Translator associations – from gatekeepers to communities

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Abstract: Analysis of 217 associations for translators and/or interpreters shows that, after the heroic age of the generalist national and international groupings in the 1950s and 1960s, there has been a progressive specialization of associations. In rough chronological order, separate institutions have been created for literary translators, sworn/authorized translators and interpreters, conference interpreters, public-service interpreters and audiovisual translators. This process might be seen as a division of labor, a normal result of increasing memberships. Analysis of the communication strategies employed by the associations nevertheless suggests that there has been a profound shift in their very nature: from a model where the association ideally vouches for the professional trustworthiness of several thousands of members, thus implicitly speaking to clients and other professions, we find a tendency toward communication patterns where the association becomes a place for social, pedagogical and political action between its members. The greater density and plexity of the interactions means that the newer associations involve smaller groups of people, selected on the basis of either professional specialization or geographical proximity. Similar interactive models are found in online marketplaces for translations and in communities of volunteer translators, which prove to be innovative not only in promoting interactive communication but also in inventing new ways of signaling translators' trustworthiness. A way forward for the traditional associations might be to adapt some of the communication strategies operative in the electronic marketplaces and among volunteers.

Calls for a sociology of translation have so far remained remarkably impervious to one of the most basic units of social organization: the formation of public associations. Associations would nevertheless seem extremely pertinent to translators and interpreters as an occupational group. As translators seek to create, affirm or modify their collective identity and interests, one of the main things they do is join forces within a legal framework of some kind. The development of social market economies since the mid-nineteenth century has accompanied several kinds of professional associations, ranging from the trade union through to the learned society, and carrying out a very wide range of functions, from the protection of collective salary levels to the vetting of professional membership. In the field of translation (here taken to include interpreting), this range of forms and functions is very much in evidence. The aim of this paper is to map out the basic forms of what I will call "translator associations", and to propose a general model of their historical development.

My survey here has started from the list of 164 translator associations compiled as part of a study on the status of the translation profession (Pym et al. 2012) – here we are not talking about people who get paid for interpreting and translating, not about associations of scholars or of Translation Studies. The corpus for that previous study included associations for both interpreting and translation, and covered all Member States of the European Union plus Croatia (not yet a member in 2012), Norway, Switzerland,

Turkey, Australia, Canada and the United States. To that initial corpus we[1] have added the Translators Association China (TAC), the associations listed as members of the TAC, and the associations that are members of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs in Asia, Oceania, Africa and South America. We have omitted associations that comprise graduates of particular schools, government bodies that keep lists of sworn or authorized translators, and groups of volunteer translators (the importance of which is nevertheless mentioned below). In all, the corpus for this study comprises 217 associations – a total that is far from complete, yet it is greater than most would suspect, and hopefully good enough for a general overview.

The focus of the previous study was on the ways associations are able to emit signals of professional status, in the same way as signals of translator quality are emitted by educational institutions and professional certification systems. Translators might be recognized as being relatively trustworthy because of the associations they belong to, in addition to the institutions they have degrees from, the professional exams they have passed, and the professional experience they have accrued. That study generally found that signals from translator associations work in conjunction with other signaling mechanisms, with some significant exceptions. For example, an association may require as prerequisites for membership an educational qualification or a certain number of years of experience, in which case they are emitting a signal of trustworthiness that is itself based on anterior signals. Alternatively, associations like the American Translators Association (ATA) organize their own professional exams, in which case their signal can effectively block or override all others. That would seem to be a basic a priori categorization of associations as signalers of status: some piggyback on other institutions, while a few seek to go it alone. The real surprise in our analysis was nevertheless the huge variety of associations, which on several occasions pushed back the boundaries of what we initially wanted to call an "association". Only a handful of institutions effectively organize their own membership examinations (the ATA, the CIOL, NAATI in Australia); the vast majority of them are doing far more than evaluating and signaling translator quality. Our original working concept envisaged a group of translators and/or interpreters protecting their collective interests through mutual recognition of professional competence, thus emitting a signal of status based on gatekeeping (members of the association are assumed to have qualities that non-members do not have). That concept (and with it, our analysis of status) nevertheless proved to be inadequate. As our list of associations grew, numerous other functions came into view: associations were also discussion groups, news distributors, organizers of social events, political lobbyists, job markets, groups of former students of particular training institutions, and much more.

Here I seek to grasp that diversity in broad historical terms. My working hypothesis is that the development of different types of associations is in part an index of the way the translation profession itself has evolved. At the same time, the history of associations might also respond to the changing media that translators have used in order to communicate both with each other and with employers, clients and various audiences. The history of associations would thus also be a history of professional specialization that at the same time adjusts to communication technologies. In terms of classical sociology (dating from Tönnies1887/2001), we would have witnessed a general move from the relative pursuit of complementary self-interest (*Gesellschaft*) to modes of association

based on interactively reinforced shared identities (*Gemeinschaft*). In terms of more recent sociologies (Appadurai 1996, Morley 2007, Fisher 2010, and much else), we would be tracing a movement from hierarchical gatekeepers (selecting those whose self-interest can be pooled) towards online interactive communities (based on social relations and mutual support in the course of practice). These few large sociological concepts can hopefully put a handle on our complex and diverse object: it is not our purpose here to go into any more refined analysis of the types of interactions, the financial models, the market impacts, or the regional, national and international scales of the networks. Our purpose is merely to sketch out a rough general history.

1. The heroic age of grand gatekeeping

If the function of a professional association were merely to emit a social signal of the special qualities of its members, one would expect the world to be full of associations that are huge and old. This is because the strength of a status signal – its prestige and authority in the eyes of social partners – usually depends on the number of people it speaks for and the number of years it has had in which to accrue authority, over and above the actual expertise of its members. Although it is true that the examination-organizing associations are generally large and well-established, since they need prestige in order for their exams to be recognized on the market, our database is littered with exceptions to any rule.

A few associations are surprisingly old: the Society of Greek Playwrights, Musicians and Translators dates from 1894; the Danish Translatørforeningen (Association of Authorized Translators) was established in 1910; the Norwegian Statsautoriserte Translatørers Forening (Association of State Authorized Translators) was created in 1913; the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario dates from 1920; the Swedish Federation of Authorized Translators was founded in 1932; the British Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL) dates from 1910, although its widely respected Diploma in Translation was not introduced until 1989. Age, however, seems not to correlate easily with size: most of today's large associations were not born until the 1950s, which is when the international field was effectively formed.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the giants in our corpus are the American Translators Association (ATA), founded in 1959 and now with about 11,000 members in "more than 90 countries"[2], the Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer (BDÜ), founded in 1954 and now with about 7,000 members, and the Translators Association of China (TAC), founded in 1981 and now with more than 12,000 members.[3] The Canadian Conseil des traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes should also be mentioned here, and can be traced by to the same period as the ATA and BDÜ: the original association (the Société des traducteurs et interprètes du Canada) was founded in 1956 and might

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claim 2,831 members.[4] All these associations now have a hierarchical structure, incorporating a series of smaller, regional associations. From the same period we also have the founding of the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC) in 1953, now with "over 3,000 members in 100 different countries"[5], which similarly has some regional associations.

