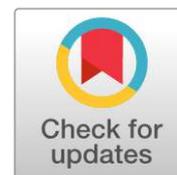


EXPLORING TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER TRAINING IN THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO CONTEXT: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the current provision of translator and interpreter training in the English-speaking Caribbean nation of Trinidad & Tobago. In contextualising the country's current linguistic and geopolitical situation, including the growing prominence of Spanish in the country's society, present conditions regarding the need for translational services are outlined. The overview adopts a literature-based approach which involves analysing the websites of tertiary institutions in Trinidad & Tobago where translation and interpreting-related training provision is currently on offer. Through examination of the relevant course syllabi and the pertinent degree and diploma programmes available, available course offerings are presented and discussed, thus giving a solid panorama of the present landscape regarding translator and interpreter training options in the country. Finally, although interpreter training seems well-established in the country, suggestions are offered regarding possible future steps for translator training in the Trinidad & Tobago context, as well as pointers for subsequent empirical research in the future.

Keywords: Trinidad and Tobago, Anglophone Caribbean, translator training, interpreter training, certification

Article history:

Received: 11 December 2021

Reviewed: 05 January 2022

Accepted: 06 January 2022

Published: 30 June 2022

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Citation: Hoyte-West, A. (2022). Exploring Translator and Interpreter Training in the Trinidad and Tobago Context: An overview. *English Studies at NBU*, 8(1), 43-52. <https://doi.org/10.33919/esnbu.22.1.3>

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Situated close to the Venezuelan coastline, Trinidad & Tobago is a resource-rich twin-island republic, with a land area of just over 5,000 square kilometres and a population of around 1.3 million (Robinson, Watts, & Brereton, 2021). Despite its diminutive size, the country is the second largest member of the Anglophone Caribbean, a status which belies its former multilingualism. Although English is the nation's only official language – commonly spoken in its demotic variant of Trinidad & Tobago Creole English (Romaine, 2017, p. 390) – current geopolitical factors mean that there is growing awareness of the translational professions in the domestic context, which is a key component of the author's project on translation, interpreting, and multilingualism (for more information, see Hoyte-West, 2021). Accordingly, this overview focuses on the current training options available for translators and interpreters in Trinidad & Tobago, building on Bogle's (2016) overview of the translation-related environment in the wider English-speaking and French-speaking Caribbean, which considered literary, Bible, and practical translation as well as relevant professional aspects.

To date, comparatively little research has been conducted regarding the translation and interpreting of spoken languages in Trinidad & Tobago, although considerable work has been conducted on historical and educational aspects relating to signed languages (for example, see Braithwaite, Draycott, & Lamb, 2011; Braithwaite, 2018). Hence, though small in scale, the present study aims to provide a snapshot of current translator and interpreter training opportunities in the country, examining the availability and structure of the training programmes presently available. Indeed, several similar studies exploring general and specific aspects of translator and/or interpreter training in a given market have been conducted in a range of countries, including China (Xu, 2005; Zhan, 2014), Japan (Giustini, 2020), Latvia (Silis, 2009), Montenegro (Lakić & Pralas, 2016), Spain (Baxter, 2014), Tunisia (Salhi, 2011), and the United States (Mikkelsen, 2014), as well as the author's recent overview of the interpreter training context in the Republic of Ireland (Hoyte-West, 2020). To this end, it is intended that the current study will not just provide a foundation for future empirical work regarding relevant education and training models for the translational professions in Trinidad & Tobago, but could also lead to the possibility of comparative work with other small states in the Caribbean and beyond.

The language situation in Trinidad & Tobago

As also summarised elsewhere (Anonymous, 2021), Trinidad & Tobago became an independent nation in 1962. As with every country in the Western Hemisphere, however, the islands had been subject to colonial rule for several centuries beforehand. Originally inhabited by Arawak and Carib tribes, Trinidad and Tobago were claimed for Spain by Christopher Columbus in 1498. In terms of its colonial history, Tobago's was the more chequered of the two islands, passing between British, Baltic, Dutch, and French control before remaining in British hands after the Napoleonic Wars. Trinidad remained a colony of Spain – though with a notable influx of French plantation owners and their slaves in the late eighteenth century – until it was conquered by the British in 1797, who later brought indentured workers from the Indian subcontinent to work on the plantations after the slaves were emancipated in the 1830s (Robinson, Watts, & Brereton, 2021).

This complex history has meant that, unlike many other countries in the Anglophone Caribbean, no one single ethnicity is dominant. As such, the legacy of colonisation has meant that modern Trinidad & Tobago is composed primarily of people of African, East Indian, and mixed heritage, with smaller groups of people of European, Chinese, and Amerindian origins (Robinson, Watts, & Brereton, 2021). Over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the influx and mixing of various peoples meant that at one time many different languages could be heard; however, this linguistic diversity has now almost disappeared.

