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Interpreter Training in the Republic of Ireland: An Overview

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Abstract: Although the Republic of Ireland is a bilingual country, this study illustrates that there are comparatively few domestic training options available for interpreters of spoken languages. In providing an overview of the present state of affairs, this article contextualises the current linguistic situation both within the country and at the European level. Attention is paid to the recognition of Irish as an official language of the European Union (EU), as well as to the corresponding implications for interpreter training. In addition, the domestic situation regarding community interpreters is also outlined, with the lack of official regulation of the interpreting profession also noted. Subsequently, the options for interpreter training in tertiary education are outlined, both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate level. In addition, relevant information regarding the structure and content of the modules and courses is provided. To conclude, some thoughts regarding potential developments of interpreter training in the Irish context are outlined.

Keywords: Interpreting, interpreter training, Republic of Ireland, Irish.

1. Introduction

As a bilingual nation, interpreting has been a commonplace activity throughout Irish history. Indeed, historical and literary aspects of interpreting and interpreters in Ireland have been the subject of considerable scholarly focus (for example, Cronin 2003; Phelan 2013, 2020a). Turning to the present day, research has also been conducted on community interpreting (for example, Phelan 2001, 2007; Zimányi 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), as well as the author's current project on conference interpreting (Hoyte-West 2019, 2020a, 2020b). However, although previous work has been conducted on sign-language interpreter training in the Irish context (Leeson and Lynch, 2009), the interpreter training of spoken languages in Irish universities has received less attention. Building on studies of university-level translator and interpreter training in China (Zhan 2014) and Spain (Baxter 2014, 2017; Aguayo Arrabal 2019), this study aims to provide an overview of the current interpreter training options available in the Republic of Ireland for spoken languages.

2. The language situation in the Republic of Ireland

The official languages of the Republic of Ireland are Irish (*Gaeilge*) and English. Although Irish became the European Union's 23rd official language in January 2007, centuries of repression under British rule and the overwhelming dominance of English have meant that widespread bilingualism remains something of a pious hope. The elevation of Irish to official EU language, though, has had a significant impact on the need to provide translation and interpreting at the supranational level. Indeed, a lack of qualified Irish-language linguistic personnel has led to the implementation of a derogation for Irish, thus limiting its use in the EU institutions. With the derogation planned to be lifted in January 2022, it could be argued that this demand from the institutional market has also influenced translator and interpreter training at the domestic level (European Commission 2019).

In addition to Irish and English, it is important to note that many other languages are also spoken within the Republic of Ireland. Although the country had traditionally been a nation of emigrants, economic prosperity during the so-called Celtic Tiger years in the 1990s and early 2000s brought with it growing immigration from all parts of the world (Fanning 2016). Hence, modern Ireland is increasingly multicultural and multilingual, with corresponding needs for appropriately-skilled community interpreters in medical, legal, and other relevant settings. However, it is important to note that all aspects of the interpreting profession remain unregulated in the country, which has had a corresponding impact on the professional status, role, and visibility of interpreters among policymakers and the wider public (Hoyte-West 2020a).

3. Current provision of interpreter training in the Republic of Ireland

Analysis of relevant online sources reveals that provision of interpreter training in the Republic of Ireland is relatively limited at present (Irish Translators and Interpreters Association, 2020). At the undergraduate level, the country's classical universities – Trinity College Dublin (University of Dublin), as well as the constituent universities of the National University of Ireland (University College Dublin, University College Cork, Maynooth University, and the National University of Ireland, Galway) – primarily focus on teaching modern languages in the traditional manner. Yet at several of the country's newer universities, final year BA students do have the opportunity to undertake dedicated interpreting modules as part of their undergraduate studies of applied languages.