All these institutions have a relatively strong centralized administration that actively speaks on behalf of members in dealings with governments and administrative bodies; communication is generally one-way, with the administration addressing members through publications (for example, *MDÜ Fachzeitschrift für Dolmetscher und Übersetzer* and the *ATA Chronicle*). Over the years, this structure has grown to a point where membership of the association gives members considerable professional standing. In a questionnaire survey (Pym et al. 2012), ATA membership is reported as having a clear market value (i.e. translators can attract better clients and receive better payment), and BDÜ membership is similarly reported as having a strong market value but at a level slightly less than academic qualifications (the traditional *Diplom-Übersetzer*). The ATA organizes stringent certification exams, whereas the BDÜ, as a federation of associations, receives members through the member organizations. This is not to say that the social dimension is entirely absent: some associations within the BDÜ offer healthcare plans and insurance benefits.

Figure 1. Numbers of members and years of foundation of 217 translator associations from all countries, 1890-2012
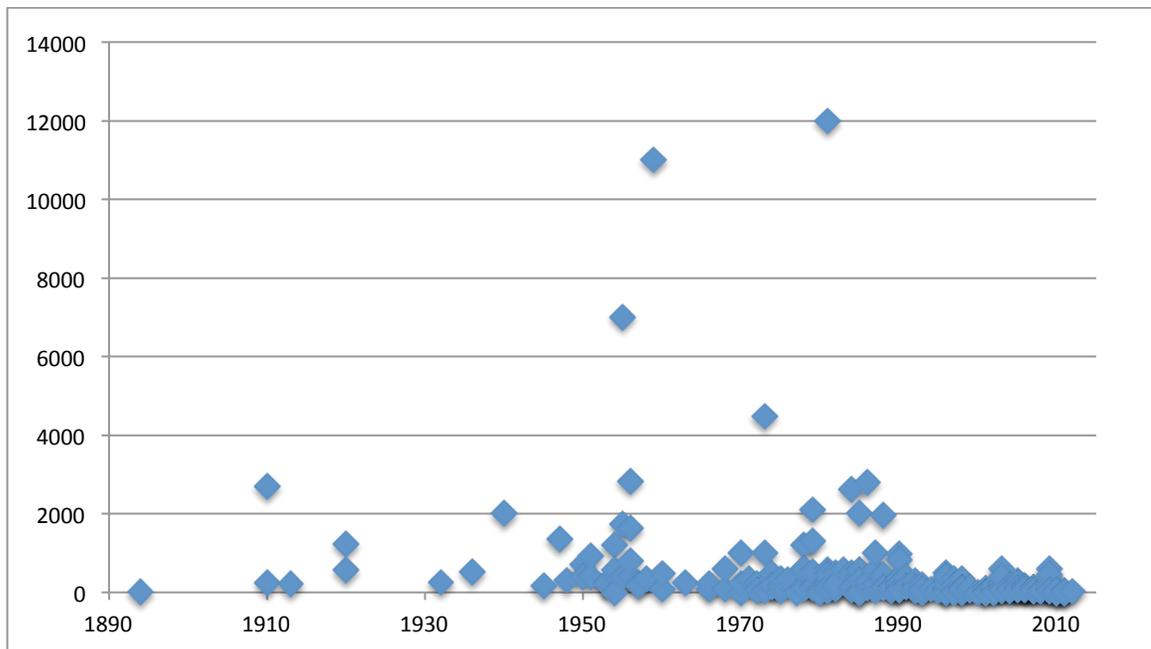
Several other international associations were created in the same years, significantly in French, which still retained some of its status as the language of international

[4] In June 2012 the Quebec association OTTIAQ withdrew from the Conseil, which complicates the count.
[5] http://aiic.net/about/. Accessed March 2013.

diplomacy. The Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs (FIT) was founded in 1953, the same year as the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC), and international French was further retained in the Conférence Internationale Permanente d'Instituts Universitaires de traducteurs et d'Interprètes (CIUTI), created in 1960. FIT and CIUTI began as clubs of other institutions: the existing national associations in the case of the FIT, and the existing prestigious translation schools in the case of CIUTI. Once again, the structure of these organizations was highly centralized and based on the construction of authority, with more information flowing from the administration to the members than the other way around. In all these cases (with the obvious exception of AIIC), the reigning model was of an integrated profession in which translation and interpreting were united. This was the age of a triumphant multilingual United Nations, bringing together the victors of the Second World War (and their selected languages). It was an era in which simultaneous conference interpreting retained a magical aura, with fabled heroes able to perform incredible feats of accuracy and memory, and the head of the UN interpreters held the rank of Ambassador, as well-paid written translators basked in the luxury of dictating their renditions, which secretaries later typed up. Official translators were special people, with particular qualities to which not everyone could aspire. Authoritative associations, which thus appeared to conceal and then hand on secret knowledge, were a major means of not only controlling access to the profession, but of shoring up its prestige and salaries.

Perhaps thanks to this same logic, but also because of the need to defend national languages, this heroic age of the 1950s and 1960s also saw the founding of many national associations along the same lines. There are two distinct groups in our data here. The associations in France (1947), Italy (1950), Finland (1955) and the Netherlands (1956) now have between 700 and 1700 members, making them large enough to speak with some authority on behalf of an integrated profession. These are generalist associations, bringing together technical translators, interpreters, sworn translators/interpreters, and sometimes literary translators as well. However, other associations founded in the same period and with the same generalist principles have remained quite small, now mustering between 200 and 600 members. This has been the case in Norway (1948), Austria (1954), Spain (1954), Sweden (1954), Belgium (1955), Croatia (1957), Greece (1963) and Switzerland (1966). The reduced size of these associations may in some cases be due to the limited dimensions of the national markets concerned (although the Finnish association has 1726 members, in a population of some 5m. people, and the Netherlands Society has 1625 members in a country of 16m.). Many of the smaller national associations would appear to have stagnated, or have otherwise failed to speak for an integrated profession. In some cases they have been rivaled by younger associations; in many cases they have been challenged by the development of more specialized associations.

