancha* (JCCM) in 2012. In both regions, the migrant population has progressively decreased, eventually dropping to the numbers originally collected in 2006. Differences regarding nationalities and, consequently, the language services required in each region were also detected. The most significant difference was the presence of a larger Chinese population in Madrid than in JCCM in 2016. Both regions previously had a high percentage of Romanians and Moroccans.

Conversely, over the recent years the number of refugees and asylum seekers has increased both nationally and in the regions of study, especially Madrid and Sigüenza, a town in the province of Guadalajara and this being one of the five provinces of JCCM (Memoria CEAR 2006). Little information was available on the refugees until the start of the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015 (European Commission). However, this topic falls outside the scope of this article. For more information, refer to León Pinilla (2018: 203–20).

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Bearing these demographic changes in mind, this study is based on the following premise: it has been more than 15 years since the publication of the first study on language services provided to the migrant population in the region of Madrid (Valero-Garcés 2002) and more than a decade since the second study, "Map of the T&I situation in public services and intercultural mediation in central Spain" (Valero-Garcés 2006), were made available.

Both studies concluded that there was an imbalance between the increasing needs in terms of migrants' and refugees' languages and the limited resources provided to meet them. This was especially evident in the lack of trained professionals to communicate with the new population. Courses and training programs were greatly needed for the bilingual individuals who assist in the communication between newcomers and institutions. The difficulties they encountered in their work (lack of specialization and resources, low wages, etc.) revealed just how much progress was needed for public service interpreting and translation (PSIT) to achieve recognition as a profession.

2 The project: Objectives and methodology

This study is a continuation of the previous work (Valero-Garcés 2002, 2006) conducted at the start of the twenty-first century. The main goal is to analyze the evolution and current situation of PSIT in Central Spain. The specific areas covered are the CAM and JCCM. The aim is to determine what new developments PSIT has undergone over the past decade and whether the projects and measures previously established are still in force or, on the contrary, there has been a setback.

Two hypotheses are proposed:

- 1. Since PSIT is in the process of professionalization, it will be possible to observe growth and progress in the development of the profession during this century.
- 2. Taking into account the financial crisis Spain has been suffering since 2008, the second hypothesis contradicts the first: budget cuts to public services may have negatively affected the development of PSIT in Spain.

A descriptive-comparative method is used to observe, collect and analyze data and describe and compare them to previous studies. Data were obtained from two sources: surveys completed by health care and police professionals, and surveys completed by language-service providers. As previously mentioned, the same survey completed by health care and police professionals in the 2002 study was used once again this time around in order to compare data. The survey includes 25 questions and 1 final openended question which provides qualitative information. The survey was distributed in both the health care and police settings. It is worth noting the reluctance of the institutions to participate in this type of research; some survey recipients claimed they needed permission to answer the survey and, consequently, forwarded it directly to their superiors who, in turn, claimed they had no availability to respond due to excess work. This fact explains the limited number of answers obtained.

As for the survey of language-service providers, it included the six open-ended questions that follows: (1) volume and area (legal, health, administrative, etc.) of services provided, (2) most commonly requested languages, (3) interpreter and translator training, (4) financial compensation, (5) main difficulties experienced and (6) other comments. The interviews were conducted in October and November 2016 in person, by phone and online.

3 Survey of public-service providers: Data and results

In all, 15 health-care surveys and 22 police surveys were collected in the Madrid area (CAM), and 12 health-care surveys and 9 police surveys were collected in JCCM.

3.1 Health-care setting

In the health-care setting, there was greater participation in Madrid, especially from the Ramón y Cajal Hospital - a leading institution in the provision of language services (Klein 2014, Martínez Aguado 2014) – as compared to JCCM.

In general, women made up the vast majority of respondents across all centers. Most (95%) worked in the field of nursing and had a bachelor's degree; 65% had an intermediate level of English and a low level of French. None of the respondents considered themselves fluent or bilingual in any foreign language. Respondents were generally unaware of the language services, except for the Ramón y Cajal Hospital. Based on the opinions offered by health-care providers about immigrant patients, it becomes clear that even though the size of the foreign population has progressively decreased to the point of reaching the same numbers gathered 10 years ago, all the professionals had served foreign patients over the past few years by attending the newcomers or the migrant population already in the early years of the twenty-first century.

