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2012, Volume 5

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# CULTUS

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

TRAINING FOR A TRANSCULTURAL WORLD

2012, Volume 5

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ICONESOFT EDIZIONI - GRUPPO EUROSAN ITALIA  
BOLOGNA

## CULTUS

*the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*

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## Foreword

This issue asked for contributions focussing on research, models, strategies, and also practical exercises which either break new ground on classic linguacultural divides, or are able to reach beyond static, stereotypical 'cultural differences' and make some headway in improving communication and mutual understanding in an increasingly transcultural and virtual world. As we had such a response, boosted through the active contribution of SIETAR Europe papers given at Krakow "Interculturalism Ahead: Transition to a Virtual World?" (September 2011), instead of our usual 5-6 papers we have 10 but, sadly perhaps, no interview this year.

The first papers in this issue offer specific frameworks or models, all of which move us on from the static cultural-difference models, and chart how the transcultural turn is developing; while those on university training and translation give us a stark reality check. Though there is some light, and much investment in training, especially through foreign study, the picture regarding student perception of the training and of 'the Other', along with actual professional translation highlights the fact that there is still some way to go before we can talk of a real 'transcultural turn' in practice.

We hear much about EU supported initiatives in education and training. In particular there is FREPA a Council of Europe 'Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures' (Daryai-Hansen & Schröder-Sura) and INCA, the "Intercultural Competence Assessment" suite of tools (Cano). From the business world we have a fusion of cultural dimensions with the Reiss Life motives (Konigorski), rhizomatic (rather than tree diagram thinking) embodied in the analogy with the Mobius strip (Hale); WorldWork's 'International Profiler' (IP) and International Preference indicator' (IPI) (Ewington & Hill) along with a more communication focussed enhancement (Spencer-Oatey and Stadler).

Areas of perception of cultural difference include a German-American study of Facebook (Reeves), the intercultural benefits of EU supported 'Applied Language Europe' (ALE) European university study exchange



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(Morón-Martín) and the 'Mobility in Higher Education' project (Cano). With regard specifically to translation and transculturality there is a discussion on the use of corpora and travel insurance texts (Peruzzo and Durán-Muñoz) and a case study on the translation of film titles.

*David Katan*  
*Cinzia Spinzi*

## **Becoming a Translator: the Development of Cultural and Intercultural Competence in Spain**

*Ana Gregorio Cano*

### *Abstract*

*Translators need to develop their competence in order to enable intercultural communication and facilitate communication between societies. Therefore, from a professional perspective, the process by way of which cultural and intercultural competence is acquired by future translators, interpreters and social mediators must necessarily be studied.*

*The structure of this paper is as follows: section 1 is a clarification of our approach to cultural and intercultural competence in translation, together with an analysis of the theoretical framework in which this study has been developed. Section 2 presents the data collected by means of a questionnaire. Moreover, this section also describes the survey instrument and questionnaire items included in order to understand the data obtained. The research is descriptive, it is an analysis and description of an actual situation, taking into account the main agents involved in the acquisition of cultural and intercultural competence, and no attempt has been made to extrapolate the data obtained to the population as a whole.*

*This empirical study into the acquisition of cultural and intercultural competence in translation training utilises quantitative data gathered at two stages of learning across several academic years (2007-08, 2008-09 and 2010-11) at five Translation Schools in Spain. The questionnaire study encompasses cultural knowledge, level of cultural competence, attitudes and resources, readiness to adapt one's behaviour and, openness, as well as students' attitudes towards cultural and intercultural encounters in daily life. The results provide insight into the self-evaluation of student translators with regard to different aspects of their cultural and intercultural competence.*

*Keywords: development of intercultural competence, intercultural communication, translator competence, empirical study, students of translation.*