So, in many parts of the world, the heroic age ended.

## 2. First specialization: literary translators

Things fell apart, almost from the beginning. The grand generalist ambitions of the 1950s were progressively challenged by associations for more specialized forms of translation. As can be seen in Figure 2 (where we retain the timeline of Figure 1 but have greatly

amplified the scale for the membership numbers), the first major separation came from associations that were specifically for literary translators.

The first sign of this separation was the appearance of the Verband deutschsprachiger Übersetzer literarischer und wissenschaftlicher Werke (VdÜ) (Association of German-Speaking Translators of Literary and Scientific Works) in 1954, in the same year as the generalist BDÜ. The literary translators then joined with the Verband deutscher Schriftsteller (Association of German Writers) in 1974 and now claim to have more than 1,200 members.[6] Significantly, one becomes a member of this association not through certificates or training, but by having translated at least one literary work and having been paid for it in money (at least in the 2011 version of the association's constitution). That is, you find recognition as a literary translator by doing it (and selling it), not by learning about it or passing exams – this is a club of people who enter on the basis of experience.

Other associations of literary translators were established in Croatia and Slovenia, both in 1953, and in Sweden in 1954, as a section of the Swedish Writers' Union. Since then, the creation of separate associations for literary translation has been surprisingly constant, and with fairly low membership numbers – except for the French association, created in 1973 and now with about 1,000 members. In fact, apart from the French and German cases (the two high points in Figure 2), literary associations have been consciously smaller, with greater proximity between administration and membership. This more intimate format has propagated in recent years, thanks in part to the impact of websites and electronic media: associations of literary translators have been founded in Hungary in 2003 (160 members), Lithuania in 2004 (121 members), Australia in 2005 (68 members) and Turkey in 2006 (180 members). At the same time, many literary translators also work as authors, editors, proofreaders, etc. – Pym et al. (2012: 88) estimate that some 60% of translators in Europe work part-time – and are consequently members of associations for writers or authors, which may or may not have sections for translators. These more general literary associations are not included in our corpus.

Figure 2. Numbers of members and years of foundation of 15 literary translator associations in the European Union, Canada, the United States and Australia, 1890-2012
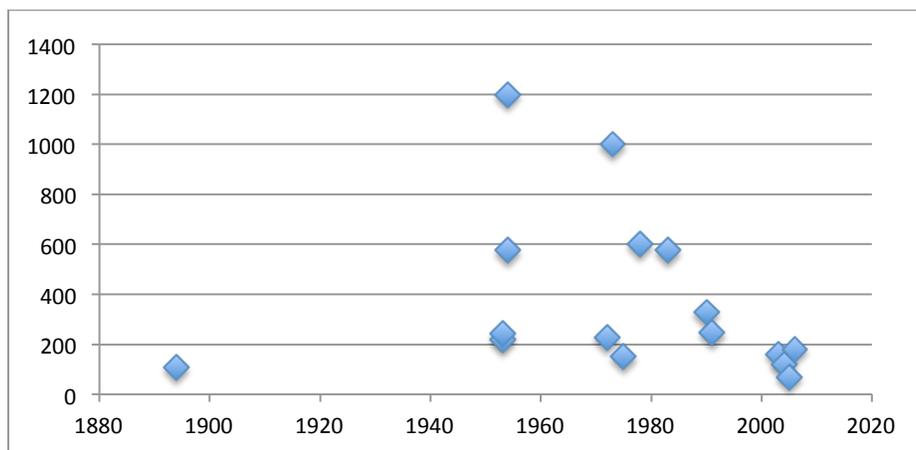
[6] http://literaturuebersetzer.de/. Accessed March 2013.

The creation of associations for literary translation was so constant as to form the basis for the Conseil Européen des Associations de Traducteurs Littéraires (CEATL) in 1993, which in 2013 had 34 member associations (including many associations for literary writers). A survey carried out by the CEATL in 2005-06 focused on the incomes of literary translators. The main finding was that "in 20 out of our 23 countries, literary translators' average purchasing power is less than 60% of the per capita purchasing power standard (PPS)" (Foch et al. 2008: 70), that is, less than 60% of something like a minimum wage. In itself, this may not be particularly scandalous, given that many literary translators have second and third occupations from which they generate income. However, if the function of these associations were ever to restrict membership so as to bolster translators' authority and earnings, then they would not appear to have been very successful. The function of the associations is more often to circulate information, to organize social events, and to promote public awareness of their members' work – which necessarily involves producing information on financial precariousness, seeking collective solutions, and occasionally indulging in some degree of shared commiseration.

3. Law-bound specialization: sworn or authorized translators

Quite a different separation is seen in the formation of associations for sworn or "state-authorized" translators. These are the translators (usually including interpreters) who are considered qualified to work for the various national justice systems, either in the courts or in the production of translations that are legally valid (the names for the profession vary with the different legal regimes). Just as literary translators have gravitated towards institutions specifically concerned with literature, so sworn or authorized translators have been regulated by specifically juridical institutions, mostly in the form of national laws restricting whose work is valid.

The largest association in this category is the Colegio de Traductores Públicos de la Ciudad de Buenos Aires, which was founded in 1973 and lists 4,486 members on its website, which is a lot of sworn translators for just one city. It should be noted, however, that the university degree programs for translators in Argentina traditionally qualify all graduates as "traductores públicos" (sworn translators). The same is true in the various provinces of Argentina and in Uruguay, where the corresponding association was found in 1950 and has some 400 members. This tradition stretches a long way back: the School of Law at the University of Uruguay was authorized to issue the degree of *Traductor Público* as early as 1855 (Sainz 1993), so in this part of the world it would obviously be erroneous to describe sworn translation as a later specialization: it was the original default training.

Something similar is also found in Scandinavia. As can be seen in Table 3, associations in Denmark, Norway and Sweden date from the 1910s and 1930s, thus pre-dating the heroic age of the generalist associations. The other associations are nevertheless of much more recent creation, in tune with the progressive fragmentation of the profession. What is perhaps most surprising is the number of smaller associations founded in quite recent years. In theory, associations connected with justice systems should be the most in line with the aim of authoritatively certifying the translator's trustworthiness; we would expect them to be as old as the legal regimes within which they operate. And yet we find separate associations created in the Netherlands in 1988, a

second association founded in Denmark in 1990, no fewer than four associations of court interpreters created in Croatia since 2007, and moves to create an association in Portugal from 2011. In some cases, these recent creations are associated with changes in legal regimes (we assume this to be the case in Croatia); in others, the new associations are founded to voice discontent with the professional status of translators and interpreters in the justice systems, as in the case in Portugal and the Professional Interpreters Alliance (PIA) and the Society for Public Service Interpreting (SPSI) in the United Kingdom. That is, associations can serve both as institutional supports of justice-system legislation and as organizations for the criticism and improvement of the working conditions of translators and interpreters. In this latter function, some of these groups resemble the critical aspects of the literary associations. In almost all other respects, though, they exercise a clear gatekeeping function: members must have particular academic qualifications or professional certification.