In the region of Madrid, communication difficulties were experienced first and foremost with speakers of Chinese, followed by Arabic and Romanian patients; whereas in JCCM, Romanian, followed by Arabic, English, French and Chinese patients posed the greatest communication difficulties.

The patients were residents, undocumented foreigners and tourists in need of medical assistance, in that order.

The most frequently requested services were the emergency room, doctor's consultation and hospitalization in that order. These data coincide with the approval of Spanish Royal Decree-Law 16/2012 of April 20, on Urgent Measures to Guarantee the Sustainability of the National Healthcare System and Improve the Quality and Security of its Benefits (Real Decreto). In October 2018, a new law was passed that reverses the exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the health system and ensures universal access by linking health care to residency rather than to social security (Official Gazette-A-2018-10752). This reform may change this situation but more time would be needed to analyze it.

The data collected also account for the most prominent communication problems. Most respondents (72%) acknowledge having resorted to basic and rudimentary solutions that fail to guarantee effective communication between both parties. They mentioned that these were frustrating situations that did not receive enough consideration by authorities.

The most common solutions used to handle such communication problems included basic gestures and resources to support verbal communication (74%), requesting help from a colleague with knowledge of the language (34%), asking the patient to come back with somebody who could help him/her communicate (85%), and telephone interpreting services (14%) when available.

As regards interpreting and translation services, 76% of respondents indicated that their centers had fewer interpreting and translation services than before the financial crisis (2008). This may indicate that the demand for this type of service has not remained stable over the past 10 years.

While the survey did not gather more specific data about telephone interpreting, a large percentage of health-care professionals (80%) pointed out that between 2007 and 2012, telephone interpreting services were provided by external companies as well as projects related to communication. These eventually came to an end and were not continued.

Most health-care providers (68%) also pointed out that there is currently much less demand for language services and that the budget for such services has also decreased due to health-care cuts. This aligns with the decreasing size of the foreign population at a national level, as previously mentioned.

The health-care centers that still have interpreting services tend to outsource them to languageservice companies.

3.2 Police setting

In all, 22 respondents in CAM and 9 in JCCM completed the survey. In contrast to the health-care setting, there is a stronger presence of men in the police setting. The majority of survey respondents had completed basic or secondary education, while a smaller percentage has received a university education.

Half of the respondents (50%) said they knew some English and a small percentage (15%) also had some knowledge of French. The rest (35%) did not answer. The vast majority (92%) reported that they served or had assisted users who do not speak Spanish. These were mostly tourists, followed by residents and undocumented foreigners. The services most often requested by foreign users were claims, arrests and, to a lesser extent, statements and information requests.

The languages most commonly used by foreign users were Arabic, Romanian, English and French, in that order. Other languages mentioned were German, Chinese, Urdu, Albanian and Wolof, These data reveal a much wider range of languages than the previous studies.

The majority of respondents (89%) confirmed that they had experienced communication problems with users who were not fluent in Spanish, often resulting in misunderstandings. The most commonly employed strategies to communicate – as was the case in the health-care setting – were gestures and requesting help from colleagues as well as asking users to come back with someone to assist them with communication. Telephone interpreting was not as widespread in the police setting as in the health-care sector.

A total of 88% of respondents confirmed that the need for translation ranged from "sporadic" to "weekly," while 66% reported that interpreting was needed on a "daily" basis. A total of 90% of respondents confirmed that such services were provided by an external, subcontracted company. As regards the problems most commonly experienced when working with interpreters, 52% of respondents point out that interpreters and translators were unfamiliar with more specialized terminology, which could lead to changes in meaning and omissions, and lacked professional experience, resulting in parallel conversations between the user and the interpreter.

4 Survey of language-service providers: Data and results

In order to gain a more accurate view of reality, data were also gathered from the language-service providers subcontracted by the public-service entities. Respondents provided information about the volume of services, most commonly requested languages, interpreter and translator training, compensation and the main difficulties experienced. A survey was designed, and data were collected by phone, online or face-to-face from October to November 2016.