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## 1. Introduction

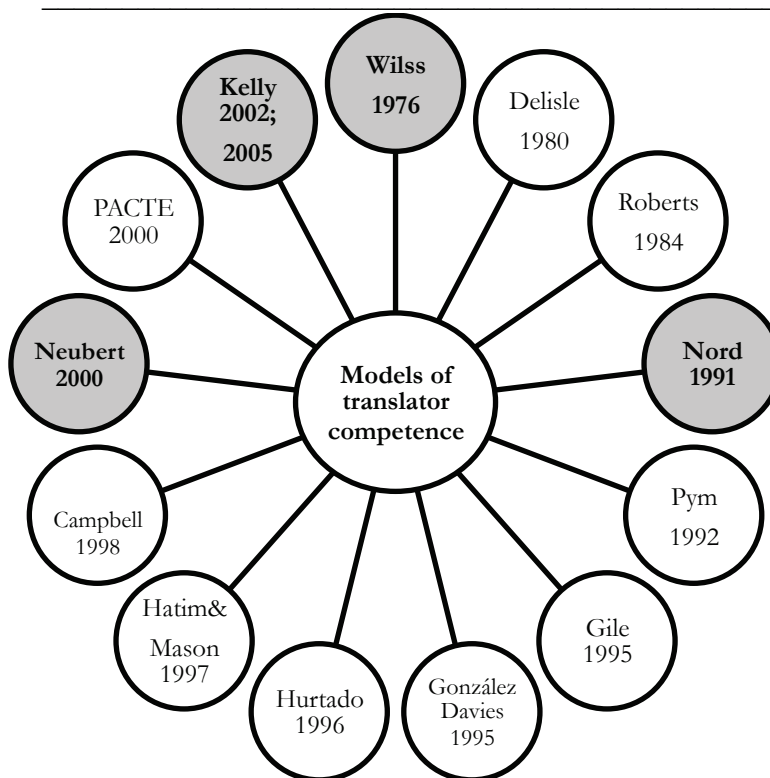
There exists a certain amount of consensus in the field of Translation Studies regarding the pivotal role of cultural and intercultural competence in relation to translators and interpreters as mediators (Steiner 1975, Nord 1991 & 1997, Toury 1995, Hatim & Mason 1997, Robinson 1997 & 2003 and Katan 2004, to mention but a few representatives of translation schools). For this reason “culture” usually forms part of translator and interpreter training programmes. There is, however, little consensus as to the definition of the competence, and very little research has been carried out into its acquisition. Some research teams working in translator training and the acquisition of translator competence in Spain are: the PACTE Research Group (PACTE, 2011), the Traducción, Lenguas y Cultura en la Sociedad del Conocimiento Research Group (Bravo, 2004) and the AVANTI Research Group (Gregorio, 2012).

The significance of the subject, now central to translation, interpreting and intercultural mediation in general, becomes greater still when intercultural competence is considered as a generic desired learning outcome within all university courses in the context of *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*, a pilot project aimed at establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (González & Wagenaar, 2003).

Yet, cultural and intercultural competence is a non-traditional capacity, insofar as it is not a question of acquiring (only) knowledge, or even (only) skills, but rather the ability to intervene at the level of attitudes and values, many of which run very deep in the individual. This paper aims to go into further depth in the definition and analysis of this complex competence as well as the processes through which it is acquired by students of Translation Studies in Spain.

## 2. Models of translator competence

There are already many models of translator (or translation) competence, which Gregorio (2007) has analysed:



**Figure 1.** Models of translator competence (Gregorio, 2007: 27).

However, not all the models embrace both cultural and intercultural competence as a constituent subcompetence of translator competence, and which Wilss (1976), Nord (1991), Neubert (2000) and Kelly (2002; 2005), for example, consider as fundamental to the work of any professional translator.

Wilss (1976: 120) was one of the first authors who elaborated a description of translator competence in which cultural competence is explicitly highlighted: “a supercompetence, basically defined as an ability to transfer messages between linguistic and textual systems of the source culture and linguistic and textual systems of the target culture”.

Later, Nord espouses that cultural competence is fundamental to a translator: “(...) the essential competences required of a translator [are] competence of text reception and analysis, research competence, transfer competence, competence of text production, competence of translation quality assessment, and, of course, linguistic and cultural competence,

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both on the source and the target side.” (Nord, 1991: 235)

Neubert also refers to the importance of cultural competence: “There are roughly five parameters of translational competence, viz. (1) language competence, (2) textual competence, (3) subject competence, (4) cultural competence, and last but not least, (5) transfer competence. It is precisely the interplay of these kinds of competence that distinguishes translation from other areas of communication.” (Neubert, 2000: 6). One of Neubert’s most important considerations pertains to translation as a linguistic and cultural activity (Neubert, 2000: 3).

Kelly’s model of translator competence also includes cultural competence as one of the subcompetences of her model of translator competence (2002; 2005).