Although there would appear to be clear legal reasons for having separate associations for sworn or authorized translators, not all the new associations have been created exclusively for the justice systems. TEPIS, founded in Poland 1990, presents itself as an association of "sworn and specialized" translators; the SPSI, founded in the United Kingdom in 2011, explicitly aims to serve both the justice system and the National Health Service trusts. The category of "public service" translating and/or interpreting would nevertheless not appear to have been institutionalized in the form of associations outside of the United Kingdom.

Despite these various ways of cutting the cake, most of these associations bring together both written translation and oral interpreting, since the two modes tend to be subject to the same legislation. In consequence, the European Legal Interpreters and Translators Association (EULITA) was founded for both modes in 2009 and had 28 full-member associations in 2013. Many of those member associations are nevertheless generalist entities that have an interest in legal translation and interpreting: alongside the associations strictly for legal work we find the BDÜ, TEPIS and the Irish generalist association, for example.

Figure 3. Numbers of members and years of foundation of 22 associations of sworn, authorized or court translators/interpreters in the European Union and the Americas, 1890-2012
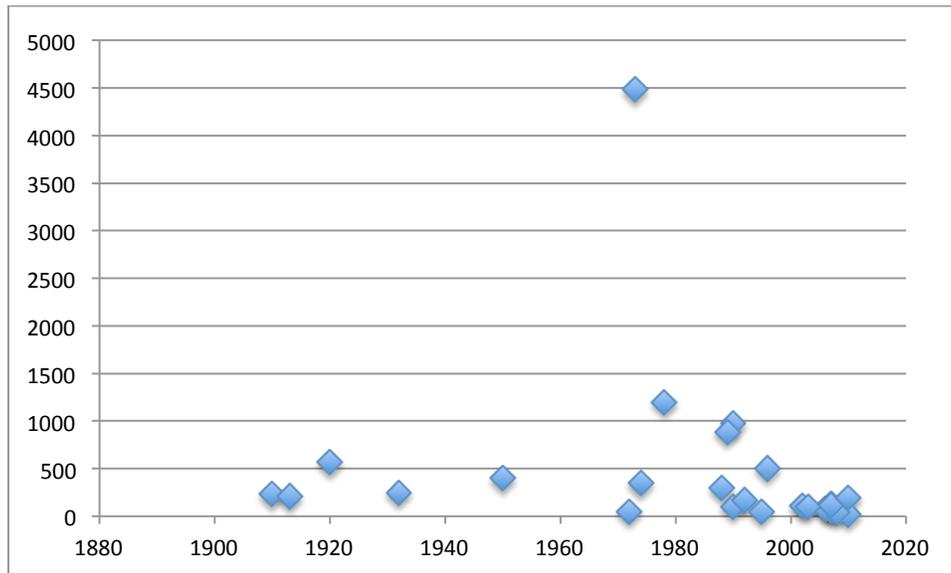
4. Interpreters go it alone

The creation of separate associations for interpreters partly runs parallel to those for literary and sworn/authorized translators, but occurs with a very specific configuration. As mentioned above, the Association Internationale des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC) was founded in 1953 and now claims some 3,000 members. So the original model here was to have one international organization that would centrally regulate the professional status of the interpreters considered qualified to provide services at conferences (either consecutively or simultaneously). The smaller associations appeared later.

Some of the new creations were specifically national associations of conference interpreters, as in Spain in 1968, Slovenia in 1972, Italy in 1974 and Portugal in 1987. It seems that these associations were founded in countries where there were very few AIIC members at the time, and yet there were national demands for qualified conference interpreters. In the narrative of one AIIC member in Spain (which comes replete with the topoi of brave pioneers, spontaneous quality, and supportive companionship for a select few) we find a clear assumption of two separate markets, corresponding to two different modes of prestige, and thus to the grounds for two separate associations. The account refers to the 1960s:

> Here in Spain they used to call us AIIC members the "internationals" - that was our comparative advantage over those who lacked the international projection of AIIC. We enjoyed a degree of prestige, which doesn't put bread on the table but is certainly gratifying. For instance, I did a lot of work for the FAO in Rome - it was my best client - and I also often worked in London. (Oyarzun undated)

The websites of the national associations for conference interpreters make curiously little reference to AIIC, just as the AIIC website, which is organized in terms of mostly national regions, makes no mention of these rival associations.

The websites of these associations do not mention "social" benefits or activities. Their functions tend to be more focused on explaining the work of interpreters and enabling potential clients to contact interpreters. In this sense, they are working as job brokers, and thus implicitly protecting the rates requested by their members. That said, we have not found any websites that stipulate the hourly or daily rates that must be paid to members (which would in any case be illegal in the United States, see Pym et al 2012: 66). In some cases there are guidelines, but the associations are careful not to replace the function of the labor market.

Figure 4. Numbers of members and years of foundation of 17 associations for interpreters, 1890-2012
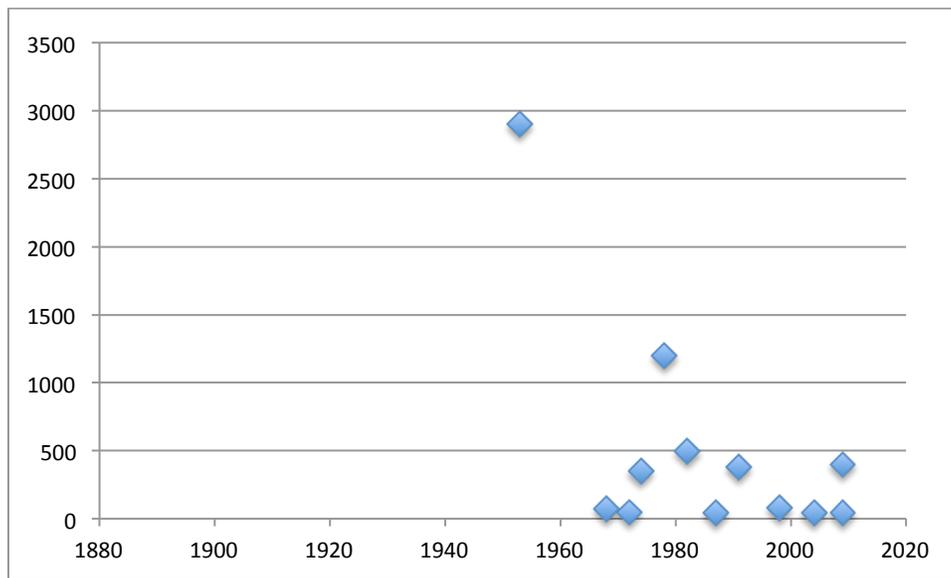
The Shanghai Association of Interpreters, founded in 2011, seems the only real sign of separation from the 40 or so regional translator associations in China (listed on the TAC website).

