Interview Marc Orlando

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Brief presentation:

My name is Dr Marc Orlando, I am a French-Australian bi-national, with working experience in France, New Zealand and Australia. I am the current director of Translation and Interpreting Studies at Monash University, in Melbourne, where I lecture in T&I and carry out research on translator and interpreter training and education. I am a firm believer that practice and research can inform each other through training and therefore I still work actively as a conference interpreter (member of AIIC) and as a translator, certified by NAATI.

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1. You have been involved in the Translation and Interpreting Studies Program at Monash University in Melbourne for over a decade, have you noticed an evolution in the way students approach technology?

Students have always easily accepted the fact they have to use technology if they trust their trainers and educators and are told it is necessary and expected to be tech-savvy in this profession. I think that they actually learn and take on technology applied to translation practice very quickly.

One big difference today is that we need to add a lot in the curriculum (on top of translation and interpreting education and practice) if we want to cover technology use: classes on subtitling and AVT in general; on CAT tools; on translation memory (TRADOS in our case) and machine translation (MT); or on post-editing and MT. In interpreting on the use of video, telephone, digital devices in or out of the booth, portable equipment, text-to-speech software, etc. We use several software for terminology database or glossaries development too. The ideal in my view is to embed the use of technology (hardware and software) in any T&I practice class, and not only in separate technology classes. At Monash, we train students very early in the use of those technologies and then practice using them for the duration of the course.

One small issue though in translation in particular is that we developed curricula for technology around Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) and we will now need to redesign them around Neural Machine Translation (NMT). There is a bit of tweaking to be done around class activities if we want the training to stay relevant and appropriate for industry needs.

2. How about your own practice as a translator and interpreter?

I have not been involved in professional translation projects for a few years but when I was a full-time translator, I had to learn how to use TRADOS and used it for large documents. I must admit I have never really liked it much, as I find that it somehow limits your creativity. However, I must also admit that it can be very useful and relevant for long, technical and repetitive, devoid of stylistic features documents, for which a high daily output is expected. Competence in using translation memory tools is a clear industry requirement today. Again, the growth of NMT is a game changer, and the whole profession will have to adapt to the changes.

I am quite active in interpreting (mainly conference interpreting in international or bilateral meetings) and the use of technology in practice has clearly increased over the years: in the booth where interpreters can resort to their laptops or tablets, and relevant software or apps, to access information while interpreting. Also outside the booth, when they can decide to use digital tour-guide type portable equipment (often called *bidule* in the profession) to still be able to work simultaneously. Remote interpreting through video (also called Video Remote Interpreting or Video Mediated Interpreting) is being used more and more frequently, sometimes for conferences, but also very often for court, legal or healthcare interpreting.

3. Can you briefly present the "digital pen technology" that you use in class?

The *Smartpen* was developed in 2008 by Livescribe, and was initially targeted at secretaries, or at those who take notes in meetings, and want to review their notes in a very innovative and 'live' manner.

The pen is a normal pen used with paper (microchipped paper actually) but is also a computer platform. With its high quality microphone and its infrared camera at

the tip, it is possible to simultaneously record what is being said in the room and film the notes taken at the same time. The data is synchronized by the pen and microchipped paper and can be played back on a computer, a tablet, a phone etc.

When I started using it in 2009, I immediately realised the huge potential these features represented when training interpreters in note-taking for consecutive interpreting. The possibility to see the process of notes being taken 'live', and not only the final product on a page, offered a breakthrough to give individual and pertinent feedback to students, to involve them in process-oriented and formative assessments, and to develop metacognitive activities in a course. I have since then developed various pedagogical sequences and resources that are applied in many training programmes. I have also used the pen to study a hybrid mode of interpreting where simultaneous and consecutive are mixed during a performance, but this is another story…

4. According to you, what changes does artificial intelligence based translation imply for translators?

In translation, the move over the last 20 years from rule-based MT to statistical MT and now to neural MT shows that the technology keeps changing and improving. Most of the best MT systems are now using NMT (Google, Microsoft, SDL, Transperfect and many others), and the quality of translations through MT is improving day by day. Some say it could be a source of worry for the profession. Others recognise that even NMT still makes various types of mistakes. So post-editing MT will be an important activity for professionals, it is a growing part of the language industry. Revision of human post-editing too.

In interpreting, some say that AI is also a big threat for professionals. Others reckon that AI still cannot match human interpretation properly, especially when it comes to the *vouloir dire* (the intended meaning), or humour, eloquence, registers etc. There was trial to use AI interpretation in a meeting in Asia in April and the result was very poor and embarrassing. This is certainly good news for human interpreters. But, once again, things are improving quickly, and one of the reasons is that companies hire interpreters to help them develop the AI that may one day replace human professionals.

Speech-to text and text-to-speech software are also improving day by day. This is also an area to keep an eye on.

As trainers and educators, we need to keep a finger on the pulse and adapt our curricula accordingly.

5. How do you see the future of translators in regards to technology?

Whether involved translation or interpreting practice, it is clear that today's practitioners have to be adaptable and versatile to be able to respond to these various technological needs and demands.

There is a motto currently in the profession to answer the question whether translators and interpreters will be replaced by technology: "T&I won't be replaced by technology, they will be replaced by T&I who use technology"! Food for thought, especially for trainers and educators but also – and maybe more importantly perhaps– for the older generation of practitioners.

I do not think the future of the profession is too bleak. Most indicators show the T&I professions as 'bright outlook' occupations. What is certain, though, is that these professions have changed and will change again and again, hence the necessary adaptability professionals have to develop.

6. One of the topics I am interested in, and I explore this in my PhD, is the effects of globalisation and the technological revolution of the last twenty years in translation practices. Globalisation has arguably enhanced the deontological need for translators to preserve linguistic particularities, regionalisms, oralisms but also cultural differences or cultural specificities. I find it hard to discern this "preservation" elsewhere than in "marginal" means of expression such as translated literatures for instance – my field is the translation of New Zealand poetry into French – based on your experience in both official or corporate fields of translation (with the government or embassies) but also in translating books on the history of Aborigines or Māori Arts, would you say technology is helping translators to preserve linguistic and cultural specificities or is it the opposite?

I assume technology can be used to do so. I know of colleagues involved in linguistics and preservation of Aboriginal languages who work with communities to make sure they will record and immortalise rare and endangered languages by using all sorts of digital devices (audio and video recordings, subtitling etc). This is a good example of useful technology.

Online communities seem to flourish too, which is probably a sign that languages and cultures can survive there too. I agree with you about the 'marginal' means of expression to promote languages and cultures, but at the same time, more and more online content is translated in various languages, as it is a way to make sure web users stay longer on some sites. There is a commercial interest in doing so, in the tourism industry for example, one of the areas where translators are needed. Media localization is booming: translation of websites, TV series, games, apps, software etc.

As for the official or corporate fields of translation, I would say that generally speakers use their mother tongue and therefore interpreters, even when they understand English well. It is a matter of peace of mind; they trust the interpreters to convey appropriate meaning and nuances. And when they do not, then they always take a risk. President Macron's use of the adjective 'delicious' when addressing Prime Minister Turnbull recently is the best evidence!

The books I have translated fall under what is labelled 'social anthropology'. Such publications (ethnographic translations) are definitely a way to promote cultural and linguistic diversity.

This is not specifically related to technology, but I will conclude by quoting Edith Grossman when she advocates for more and more translated content:

"Translation always helps us to know, to see from a different angle, to attribute new value to what once may have been unfamiliar. As nations and as individuals, we have a critical need for that kind of understanding and insight. The alternative is unthinkable".