### **3. Acquiring cultural and intercultural competence**

Cultural and intercultural competence cannot be defined or analysed without a clear idea of what is meant by culture. Over the years, this has been the subject of much debate and probably much less consensus across several academic disciplines, Translation Studies included. Suffice it here to mention two classics - Edward B. Tylor (1871) and Alfred Kroeber & Clyde Kluckhohn (1952) - respectively from the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The last decades have been marked by the foregrounding of cultural concerns in many different fields, including Translation Studies. This development has brought along substantial changes in the approaches to this matter in Translation, from a more ethnographic and inclusive conception of “culture” to the approach adopted here, summarised by Katan (2004: 26) as “a shared mental model or map of the world. This includes Culture – though it is not the main focus. Instead, the main focus here lies in ‘what goes without being said’ and the ‘normal’. This ‘normal’ model of the world is a system of congruent and interrelated beliefs, values, strategies and cognitive environments which guide the shared basis of behaviour”.

I see the translator and the interpreter as a specialised communicator. In the translation process, the translator/interpreter not only works to understand the communicative situation in the Source Text but must also do the same with the Target Text. According to Nord (1997: 21): “the translator can be compared with a target-culture text producer, expressing a source-culture sender’s communicative intentions”.

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Traditionally - insofar as we can speak of tradition in such a recent discipline as this - translator and interpreter training programmes in Spain have covered cultural and intercultural competence almost exclusively in the form of knowledge of the foreign cultures related to the languages studied. This has usually taken the form of course modules in “Civilization”, or “Area Studies” during the early years of study, together with an insistence on having a wide general knowledge, as well as stressing the importance of reading the press and being up to date with world events. However, the development of student cultural and intercultural competence may be achieved in many innovative ways; indeed, much can be learned outside the classroom in non-conventional situations. Learning is not just a question of acquiring more and more facts, but rather also of acquiring and developing skills and attitudes.

The following section explains the study which was undertaken to identify the factors which most influence the processes whereby cultural and intercultural competence is acquired: the extent to which it is actually acquired, and the questionnaire employed to achieve this aim. The data discussed in this paper forms part of a larger project on the acquisition of cultural and intercultural competence in translator training<sup>1</sup>, the final aim of which is to understand the situation in greater depth in order to design effective training syllabuses and activities for the European Higher Education Area.

#### **4. Methodology and research design**

A questionnaire was applied to groups of students in their first and final (fourth) year of BA study at translation schools in five Spanish universities<sup>2</sup> for the 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2010-11 academic years. The results can be deemed representative as our sample represents 99.2% of the population for the first year, according to official figures,<sup>3</sup> and around

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<sup>1</sup> The Acquisition of Cultural and Intercultural Competence in Translator Training (ACCI)/HUM 2006-04454/FILO, R&D Project supported by the Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport.

<sup>2</sup> University of Granada (UGR), University of Salamanca (USAL), Jaume I University in Castellón de la Plana (UJI), Pablo de Olavide University in Seville (UPO), and the Comillas Pontifical University in Madrid (UPCO).

<sup>3</sup> According to the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (MICINN), the approximate total number of students enrolled in the first year in the five schools of translation and interpreting participating in the study was 660.

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two-thirds of the final year students according to estimated figures.<sup>4</sup> As a starting point for the study, an exhaustive review of the literature provided details as to the variety of instruments used in the assessment of the acquisition of cultural and intercultural competence, as well as their validation. Following other studies, I decided to concentrate on the instruments designed by Tsokaktsidu (2005), the TEMCU Project ([www.temcu.com](http://www.temcu.com)) and the INCA Project ([www.incaproject.org](http://www.incaproject.org)). However, the study that best suited the aims of this investigation was the INCA Project, due to the fact that its website offers a wide range of resources linked to culture, and in particular to its acquisition and development.

INCA is a project funded by the European Commission's Leonardo da Vinci II programme which has developed a framework, a suite of assessment tools - including INCA on-line - and a portfolio for the assessment of intercultural competence linked to language and subject knowledge competence. Furthermore, INCA offers a theoretical framework formulated by the project partners and contributors, experts in intercultural learning theory, diagnostic testing and "culture shock" (Byram, K hlman, Bernd and Budin).