At the recently created Technological University of Dublin (TU Dublin), students in both the BA International Business & Languages and the BA in Languages & International Tourism degrees have the opportunity to take a combined translation and interpreting module in a range of languages with English, including French, German, Irish, Italian, and Spanish (Technological University Dublin 2020a; Technological University Dublin 2020b). The University of Limerick also offers its fourth-year undergraduate students the possibility of attending introductory training in French, German, Irish, and Spanish interpreting with English (University of Limerick 2020). And the Applied Languages and Translation undergraduate programme at Dublin City University offers an optional final-year module in the theory and practice of community interpreting. However, the module catalogue does not make this clear whether this option is offered across the wide range of degree languages offered by the university, which include French, German, Japanese, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish (Dublin City University 2020). At present, this option remains the only training opportunity for community interpreters in the country; previously, a certificate course did run at Dublin City University between 2004 and 2009. Although it produced a number of qualified graduates, the lack of appropriate regulation at the national level meant that they did not have the necessary competitive advantage in the wider interpreting market (Irish Translators and Interpreters Association 2015, 3). Though attempts to improve the situation for community interpreters have been mooted (Phelan 2020b), the profession still remains unregulated.

Moving to conference interpreter training at the postgraduate level, as also noted in Hoyte-West (2019), it is important to state that there was no available training course for Irish-language conference interpreters in the Republic of Ireland when Irish became an official EU language in 2007 (de Rioja 2012). As such, the initial cohort of five potential EU conference interpreters with Irish was trained in the United Kingdom (European Commission 2007). A postgraduate

degree course in conference interpreting, however, had been available at Dublin City University for a few years at the turn of the century (Bermúdez 2020), but was no longer available by 2007.

In 2008, though, the postgraduate degree in conference interpreting was founded at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway), with the explicit aim of training bilingual Irish-English consecutive and simultaneous interpreters for the EU institutions (Varley 2008). As such, the course is based within the *Acadamh na hOllscolaíochta Gaeilge* (Irish Language University Academy), an institution within NUI Galway which fulfils the university's obligation to offer tertiary-level courses through the medium of Irish (Mac Donnacha 2009, 49). At the time of writing, the course has grown to also incorporate training in other major European languages, including French, German, Italian, and Spanish. The course accommodates a range of language combinations ranging from AB (bilingual) to ACCC (three passive languages into the native tongue). Although the course is not part of the European Masters in Conference Interpreting (EMCI) consortium, it follows best practice guidelines. Hence, all prospective applicants are required to pass an aptitude test to enrol into the MA in Conference Interpreting, in addition to ensuring they hold an undergraduate degree with a minimum of a lower second-class honours (2:2) classification.

The training programme includes introductory and advanced consecutive and simultaneous interpreting courses, as well as modules on the theory and practice of conference interpreting, research methodology, as well as the history and current role of the EU institutions. This is complemented by professional workshops on voice training, professional ethics, and public speaking, as well as a study visit to the interpreting directorates of the EU institutions in Brussels. Following completion of the academic and practical training, students have the option to leave with a Postgraduate Diploma qualification, or also have the opportunity to write an MA thesis on a research topic relating to conference interpreting (National University of Ireland, Galway 2020). Several graduates have passed the EU's interinstitutional accreditation examinations for freelance conference interpreters (de Rioja 2012), and the first ever EU staff interpreter with active Irish is a graduate of the MA programme at Galway (EU Interpreters 2018).

4. Concluding remarks

This study has provided a cursory overview of the interpreter training provision for spoken languages that is currently available at Irish universities. Three universities offer options in interpreting to undergraduate students of applied languages, with Dublin City University offering its BA students the opportunity to complete a module in community interpreting. This course remains the only such training course currently available in the Republic of Ireland, but it is to be hoped one day that greater regulation will increase the demand for such programmes

At postgraduate level, a full MA degree in conference interpreting is currently offered at NUI Galway, with the support of the EU institutions. As the derogation on the use of Irish in the EU institutions is set to be lifted in January 2022, it is important to note that this may lead to further opportunities for interpreters and interpreter training in the Republic of Ireland. In addition, the impact of Brexit should also be factored into any future developments regarding interpreter training, as the Republic of Ireland's new status as the largest English-speaking country in the EU could lead to an increase in its attractiveness as a destination for international conferences, thereby leading to greater demand for interpretation services. Furthermore, at the supranational level, the requirement for EU civil servants to hold EU nationality may also lead to continued recruitment opportunities for EU staff interpreters in both the English and the Irish booths. In response to these wider changes, it is clear, therefore, that the interpreter training landscape in the Republic of Ireland will continue to evolve over the years to come.

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Notas de autor

Research interests: translation studies, conference interpreting, multilingualism, minority languages