Most of the recent associations for interpreters correspond more clearly to the progressive diversification that the interpreting profession itself has undergone, corresponding to the institutional recognition of new areas of activity. As noted above, separate associations have been formed for police interpreters (in 1974 in the United Kingdom) and public-service interpreters (in 2009 and 2011, also in the United Kingdom). The International Association for Medical Interpreters, founded in the United States in 1986, claims to have "over 2,000 members". Associations of sign-language interpreters have been founded in France in 1978, Finland in 1982, Australia in 1991, New Zealand in 1996, Austria in 1998, Poland in 2009, the Czech Republic in 2000 and Slovenia in 2004.

Despite the work done by these associations, the vast majority of the national associations are still for "translators and interpreters" combined. The reason for this is perhaps to be found in the prevalence of part-time work or multitasking. Brown (2001) surveyed 374 AIIC interpreters and found that 68% of them do written translation as well as interpreting.

5. And the audiovisual is born

The creation of some associations is directly related to the institutionalization of new areas of professional activity. This is certainly the case of audiovisual translation, where our corpus registers six associations founded: in Norway in 1997, now with a respectable total of 152 members, and then in France in 2006, Poland in 2007, Spain in 2010, and Croatia in 2012, with a "Forum for Screen Translators" within the Danish Journalists Union since 1996.

With relatively small memberships, these associations resemble those of the interpreters to the extent that their websites appear to be primarily oriented towards explaining the profession to outsiders, offering implicit guarantees of the quality work done by members.

Figure 5. Numbers of members and years of foundation of 6 audiovisual translator associations in the European Union, the United States and Australia
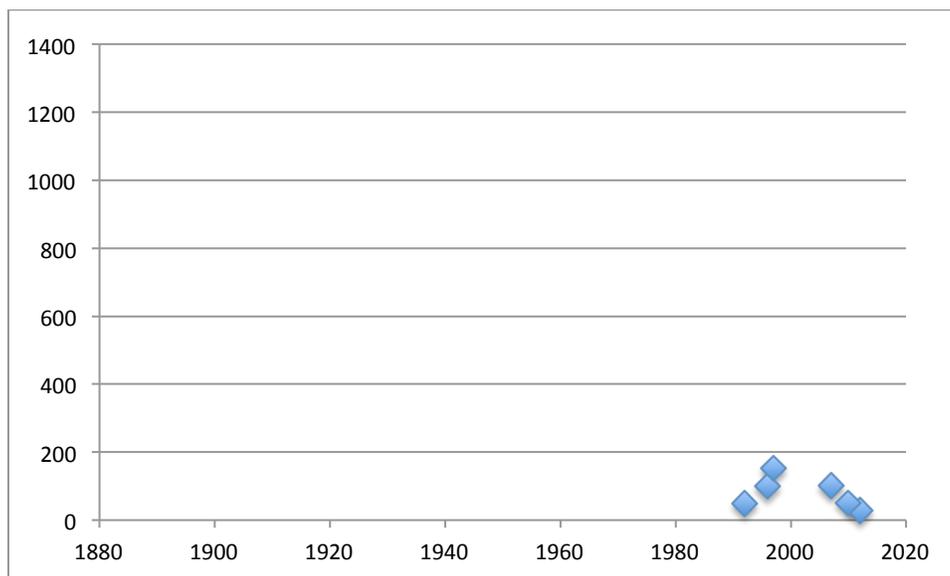
6. The impact of terminology and translation technologies

One might suppose that the recent creation of separate associations for audiovisual translators in some way corresponds to a world where digital technologies make audiovisual communication important, and certainly make the production of subtitles much easier. Such a hypothetical relation with technology is nevertheless very precarious if generalized. If we look back at Figure 1, we see a flurry of very new associations that would not seem to correspond to any new breed of technicians.

The professionalization of terminologists might be particularly related with technology, but in our corpus this group remains a case apart, with a presence that is now quite dated: terminologists are mentioned in the name of the CTIC (1970) and other associations in Canada (1970, 1989, although only since 2000 in the case of the Ordre des

traducteurs, terminologues et interprètes agréés du Québec), in the Swiss ASTTI (1966), and in the general description of the FIT. They appear to have few separate associations, and the ones that do exist (the European Association for Terminology was established in 1996, and the Terminology Association of Hong Kong dates from 1999) make little mention of the translation profession and would not appear to have historically split off from the translation community. Indeed, the integration of terminologists would appear to be a remarkably Francophone concern from the past century, with the development of separate professions being the norm in the rest of the world.

Perhaps more surprisingly, there are no new associations for anything related to or posteditors of machine translation feeds, or for project managers or any of the translators working for the localization industry. There are many associations of localization or language-industry *companies* (GALA, EUATC, ELIA, the now-defunct LISA, and many at the national level), but not for the new kinds of language workers employed by those companies. In sum, the impact of technology is remarkably restrained. The translators looking for information on specific technologies, particularly on translation memories, do not instinctively turn to any traditional translator association – they instead tend to join online discussion groups, where information is often free and lively, without any of the institutional constraints of an association as such. I will return to this relatively de-institutionalized structure later.

7. Reasons for new associations

The constant founding of small legally constituted associations throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s might be considered symptomatic of a different *kind* of association, with different functions. In these cases, longevity and size are clearly not what translators are looking for. Several reasons would seem to explain the felt need for associations that are new (and thus normally very small). Some associations can be attributed to the various waves of EU accession (as in Croatia, for example). Others are more clearly related to the progress of official languages (Catalan, Basque and Galician in the case of Spain), which would seem a logical enough relation with history.