The aim of the questionnaire is to elicit responses regarding:

1. *The student's attitude in cultural and intercultural situations of daily life (general situations)*
2. *The student's self-conception as to the profession of translator and interpreter*
3. *The student's self-evaluation in various relevant aspects of cultural and intercultural competence in Translating and Interpreting*
4. *The student's profile.*

4.1. Student attitude in cultural and intercultural situations of daily life (general situations).

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<sup>4</sup> Calvo (2009: 338-339) estimated that the number of students in final year of Translation and Interpreting Studies in Spain is 85% less than the students enrolled in the first year, so according to this data, the total number of students in their final year would be approximately 288 in Spain. The sample we collected is 123.3% representative as the questionnaires of final year correspond to two academic years (2008/09 and 2010/11).

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This section consists of 11 items pertaining to general cultural and intercultural situations which may be easily graded by the students. Said items refer to situations in non-specific contexts of translation and/or interpreting. A wide range of issues are covered, and there are some implicit points concerning verbal and non-verbal language, politics, religion as well as customs of people from a culture which differs from their own. These general situations can be answered by anyone, no matter whether they have lived abroad or not. In all cases, the respondents are asked to predict their responses in that given situation.

In accordance with INCA theory and its six essential spheres of intercultural competence proposed, i.e.: i) *tolerance for ambiguity*, ii) *behavioural flexibility*, iii) *communicative awareness*, iv) *curiosity about other cultures in themselves and in order to be able to interact better with people*, v) *respect for otherness* and, vi) *empathy*, an attempt was made to include at least one item from each. In this section items 1, 2 and 8 are considered as examples of ii) *Behavioural flexibility*; items 3 and 10 represent iii) *Communicative awareness*; items 4, 5 and 6, and again item 10, can be included in area iv) *Knowledge discovery*; item 7 pertains to i) *Tolerance for ambiguity* as well as v) *Respect for otherness* and vi) *Empathy*, as does items 9 and 11. This section of the questionnaire was subject to a four-grade scale: 1 = I totally agree; 2 = I agree; 3 = I do not agree; 4 = I strongly disagree. The reason why the scale was a four-grade instead of the typical Likert five-grade scale was because people tend to choose the in-between answer when they are not very confident about what they are being asked. In order to avoid this, the questionnaire includes a four-grade scale.

#### 4.2. Student self-conception as to the profession of translator and interpreter.

In this section the student was asked about their self-conception as to what a translator and/or interpreter must do; as a response they were asked to grade their agreement or disagreement using the same four-grade scale. This section was headed as follows: “How important is this activity/attitude/knowledge for a professional translator and/or interpreter?” Almost all the items refer to competences implicitly or explicitly involved in the work of a translator and/or interpreter in accordance with Kelly’s model of translator competence (2002; 2005). This section contains 10 items each with the same four-grade scale.



#### 4.3. Student self-evaluation of cultural and intercultural competence in translating and interpreting.

In this section, the approach was different as we intended the student to unconsciously evaluate him/herself, so as to avoid the answer explicitly relating to this highest level of acquisition. The twelve responses were arranged in four groups (each with three responses) of which the respondent was required to tick just one response per group. In this response “(a)” was synonymous with the basic level of cultural and intercultural competence, “(b)” with the intermediate, and “(c)” with the advanced level, while each of the four groups referred to a different field:

1) Cultural knowledge	(a) I have some general knowledge about the cultures of those I work with. This knowledge consists of facts that are not always connected, and I don't yet have an overall picture of the relevant cultures.
	(b) I take the trouble to find out about the cultures I am likely to be working with, paying attention not only to isolated facts, but also to values, customs and practices common to those cultures.
	(c) I have a deep understanding of cultures I encounter frequently. When involved in new intercultural situations I strive to acquire the best possible available knowledge and understanding, both through prior research and seeking regular clarification within the group.
2) Cultural competence level, attitudes and resources	(a) I tend to pick things up and learn from them as I go along, but I haven't yet the experience to work out any system of dealing with intercultural situations in general.
	(b) I am quick to see patterns in the various experiences I have, and I'm beginning to draw conclusions without having to seek advice.
	(c) I am constantly ready for situations and encounters in which I will exercise my knowledge, judgement and skills, and have a large repertoire of