As noted previously, Trinidad & Tobago has English as its only official language, but in 2004, the country's government embarked on the Spanish as the First Foreign Language (SAFFL) policy to promote the role of Spanish in public life, with the intent that widespread bilingualism would be in place by 2020. Described more extensively elsewhere (Anonymous, 2021), the SAFFL initiative met with comparatively little success. In spite of visible policies such as bilingual signage, the policy originally centred on deepening trade and commercial relations with Latin America. This cooperation, however, was stymied by poor global economic conditions, including low oil and gas prices, as well as by geopolitical factors such as the ongoing economic and humanitarian crisis in neighbouring Venezuela.

As such, the Venezuelan crisis has resulted in a considerable number of Spanish-speaking migrants arriving in Trinidad & Tobago, a controversial situation which has impacted the country's politics and its social composition (for more information, see Mohan, 2019; Anatol & Kangalee, 2020; Wallace & Mortley, 2020). As such, the issue of providing translation and interpreting services has reached wider public consciousness, including an increased demand for qualified practitioners (Fraser, 2020). Hence, given this state of affairs, this overview of the training options available for translators and interpreters in the Trinidad & Tobago context is both relevant and necessary.

Methodology and research question

Building on the overview provided above, it was decided to conduct a literature-based study of the current provision of translator and interpreter training in Trinidad & Tobago. Consequently, the following research question was advanced:

- What are the current options regarding training for translators and interpreters in Trinidad & Tobago?

The main sources that were consulted comprised the websites of the relevant tertiary-level institutions in the country, including the University of the West Indies at St Augustine (UWI St Augustine), and the College of Science, Technology and Applied Arts of Trinidad and Tobago (COSTAAT), as well as a professional training institution, the Caribbean School of Languages. Although the methodological limitations of literature-based studies focused on online resources are clearly evident, and the project would clearly have benefitted from empirical qualitative input, nonetheless, as Snyder (2019, p. 334) notes, such literature-based studies can still be valuable when assessing the state of knowledge on a given topic. In this context, given the lack of prior research available on translator and interpreter training in Trinidad & Tobago, it was felt that the data collected and analysed would still prove to be useful, especially within the scope of the author's wider project. In addition, this literature-based approach is similar to several of the studies mentioned in the introductory section of this article (for example, Silis, 2009; Baxter, 2014; Mikkelson, 2014; Zhan, 2014; Anonymous, 2020). Furthermore, it was intended that the information obtained would provide a solid foundation for potential

empirical work in the future, once international travel resumes freely following the end of the COVID-19 coronavirus-related travel restrictions.

Results

The analysis of the relevant institutions in Trinidad & Tobago uncovered that two of the nation's tertiary institutions offer translation-related training – COSTAAT and UWI St Augustine – together with one professional training institute, the Caribbean School of Languages.

Founded in 2000, COSTAAT is a public third-level institution offering vocational and technical courses (COSTAAT, 2021a). There, translation and interpreting-related training falls under the auspices of the Department of Languages, Literature and Communication Studies. At present, two separate introductory modules in translation and in interpreting form a compulsory part of the second year of the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) two-year undergraduate degree in Foreign Language for Business: Spanish (COSTAAT, 2021b). These two modules are also compulsory within the BA in Spanish for Business, where the introductory training is supplemented by a further third-year module combining translation and interpreting techniques (COSTAAT, 2021c). In addition, COSTAAT also has a professional Translation and Interpreting Services Unit; however, this unit focuses on providing relevant translational services for the public and private sectors, rather than offering further education or training possibilities (COSTAAT, 2021d).

UWI St Augustine is the leading tertiary institution in Trinidad & Tobago. Founded in 1948, it forms part of the wider University of the West Indies, which includes five main campuses located across the Anglophone Caribbean (UWI St Augustine, 2021a). Building on Bogle's (2016, p. 52) observation that translation exercises form part of the final-year undergraduate curriculum in French and Spanish, an examination of the course catalogues at the Department of Modern Languages and Linguistics noted that two specialist translation modules have been developed for advanced undergraduate students reading for BA degrees majoring in Spanish. The first of these modules introduces students to the theory and practice of translation within the Caribbean context, working primarily with texts relating to tourism, commerce, and journalism

(UWI St Augustine, 2021b). The follow-up course deepens the theoretical and practical skills acquired in the previous semester, and focuses on the thematic areas of literature, media, environment, and the law (UWI St Augustine, 2021c). An analysis of the relevant course catalogues for the undergraduate degrees in French and Portuguese, however, did not find any stand-alone translation modules currently available for either of those languages.