The model first used to subcontract language services in the early 2000s has been increasingly employed by the administration (Ortega Herráez 2013: 9-42) and is based on a tender process (Foulquié-Rubio et al., 2018: 7). However, the process has led to a relatively small number of companies being awarded contracts, thus taking on the translation and interpreting work that staff members hired by public-service institutions are not able to carry out. This service model has been criticized on numerous occasions for its selection and contracting system, the level of compensation it offers and a potential impact on the quality of the services provided (Gascón Nasarre 2011, Ortega Herráez 2013: 10, Blasco Mayor and Del Pozo 2015: 16). Such circumstances have made it difficult to carry out this study and some insistence was required to get companies to participate, which is partially why the survey was conducted through interviews in person, by phone and online.

The three companies subcontracted by public-service institutions that responded were Ofilingua, Seprotec and Interpret Solutions. Other companies failed to respond or send any data. These respondents provided dissimilar data and avoided offering any information about hiring, payment or required training.

Data were collected from Ofilingua through conversations held with its coordinator in Madrid and via e-mail. According to the data provided on interventions, most took place at the high courts and were focused on judicial cooperation and bilateral agreements with other non-European Union countries.

A total of 61 different languages were used in the interventions, most of which were African, such as Berber, Riffian and Wolof, and, to a lesser extent, Fula, Lingala, Manding, Igbo, Edo, Somali, Soninke and Twi. Asian languages were also predominant, such as Mongolian, Tagalog, Malay and Hindi, as well as Middle Eastern languages such as Farsi and Urdu and other European languages such as Serbian, Armenian, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Georgian, Moldovan and Croatian.

As regards the volume of interventions, 2,220 services were performed in 2012, 1,902 in 2013 and 2,094 in 2014. In other words, there was a great deal of activity in 2012 that dropped off in 2013 and then increased again slightly in 2014. As regards the most requested languages in 2012, the following were reported: Romanian (414), Arabic (272), English (220), Polish (151) and French (142). Much further behind were Portuguese (82), Bulgarian (75), Russian (56) and Chinese (54).

The same order was maintained in 2013 despite a decrease in the volume of interventions: Romanian (329), Arabic (233), English (203), Polish (112), French (100) and, much further behind, Portuguese (73), Bulgarian (69), Russian (63) and Chinese (48).

With a slight increase in interventions in 2014 following the 2013 drop (although still fewer than in 2012), the same order was maintained for the first three languages, while the number of French interventions increased and Polish decreased. The main order was Romanian (371), Arabic (243), English (183), French (161) and, much further behind are Bulgarian (88) Polish (81), Portuguese (78), Russian (77) and lastly, with a slight decrease, Chinese (29).

The main conclusion to be drawn is that many of these languages are not widely known and there is little or no training available for them.

As for Seprotec, according to the information provided by the person responsible for the police and legal settings in Madrid, "more than 3,000 services were performed between 2012 and 2015," and the most frequently requested languages were Romanian (20.62%), Arabic (14.43%), Mandarin Chinese (10.25%), English (6.5%), French (6%), Wolof (4.10%), Bulgarian (3.71%), Portuguese (3.70%), Bengali (3.10%) and Russian (2.84%).

The first ten languages together make up 75% of the total services provided. After Russian comes languages such as Urdu, Albanian, Polish, Italian, Swahili and Bambara.

Lastly, Interpret Solutions, a company that provides telephone interpreting to various centers and institutions, offered general data from its 2015 annual report. While these are national data, they do indicate what has happened in Central Spain in general and, more specifically, in Madrid, as it represents one of the regions where the company operates the most.

According to the data for 2008-2014, the greatest number of services was provided in 2008 (6,333). This number decreases slightly in the following years, coming to its lowest point in 2012. In 2014, there is a slight upturn.

As far as languages are concerned, the data reveal that in 2008 French (2.35%), Romanian (11.63%), English (10.74%), Arabic (10.13%) and Chinese (8.48%) were the most frequently requested. This order is maintained in 2013, but changes in 2014 to Romanian (18.21%), Maguire Arabic (13.47%), French (9.58%), Chinese (7.56%) and English (5.86%).

5 Discussion: Migration in two different periods. A comparative study

At the beginning of this article, a demographic analysis of the regions under study was offered. The first conclusion to be drawn is that both CAM and JCCM have experienced a decrease in the size of their foreign populations over the past 5-6 years, with current data being comparable to that gathered in 2006 and prior. The financial crisis of this past decade is working against immigration and, consequently, has had an impact on the demand for PSIT at a national level and, more specifically, in the two communities this study has focused on.