	strategies for dealing with differences in values, customs and practices among members of an intercultural group.
3) Readiness to adapt one's behaviour	(a) I do not have a plan for reacting to events. When a situation becomes confusing, I tend to take a passive role.
	(b) I adapt my behaviour in new situations taking account lessons learnt in previous intercultural situations. I sometimes adopt the behaviour patterns of others, rather than waiting for them to adopt mine.
	(c) I have a good overall understanding of the kinds of communicative difficulties that can arise in an intercultural context, and have a wide range of strategies for resolving them.
4) Openness	(a) When uncertainty arises from cultural difference, I adopt a tolerant attitude as long as the issue is not a sensitive one for me.
	(b) I react neutrally to cultural differences, rather than hastily categorizing them as good or bad.
	(c) I fully respect the right of those from other cultures to have values which are different from my own, and I can see how these values make sense as part of a way of thinking.

**Table 1.** Response options for student self-evaluation of cultural and intercultural competence.

This section is one of the most interesting from the analytical perspective, due to the fact that respondents are self-evaluating themselves in each of the four fields represented. As is the case with the previous sections, the above was designed in accordance with INCA's areas, namely: field (1) knowledge discovery, field (2) behavioural flexibility, field (3) communicative awareness, and field (4) respect for otherness.

#### 4.4. Student profile.

The final three parts of the questionnaire pertain to the respondent profile

to understand the path they followed in their acquisition of languages.

## 5. Data analysis and results

This paper reports only on the elicited data pertaining to student self-evaluation regarding cultural and intercultural competence of translators' trainees regarding their level of cultural knowledge, their degree of cultural competence, their attitudes and resources, as well as readiness to adapt their behaviour and openness.

The results are presented as a comparison between the courses at the five Spanish universities, as well as between the first year and the final year results. It should be remembered that the survey shows the students' self-perception of what they think their competence is but this does not necessarily correspond to how they behave when actually translating or interpreting.

A total of 1,011 of questionnaires were completed: 655 students from the first year and 356 from the final year. The distribution ratio of students surveyed per university is as follows:

University	First year	Final year
UGR Granada	38.6% (253 subjects)	44.1% (157 subjects)
USAL Salamanca	15.6% (102 subjects)	16.3% (58 subjects)
UJI Castellón	18.2% (119 subjects)	14.6% (52 subjects)
UPCO Madrid	11.6% (76 subjects)	14% (50 subjects)
UPO Sevilla	16% (105 subjects)	11% (39 subjects)

**Table 2.** Survey participants per university and percentage distribution of first and final (fourth) year students.

The gender and the age distribution of translation students surveyed are respectively revealed in Tables 3 and 4:

Gender	First year	Final year
Men	20.8% (136 subjects)	19.4% (69 subjects)

Women	78.9% (517 subjects)	80.3% (285 subjects)
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**Table 3.** Gender distribution of survey participants.

As can be seen that many more women than men are enrolled in translation and interpreting studies in Spanish universities, thus confirming the "pink collar" status of the subject area (see Katan 2011).

The most frequent age range of access to the first year of translation and interpreting studies in Spain is 17-20 years old, while students in their final year are mainly 21-24 years old.

Age range	First year	Final year
17-20 years old	89.2% (584 subjects)	None
21-24 years old	6.6% (43 subjects)	84.5% (300 subjects)
25-28 years old	1.1% (7 subjects)	9.3% (33 subjects)
over 28 years old	2.6% (17 subjects)	5.9% (21 subjects)

**Table 4.** Age distribution of survey participants.

To provide a global picture of the subjects' self-evaluation, there are 4 tables which show percentage distributions by field.

Table 5 reveals that the response most preferred by translation students was: "b) I take the trouble to find out about the cultures I am likely to be working with, paying attention not only to isolated facts, but also to values, customs and practices common in those cultures."

Self-evaluation of cultural knowledge	First year	Final year
(a) basic level	37.9% (248 subjects)	9.6% (59 subjects)
(b) intermediate level	49.3% (323 subjects)	63.8% (227 subjects)
(c) advanced level	12.4% (81 subjects)	26.7% (95 subjects)

**Table 5.** Student self-evaluation of their cultural knowledge.

Table 6 reveals that student self-evaluation of cultural competence, attitudes and resources, is the only item where there is a significant difference regarding distribution across the categories/answers given. In this section, the most popular option amongst first year students was (b):

“I am quicker to see patterns in the various experiences I have, and I am beginning to draw conclusions without having to seek advice”; while final year students primarily chose option (c): “I am constantly ready for situations and encounters in which I will exercise my knowledge, judgement and skills, and have a large repertoire of strategies for dealing with differences in values, customs and practices among members of the intercultural group”.