A more intriguing possibility is a degree of discontent with the larger, generalist associations that date from the middle of the last century. In Spain we find no fewer than 12 associations, which is rather more than the languages alone can account for. In this case, the generalist association still exists (it dates from 1954) but would not appear to have retained much dynamism (I wrote to them some ten times in 2012, asking for the number of members, without receiving any reply). The smaller, newer associations in Spain are not only much better at responding to inquiries, they are also good at maintaining interactive websites, organizing events, and distributing fresh information. Signs of a similar break might be found in the Deutscher Verband der freien Übersetzer und Dolmetscher (DVÜD), set up in 2011 and describing itself at the time as "eight translators and a lawyer" (yes, you need a lawyer!)[7]. The DVÜD did not set out to oppose the 7,000-strong BÜD – it simply "wants to get things moving". More tellingly, this new

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[7] http://dvud.de/. "Wir… das sind 8 Übersetzer und ein Anwalt und noch ein paar mehr Menschen, die endlich etwas bewegen wollen" (We… that is eight translators and a lawyer and a few others who just want to get something moving"). Accessed November 2011.

association stemmed from a very active Internet discussion group[8], just as other informal networks are very active within LinkedIn; it might thus aspire to a degree of involvement and interactivity that the large traditional organizations cannot offer. Some 18 months after their creation, the association was busy organizing webinars on high-tech topics, running a You Tube channel, operating its Facebook site, giving guides to blogs, and offering members a free packet of contract templates (that lawyer had indeed been useful!). Clearly, the younger association is more in tune with electronic communications; it can offer services and modes of interaction that seem beyond the reach of the association of 7,000 older members.

A further example of the advantages of electronic communication is the International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI), founded in Buenos Aires in 2009 and with around 400 members in 2013. When communication is free and instantaneous, there is no reason for an association to stop at national borders: why not go global from the start? Yet this generalist association is not just a product of technology. It might appear to imply discontent with the traditional system embodied in the only other international generalist association, the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs, which claims to speak on behalf of some 83,000 translators. So why the new association? Signs of tension are not hard to find, yet they are strangely national rather than international: the three founding members of the IAPTI were expelled from the Argentine Association of Translators and Interpreters (a FIT member), ostensibly for founding an association with competing aims.[9] The international association then explains one of the main differences between the two associations:

> […] many colleagues from a variety of different countries do not possess translating or interpreting diplomas. But these are professionals who should indeed be included in any association that wishes to genuinely reflect the broader professional community and to work to correct a number of irregularities that exist today in Italy, the United Kingdom, the United States, Argentina, Brazil, India and so many other countries around the world. AATI [the Argentine Association of Translators and Interpreters], on the other hand, with very few exceptions, does not admit translators and interpreters who do not hold a degree.

This passage makes an instructive connection between one kind of injustice (not all good translators have a degree) and another ("irregularities" exist around the world), somehow suggesting that it is all the one ethical fight. The association's logo and website are correspondingly full of references to ethics and justice. Now, if you are a translator or interpreter who can demonstrate four years of experience, you can joint he IAPTI for US$60 a year, which entitles you to use the association's logo (blind justice holding scales), an email address with the association's domain, discounts on industry publications, and inclusion in the association's online directory. In short, the association offers strong signals of status to people who would otherwise not have access to such symbolic capital. It is a good deal.

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[8] http://uepo.de/2011/11/12/dvud-neuer-verband-fur-ubersetzer-und-dolmetscher-gegrundet/. Accessed November 2011.
[9] http://www.aipti.org/eng/speaks-out/art3-aati-expels-members-for-founding-iapti.html. Accessed March 2013.

And yet, the leap into instantaneous global association is not without peril. The IAPTI has a viable business model: 400 members at US$60 a year means an annual income of US$24,000 simply to maintain a website and check dossiers. And the checking of dossiers is much cheaper and easier to arrange than is the other major alternative: public exams at the national level (as organized by the ATA in the United States, the CIOL in the United Kingdom, NAATI in Australia, the TAC in China). On the other hand, the exams send a strong signal of status that works well on national markets, particularly when the exams have a pass rate of about 20 percent, as most of these do. The problem with the new international association could be that, precisely because of its very international scope, it has no economic interest in excluding potential members: since a good number of the candidates are in far-off lands with exotic languages, a few bad apples are unlikely to harm the whole barrel – at least not in the way that can happen when signals of status are questioned on a national market. Further, with respect to the ethical correction of "irregularities", an excess of hidden localism can lead to moral hazard. For example, the IAPTI publicly fights injustice when it criticizes a prize-winning Argentine company for paying low wages to its translators.[10] The criticism is no doubt well justified. Yet it seems compromised when one realizes that the President of the IAPTI owns a rival translation company in Argentina. Justice does not come easy, and it is not always blind.

8. Services and communication within new and old associations

In some cases, new uses of websites and electronic communication are immediately apparent in the visual presentation of the association. For example, the website of the Polish association TEPIS (Figure 1) might suggest official state paper, in Habsburgian *Jugendstil*, in some way connoting the authority and trustworthiness of members, as might an official stamp, and thus implicitly addressing a world of non-members (translators' clients, or other associations).

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[10] https://www.iapti.org/eng/speaks-out/art6-iaptis-official-protest-against-prize-awarded-to-translation-back-office.html. Accessed October 2013.

Figure 6. Screenshot of the homepage of TEPIS, the Polish Society of Sworn and Specialized Translators (http://www.tepis.org.pl/). Accessed October 2013.

In contrast, the more electronically-minded associations tend to include human translators on their websites, often remarkably happy ones, and speak more directly to translators themselves, either as potential or existing members. The Austrian association Universitas is a good example (Figure 7): the German slogan promises translators that joining this group of smiling language professionals will lead to success. Indeed, the electronic emphasis on people is directly related to the way the younger associations use social networking sites (note the links to Facebook, Twitter and You Tube on the Austrian site). In this case, however, the difference between the two associations is not one of age: the Polish TEPIS was founded in 1990; the Austrian association dates from 1954. The difference is that the latter has been able to reinvent itself, incorporating the use of live and lively interactive electronic communications.

Figure 7. Screenshot of the homepage of Universitas, the Austrian Interpreters' and Translators' Association (http://www.universitas.org/). Accessed March 2013.

Behind this difference in communication strategies there are some rather profound differences in the reasons *why* associations might want to communicate with their members. If an association merely signals the trustworthiness of its members, then little is required beyond a symbol of status and an online list of members. Some associations, however, strive to offer much more. The range of possible activities might be illustrated by the following list of services offered by the ITI in the United Kingdom:[11]

- Inclusion in the directory of members
- Discounted entry to the annual conference, weekend workshop, plus seminars and webinars
- Professional indemnity insurance
- The ITI's journal, published six times a year
- A peer support scheme giving advice and support to new members and those seeking extra guidance
- Job adverts through the ITI bulletin and website
- A legal helpline offering free advice on a wide range of legal matters
- Help and advice on marketing, setting up a business and model terms of business
- Representation on FIT (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs)
- Representation to various national language bodies
- Special offers for members, such as discounted software, weekend breaks, hotel reservations, vintage wine tours etc.