Turning to interpreter training and to the postgraduate level, UWI St Augustine has offered a Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting Techniques since 2008. Based on a short-lived certificate programme that originally ran during the 1990s, the Postgraduate Diploma aims to adhere to global best-practice standards in the domain of interpreter training, emulating prestigious institutions such as those in Geneva and Paris, as well as the renowned course which formerly ran at the University of Westminster in London (Best, 2008, p. 6). Selective in its recruitment, the programme accepts prospective candidates with proficiency in English with French and/or Spanish as additional languages. It includes intensive coursework in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting, as well as practical training in internet and IT skills relevant for interpreters. This is supplemented by optional modules covering areas such as economics, the international organisations, and sociolinguistics (UWI St Augustine, 2021d).

Notably, the Postgraduate Diploma also includes a compulsory interpretation practicum. As noted in Best (2008, p. 6), the course has fostered strong links with the Caribbean Interpreters and Translators Bureau (CITB). In a similar vein to COSTAAT's Translation and Interpreting Services Unit, the CITB is based at UWI St Augustine and provides professional language services to the public and private sectors (UWI St Augustine, 2021e). Therefore, as part of the postgraduate training programme, interpreting students gain experience working at multilingual conferences and events, utilising their consecutive and simultaneous interpreting skills in real-life situations (UWI St Augustine, 2021f).

Moving away from the university setting, the third institution offering translator training in Trinidad & Tobago is the Caribbean School of Languages, a private enterprise which offers language courses as well as translation and interpreting services. In terms of its educational offering, it provides preparation courses and is an examination centre

for both the Spanish-English and the English-Spanish variants of the Diploma in Translation (DipTrans), an internationally-recognised postgraduate-level qualification which is awarded by the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) in the United Kingdom (Caribbean School of Languages, 2021). However, unlike the degree programmes offered by universities, it is important to note that the DipTrans represents a certification aimed at professional translators, rather than a traditional course of learning and study. Indeed, to this end the CIOL notes that “it is the responsibility of each candidate to ascertain that they are sufficiently prepared for the examination and competent in both the source and target languages, have good writing skills, and the ability to translate at a professional level” (CIOL, 2021a), as well as stating that “CIOL Qualifications does not officially endorse or recommend any particular course” (CIOL, 2021b).

Concluding remarks and suggestions for further research

The current study has provided a panorama of the current landscape regarding the provision of translator and interpreter training in Trinidad & Tobago, and provides a good foundation for empirical work at a later date involving interviews with practitioners, students, and policymakers. As such, the data gleaned through the above overview has illustrated that, of the three institutions that provide translator and/or interpreter training in Trinidad & Tobago, COSTAAT provides introductory level and advanced undergraduate training in both translation and interpreting, whereas UWI St Augustine offers training in translation for its advanced undergraduates as well as full postgraduate training in interpreting. The Caribbean School of Languages offers preparation for an international professional qualification in translation offered by an external organisation.

The data also illustrate that English-Spanish is the dominant language pairing among training institutions in Trinidad & Tobago. This is perhaps unsurprising given the SAFFL policy, which has foregrounded Spanish as the country’s first foreign language in primary and secondary education. In addition, current market requirements – given the omnipresent Venezuelan crisis, as well as demand from the public and private sectors – may also lead to a need for an increased number of Spanish-speaking translators and interpreters.

Despite the presence of a postgraduate training programme in interpreting, the translational landscape in Trinidad & Tobago is marked by the absence of a full and independent degree programme in translation, either at the undergraduate or the postgraduate level. Where it is taught, translation remains something of an addendum to existing undergraduate provision in modern languages, unlike at the UWI campus at Mona in Jamaica, where a full MA degree in Translation is currently available (UWI Mona, 2021). This is despite the presence of university-linked translation and interpreting agencies such as the CITB at UWI St Augustine and the Translation and Interpreting Services Unit at COSTAAT, which demonstrate that there is indeed a viable need for qualified translators at the domestic level. Although the ties between the CITB and the Postgraduate Diploma in Interpreting Techniques appear to be close, it is notable that CITB's links with putative translators do not seem to be so strong. This may explain, in some regard, the local availability of external and foreign certification programmes such as the CIOL's DipTrans qualification.

In terms of potential future developments, the SAFFL programme remains ongoing, as does the situation regarding migration from Venezuela, which means that demand for Spanish-English translation and interpreting services will presumably continue. In terms of other language pairs, China's increasing economic interests in the Caribbean could potentially lead to wider needs for Chinese-English translation and interpreting, with implications for the provision of necessary training programmes. However, although UWI St Augustine does indeed have a Confucius Institute, at the time of writing it does not appear to offer any translation or interpreting-related courses (UWI St Augustine, 2021g). What is clear, however, is the general need for translators and interpreters in Trinidad & Tobago – and by extension, the need for high-quality translator and interpreter training programmes – will continue to develop over time. It is to be hoped that, in the coming years, a full degree programme will be developed for translators alongside the existing provision for interpreters, thus giving the translational professions there added validation and visibility.

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1. Anonymous:
2. Anonymous

Handling Editor:

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