Data collected from the surveys confirm that today fewer foreign users visit health-care centers, hospitals and police stations in both CAM and JCCM. It would seem the financial crisis constitutes one of the factors that has brought the projects and measures mentioned throughout this article to a standstill. Therefore, it is possible to corroborate the second hypothesis regarding the negative impact of the current financial situation on PSIT activity in Spain.

From a comparative point of view, the panorama of PSIT in Central Spain does seem to have improved as compared to the initial situation and considering its debut in Spain in 1997 (Valero-Garcés 1997). However, if only the past 10 years are taken into account (Valero-Garcés 2006), the conclusions of this study have changed only slightly as compared to previous work. Sadly, this is the case for both CAM and JCCM, where the use of gestures and the ad hoc or friend interpreter still represent the most widely employed solutions for communication difficulties in public services. The following quotation from 2006 corroborates this fact:

However, the results of the study conclude that, in general, healthcare providers resort to gestures and colleagues with some knowledge of the other language to solve communication difficulties, thus simplifying linguistic content as much as possible. (Valero-Garcés 2006: 70)

These words, written in 2006, perfectly match the data gathered in the 2016 study and presented here, as is the case with the following quotation taken from the results of the survey completed at the University Hospital of Guadalajara (located in JCCM) in 2006:

A total of 90% of doctors who responded to the survey report having visited patients with a native language other than Spanish. Of these, 50% confirm that these patients were not fluent in Spanish but they managed to make themselves understood in a simplified Spanish, while the other 50% claim patients did not speak enough Spanish to communicate and so they resorted to the use of gestures, drawings and assistance from third parties. (Valero-Garcés 2006: 73)

Across all the settings analyzed, and for the two study periods, the survey participants were aged 30-45 years. Another similarity between all settings and both regions is the topic of quality control: in general, none of the centers or institutions mentioned carrying out follow-up or any type of review to assess and monitor translation and interpreting services.

Some differences between the police and health-care settings stand out in both regions. In terms of nationality, a strong presence of Chinese and Arabic populations can be observed in the health-care setting in CAM, while Romanian and Arabic populations are more frequent in JCCM. In the case of the police setting, the surveys reveal that the most commonly requested languages are Romanian and Arabic – languages that public-service providers are not usually familiar with – and English and French, languages that professionals do not master.

There are also differences regarding the user typology. In the health-care setting, the foreign population was mostly made up of residents, although the presence of undocumented immigrants does stand out in the case of emergency services, especially following the approval of Spanish Royal Decree-Law 16/2012, of April 20, which amends Spanish Organic Law 4/2000 on The Rights and Freedoms of Foreign Nationals living in Spain and their Social Integration (Official Gazette, 23 December 2004). In the police setting, the majority of surveys point mainly to tourists, followed by residents and undocumented foreigners. Language services also vary according to the field: the health-care setting tends to prefer telephone interpreting, whereas there is a tendency toward in-person interpreting in the police setting.

6 Conclusions

After a decade of work, the general conclusions of these studies are clear. As regards the first hypothesis, communication between migrants and public-service providers is still not fluent despite some amount of progress, such as in the use of technology and specialized service companies (for example, Interpret Solutions, which has been a key player in the development of telephone interpreting) and the development of computer applications (Universal Doctor Project, Serrano Pons 2014).

As for the second hypothesis, it can be confirmed that the financial crisis has negatively affected the development of PSIT. The data gathered by the project "Study on Public Service Translation in Crossborder Healthcare" by the Directorate-General for Translation for the European Commission (DGT/2014/TPS) (Angelelli 2015; Valero-Garcés and Monzón 2018) confirm the negative impact of budget cuts and the absence of nation-wide measures governing such language services. Labor and economic conditions are still precarious, and the budget cuts carried out since 2008 are still in force.

Nevertheless, progress is still being made. Thus, in 2014, the European Network for Public Service Interpreting and Translation was created. In 2016, the publication of *PSIT: Training, Evaluation and Accreditation* (Valero-Garcés 2016) offers a series of articles that familiarize readers with the current status of the professionalization of PSIT in Central Spain, across the nation and at the European level. However, effective linguistic integration of the migrant population is still far off, and progress is required to achieve recognition of public-service interpreting and translation as a profession.

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