This would appear to approach the maximum of what traditional associations can offer: only a large association can publish a journal and successfully negotiate indemnity insurance, and almost all other traditional associations offer fewer services. The tendency in recent years is nevertheless for the well-established associations to offer more online services and training initiatives, as can be seen in the above list. In many cases the associations not only maintain publicly accessible lists of members, but also help clients locate translators for work (as might partly happen through job adverts in the case of the ITI).

What is changing is partly the dynamic relation between academic training and associations as signals of status. The large national associations were established in the 1950s and 1960s, when there were only a handful of translator-training programs in Europe and the function of professional associations was more or less limited to excluding outsiders. These days, when there are about 500 university-level translator-training programs in the world[12], vast numbers of trained translators are seeking more than an exclusive club: they demand interactive peer-to-peer formats, up-to-date information, continuous training opportunities, and direct access to clients. Some of the larger associations have been able to adapt to these new demands, others have not. The

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[11] http://www.iti.org.uk/become-a-member/benefits. Accessed March 2013.

[12] The list of translator-training institutions at http://www.est-translationstudies.org/resources/tti/tti.htm named some 503 institutions in 2013, although this figure should certainly be higher, given the rate of growth in China, where some 10 new Masters in Translation and Interpreting programs are opened each year.

cases of non-adaptation might explain why translators have kept forming new associations, even while they turn to the online communities that are predominantly international and non-exclusive.

It is nevertheless instructive to consider the advice given to a beginner translator in a discussion group on the online translation job portal ProZ. The beginner wants to know whether he should join the Institute of Translation and Interpreting or the Chartered Institute of Linguists, both in the United Kingdom.[13] The answers generally agree that the two associations are good and he could join both, as many translators seem to. Other answers, though, point out that the beginner will probably obtain more work through ProZ itself, and that he might better invest his time and money in improving his status in the online community.

This is where the established associations have to meet direct challenges from a very different kind of communication. Electronic technologies not only allow traditional professions to revamp themselves, they also allow a direct online marketplace for relations between clients and translators, creating spaces where translators gain status without membership of professional associations. Further, they allow translators to work directly together, producing translations rather than just talking about it.

At this point the gatekeeping function of the traditional association gives way to electronic communication, within what some sociologists have begun to call online tribes.

9. A challenge from web-based marketplaces?

Traditional professional associations are clearly able to carry out many different functions and adapt to new modes of communication. Their prime function, however, remains to manifest the professional status (and hence trustworthiness) of its members. They are primarily gatekeepers, and then several other things. If additional services are supplied, including the provision of social relations and fun, it is between the members who have been allowed to pass through the gates.

The profound challenge to this model is not from electronic communications alone. There can be no doubt that translators are nowadays exchanging information online through sites like LinkedIn and Facebook, which tend to provide social networking in a far more flexible and user-instigated way than most associations can handle. Yet there are few signs that translators have actually left an association because they find business contacts on LinkedIn and see more photos on Facebook. The more direct challenge is from the use of web-based communication to enter into a domain with which the traditional associations have only had a tangential relation: direct negotiations between translators and their clients. True, many traditional associations now have websites that include lists of their members, in the hope that clients will look at the lists and offer a member a job. And other associations have newsletters and websites where members can advertise their services, as mentioned in the ITI's list of services above. But those things are quite different from the online portals where clients advertise translation jobs and translators bid for them. The traditional associations attempt to pre-select the professionals that can enter the market; the online portals break down all those gates and, in theory, allow anyone to enter the market. The two models would seem to be at odds.

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[13] http://www.proz.com/forum/translators_associations/29683-which_is_better_iti_or_iol.html. Accessed April 2013.

The online marketplaces nevertheless have an interesting history. ProZ.com would be the largest and most dynamic portal, founded in New York in 1999 and claiming in 2013 to have "over 300,000 professional translators and translation companies".[14] Since the company's original model was based on translators bidding against each other, it seemed destined to drive prices down, creating a haven for bad translators and thus driving good translators out of the market (as an instance of "adverse selection", analyzed in Chan 2008). Such portals initially became synonymous with what AC/DC might have called dirty translations, done dirt cheap. Over the years, though, the internal dynamics of the market have required distinctions between different degrees of expertise, such that translators who deliver higher-quality work can now have that status recognized within the online market.

In ProZ, for example, anyone can sign up for free, so in principle there is no gatekeeping. In fact, the "over 300,000" members would more or less equal the 333,000 professional translators and interpreters that there might be in the world (according to the very rough estimate in Pym et al. 2012: 137-140). Full membership, however, costs US$129 a year, and only a fraction of the people who sign up actually pay that fee. That would be the first piece of gatekeeping within the apparently open community. ProZ has also been particularly innovative in developing ways for members to signal their superior skills, where appropriate, and in inventing names for the signaling mechanisms. Members ask questions about translation problems, and when a member answers a question satisfactorily, they gain kudos (or KudoZ) points; the number of points accumulated thus signals relative expertise. Members may also gain "BrowniZ" points for good community services such as translating part of the ProZ site, introducing new members, or organizing discussions ("powwows"). These are actually ways of achieving the gatekeeping functions of traditional translator associations, although in a more user-based, detailed and dynamic way – an employer can use this information to find out about a translator before agreeing to pay a fee, just as a member translator can use the ProZ databases to gather information on an employer.[15] By 2011 or so, it was nevertheless clear that these mechanisms alone were not enough to stop adverse selection. The points hierarchies have since been complemented by a system where a member can become a certified ProZ translator[16] by passing a translation exam (assessed by "peers"), proving "business reliability", and showing "good citizenship" (basically by not abusing the ProZ rules). "Translation ability" is defined in terms of Quality Standard EN15038 (which is nevertheless intended for translation service *providers*) and "industry credentials", of which the listed examples are certification by the American Translators Association and the Chartered Institute of Linguists. Significantly, no mention is made of academic qualifications (which are only one option in EN15038).