<b>Self-evaluation of cultural competence, attitudes &amp; resources</b>	<b>First year</b>	<b>Final year</b>
(a) basic level	37.1% (243 subjects)	16.6% (59 subjects)
(b) intermediate level	44.7% (293 subjects)	35.7% (127 subjects)
(c) advanced level	17.9% (117 subjects)	47.8% (170 subjects)

**Table 6.** Student self-evaluation of their cultural competence, attitudes and resources.

As regards readiness to adapt behaviour, the majority of students both in first year (448; 68.4%) and the final year (232; 65.2%) chose argument (b) “I adapt my behaviour in new situations taking account of lessons learnt in previous intercultural situations. I sometimes adopt the behaviour patterns of others, rather than waiting for them to adopt mine”. In contrast, only 16% from first year and 31.7% from final year self-evaluated themselves as “I have a good overall understanding of the kinds of communicative difficulties that can arise in an intercultural context and have a wide range of strategies for resolving them”.

<b>Self-evaluation of readiness to adapt one’s behaviour</b>	<b>First year</b>	<b>Final year</b>

(a) basic level	15.3% (100 subjects)	3.1% (11 subjects)
(b) intermediate level	68.4% (448 subjects)	65.2% (232 subjects)
(c) advanced level	16% (105 subjects)	31.7% (113 subjects)

**Table 7.** Student self-evaluation of their readiness to adapt behaviour.

The most popular response to the concept of openness was “I fully respect the right of those from other cultures to have different values from my own, and can see how these values make sense as part of a way of thinking”; this was acknowledged by 74.5% of first year and 73% of final year students.

Self-evaluation of openness	First year	Final year
(a) basic level	8.4% (55 subjects)	4.2% (15 subjects)
(b) intermediate level	16.6% (109 subjects)	22.8% (81 subjects)
(c) advanced level	74.5% (488 subjects)	73% (269 subjects)

**Table 8.** Student self-evaluation of openness.

One of the major findings of the study was that there exist significant similarities between first and final year students in the results pertaining to cultural knowledge, cultural competence level, attitudes and resources and readiness to adapt one’s behaviour. Save for the general self-professed high propensity towards openness, students generally acknowledged the option that placed them in an intermediate level.

## 6. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

This study includes a highly representative sample of translation and interpreting students in Spain (over 1,000 students drawn from five university translation schools). Although only a brief summary of part of the analysis of the survey questionnaire has been provided in this paper, it nevertheless provides insight into the students’ self-perception (see also Ordóñez 2010) of what they consider they already know at the onset (first year) and final (fourth) year of their university training.

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The present study has attempted to describe some of the aspects involved in the process whereby cultural and intercultural competence is acquired in future professional translators. Surprisingly, it would appear that the rise in the level of cultural and intercultural competence in Translation trainees following four years of training is not particularly significant.

One possible explanation for the results of this study may derive from the fact that our current education and training programmes in Spain do not have sufficiently clear theoretical notions and definitions which would then facilitate the effective and efficient acquisition of intercultural competence.

Clearly this is a limited study. Nonetheless, it does suggest at least 4 areas of further study. They are as follows:

1. It would be interesting to take into consideration those students engaged in international exchange programmes, either before and after an exchange (outgoing and incoming exchange students) from Translation and Interpreting Studies, in order to measure the impact of this intercultural experience.
2. Moreover, it would be enriching to discover the differences among students from different fields of study, in order to determine whether the training received influences the development of the intercultural competence or not. This study could be carried out by means of the questionnaire already described with the necessary changes.
3. If some longitudinal studies could be carried out to observe students' cultural and intercultural competence when facing a translation commission and pre-translating a selected text in a given time in first and final year, the overall role of cultural and intercultural competence could be better understood.
4. It would be useful to add to the research being done by the AVANTI Research Group among translation and interpreting trainers regarding their own awareness of, and attitude toward, the cultural aspects in the translation classroom. Any advance in these directions would substantially improve training outcomes - and thus the competence - of future professionals in the field of intercultural communication.

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