What this means in effect is that the online marketplace has progressively adopted some of the gatekeeping functions of the traditional professional associations, and is

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[14] http://www.proz.com/. Accessed April 2013.
[15] A similar example is provided by TranslatorsCafé, which was launched in 2002 and claims to have 143,717 registered users and 1.300 translation agencies in 2013. It has a "TCTerms stars" system similar to ProZ's kudos system. It has a "Hall of Fame and Shame" indicating the highs and lows of status, although those lists are available to paying members only. A study on the use of TranslatorsCafé (McDonough 2007: 805) showed that "fewer than a quarter of the members" actually visited the site in a 30-day period" and only 7 percent of registered members "had ever posted a question in the discussion forum". That is, the use of social networking has distinct levels of involvement, with a hard core of frequent users and a vast majority of passive followers.
[16] http://www.proz.com/pro-tag/info/about/freelancers. Accessed April 2013.

ostensibly prepared to ride on the back of the gatekeeping performed by the best-recognized of those associations (as when ProZ accepts certification by the ATA and the CIOL). Either way, the gatekeeping function remains. In same respects, the business model is similar to that of the Argentine International Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters (IAPTI): the translator pays a fee, enters through a gate, and receives signals of status that might then have an exchange value on the market. The main difference between the online marketplaces and the traditional associations might then be that the latter perform economic functions more poorly, and thereby retain an aura of disinterested recognition of quality, even a certain noble altruism – professionalism is somehow above the market. This is seen, for example, in the symbols of justice that adorn the website of the IAPTI. The online portals are also aware of this difference, occasionally hiding it beneath similar symbolism. For example, they offset the primarily commercial nature of their service by referring to "good causes", which may evoke a kind of moral status: ProZ says it links its database with Translators without Borders; Aquarius links to a database-sharing project; and GoTranslators "helps UNICEF" and does not charge fees in low-income countries. In those respects, the online marketplaces might claim to offer a little of the group identity that the traditional associations were once able to embody.

10. A challenge from communities of volunteers?

Since the late 1990s, web-based electronic communications have taken relations between translators several steps further. We have seen electronic networks established between translators who work together on a non-professional basis, for the love of what they are translating, and for the social pleasures of working together. Many of these groups are engaged in political and social causes, which generate motivation and dynamism of a kind that constitutes its own gatekeeping device (if you doubt the rhetoric, you are not there). Other networks are more benign, like the groups that produce subtitles for films and TV series. Case studies of the subtitling groups aRGENTeaM, founded in 2002, and Addic7ed, founded in 2008 (Orrego-Carmona 2011, 2012), indicate that they tend to be initiated by a small group of very active enthusiasts and then develop a certain specialization of functions as they grow. The Argentine aRGENTeaM, for example, currently has volunteers working as administrators, revisers, translators, and moderators, then there are registered users, and beyond that, the non-registered users who have access to the subtitles for free. Thanks to these concentric circles, the group can strive to apply professional standards and workflow models. These internal distinctions might resemble the status hierarchies established within online marketplaces like ProZ, which are open to all in principle but exercise internal gatekeeping in practice. The volunteer groups, however, are different in that decisions (including translation revisions) can be made collectively through online fora integrating both translators and translation-users. Further, the groups also have a pedagogical function: new members learn from working on projects and are thus integrated more into the group. The group's identity is not based on formal gatekeeping as such, but on social relations and a shared passion for translation, mostly based on an equal passion for the things being translated.

Significantly, these groups do not call themselves "associations" – they prefer the term "communities". Indeed there may be no clear need to consider them as challenges to

translator associations, apart from the mostly spurious argument that volunteers are by definition taking work away from professionals. On the other hand, what these groups are doing well, and doing far better than any of the traditional associations, is to offer a way of working together collectively, for enjoyment, and for mutual support, albeit not for money. In this, the volunteer groups indicate a range of community functions that might well be adapted by the translator associations of the future.

Before dissipating into undue optimism, however, I should note that volunteers and professionals are not worlds apart. An intriguing example is the US company dotSUB, which offers free user-friendly software for subtitling video material and is well-known for having facilitated the volunteer translation of many of the excellent TED lectures.[17] dotSUB is nevertheless very much a company: it has used its free services to locate good subtitlers, who then work on commercial projects. In 2013 the firm's website had become almost exclusively oriented towards commercial clients, with scarcely a trace of anything like a community. And then, as an example heading the other way, the website of InterpretAmerica looks as though it represents a community of interpreters working in North America, with its mission as being to "provide a national forum for the interpreting profession". [18] The group conducts research, organizes conferences ("summits") and emphasizes "unity" (since it courageously seeks to put conference and public-service interpreters in the same boat). Yet it is very much a profit-seeking company, and not at all an association – there are no volunteers, and its only members are its three organizers.

Much can be done with electronic communication, and only some of it can be called "community".

Conclusion: A necessary fragmentation?

The dates and the numbers indicate that translator associations have become increasingly specialized. From the age of generalists in the 1950s, separate associations have been founded for literary translators, sworn or authorized translators, conference interpreters (then public-service interpreters and sign-language interpreters), and most recently audiovisual translators. The orders and frequencies of creation obey different logics in different countries, but in no case have we found situations of substantial merger: once the specializations separate, they do not go back together. At the same time, the supra-national associations of associations tend to maintain the specializations: FIT comprises mainly national generalists; AIIC has chapters for conference interpreters; IMIA is for medical interpreters around the world, CEATL is for literary translators in Europe; EULITA is for legal translators and interpreters.

This tendency to specialization could simply be a historical division of labor, to be attributed to the growing size of the various translation markets and the increasing complexities of professionalization. In that sense, the term "fragmentation" is perhaps unnecessarily pejorative. At the same time, though, the age of electronic communication has brought in a flurry of new associations, not because of professional diversification but due to the communication flows made possible in the age of websites, emails and social networking. As the newer associations allow more input from members and a less

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[17] http://www.ted.com. Accessed April 2013.
[18] http://www.interpretamerica.net/welcome. Accessed April 2013.

hierarchical and centralized mode of organization, as the density and plexity of interactions thus grow, the association becomes far more a network for socialization and information than a mechanism for gatekeeping. The result is a certain localism: the association works best among like-minded people, interested in similar kinds of cultural products and often living in the same or similar social locations. This particular development might indeed be termed "fragmentation", although the pejorative value would perhaps only function for someone in search of a universal gatekeeper for the entire profession. More than a negative breaking up, what we are witnessing is a fundamental transformation of the nature of the associations themselves.

We have seen that some of the traditional associations have been able to adapt to these changes, while others have not. The most successful examples have retained the traditional gatekeeping function at the same time as they incorporate modes of non-hierarchical multilateral communication that are able to promote a sense of community. In this, the associations have followed the leads of online marketplaces and web-based volunteer communities. One suspects, however, that they will have to integrate far more innovation if they are to retain the loyalty of their members.

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