A Closer Look at Illinois’s MA in Translation and Interpreting

by Katalin Young

Katalin Young is a second-year student in the MA program, and she is focusing on Conference and Community Interpreting. She anticipates graduating in May 2016.

The MA in Translation and Interpreting offered by the Center for Translation Studies (CTS) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is now in its third year. In addition to providing an undergraduate certificate in translation studies, CTS delivers the master’s degree program both online and on campus with three specialty tracks for students to choose from: literary translation, technical translation, and conference and community interpreting. Students in all three tracks take required courses in terminology and computer-assisted translation (CAT), the theory and practice of translation, and the ethics of translation and interpreting, in addition to a capstone seminar. Students also take two courses in their specialization and two electives.

The three tracks represent the career paths that the students choose for themselves; a track must be determined no later than their second semester. It’s not uncommon for students to know what they wish to focus on from the beginning, but sometimes students discover that they have more talent or interest in a different track as they progress.

Students first focus on core courses that are considered essential for the translation and interpreting profession, then they begin to take courses in their chosen track in the second semester. These specialty classes continue into the second year, during which they also take two electives and complete a capstone project. Although each student must pick one of the three tracks, by carefully planning their electives, they can gain expertise in a second field as well. Electives cover a variety of topics, such as Translation in the European Union, Film Subtitling, and/or specific language-pair translation courses (such as Arabic-English, German-English, or Spanish-English).
In August of this year, Elizabeth Lowe, founding director of the Center for Translation Studies, retired from the University of Illinois. With vision, hard work, and dedication over the past seven years, she built the center from a mere idea into a world-class unit that offers graduate and undergraduate certificates and an MA in Translation and Interpreting that is available online and on campus. Elizabeth also constructed a network of institutional partners for CTS that stretches from South America to Europe and Asia. Our partnership with the Université Paris-Diderot has been particularly productive, resulting in biennial conferences, the third of which was held at UIUC in the spring of 2015.

Before coming to Illinois in 2008, Elizabeth founded the translation program at the University of Florida. She traveled around the world building networks of translation educators and participating in conferences and events to promote and establish standards for quality translator education. Elizabeth has written extensively on translation pedagogy and particularly on instructional design principles for teaching translation and interpreting online.

Elizabeth earned her PhD in Comparative Literature with a concentration in translation studies at the City University of New York, where she studied with the legendary Gregory Rabassa, the foremost translator of Latin American literature in the twentieth century. She pioneered research on Brazilian writers of the 1960s and 1970s, whose work she began to translate, and her book The City in Brazilian Literature (1982) was based on that research. She was one of the first translators to work with Clarice Lispector, Rubem Fonseca, Nélida Piñon, Moacyr Scliar, Dalton Trevisan, and other prominent Brazilian novelists. In 2010, she was recognized by the Brazilian Academy of Letters for her life work in translating Brazilian literature, and especially Euclides da Cunha’s 1902 Os Sertões, one of the landmarks of twentieth century Brazilian literature, published by Penguin in 2010 under the title, Backlands: The Canudos Campaign.

Her second book, Translation and the Rise of Inter-American Literature (2009), co-authored with Earl Fitz, examines the role of the translator as cultural agent in the construction of an inter-American identity. She is interested in new writing from Brazil, and her translation of the novel The Happiest Ending for a Love Story is an Accident by J.P. Cuenca (2013) was a finalist for the 2015 IMPAC award. Most recently, her translation of the novel Happy People in Tears (2015), by noted Portuguese writer João de Melo, was published.

While she will be missed at UIUC, we hope to see Elizabeth on the lecture and conference circuit. Elizabeth now resides in Gainesville, Florida, where she continues her translation scholarship and online teaching, as well as favorite leisure activities, such as sailing on Florida’s Atlantic waters with her husband Terry. Aproveite, e boa sorte!
Meet a CTS Lecturer

Laura Ramírez Polo, a native of Spain who just moved to Urbana a few months ago, is the most recent addition to the CTS faculty. Not one to shy away from a challenge, she is teaching four courses this semester while getting to know the campus and surrounding communities through involvement in a local choir, salsa dancing, and Cross-Fit.

Ramírez Polo has been translating professionally for the past 15 years while pursuing advanced degrees and certificates in translation and interpretation, computational linguistics, controlled languages, and machine translation. She is currently wrapping up a degree in library and information science from the Universitat Politècnica de Valencia.

When asked recently how Ramírez Polo came to be interested in foreign languages, she recounted a memory of herself as a five-year-old watching the soccer World Cup competition on television with her father and asking him why there were words (captioning in other languages) on the screen. He told her that it was because people from many different countries, who spoke different languages—literally, tongues in her native Spanish—were also watching. Ramírez Polo’s young mind tried to determine how different tongues might look when speaking various languages and became intrigued by the idea of being able to change her tongue, too! Over the years, this affinity grew, and Ramírez Polo is now also fluent in English, German, and French.

While language fluency is a prerequisite for ease in a foreign society, Ramírez Polo says for her, “Language is about being able to communicate with people and understand their culture.” Accordingly, she enjoyed living in England and Germany prior to her return to Spain and, now, a jump across the globe to Illinois.

Ramírez Polo is especially excited about the personal interactions she has with students who are advancing their language and translation skills and the possibilities for innovative collaboration available at the University of Illinois. Her research interests include CAT, terminology, human-machine interaction, and new types of digital genres for translation.
Meet a CTS Alumnus

Michael VanNorman is a 2014 graduate of UIUC who earned a bachelor’s degree in Spanish with a minor in Portuguese, as well as a certificate in translation studies. He spent his junior year abroad in Barcelona, Spain. He currently resides in his hometown of Downers Grove, Illinois, and works as an associate project manager at Argo Translation in another Chicago suburb, Glenview.

The route to his first professional position is a testament to the power of social media networking. “I actually was offered an interview through LinkedIn,” said VanNorman. “My boss saw that I had looked at his profile, and he just happened to need another project manager at that time. On my profile, he saw my U of I background and that I majored in languages and did the translation studies program. He messaged me, asking if I’d be interested in an interview.”

VanNorman is enjoying the work, which consists of managing many translation projects at once. “I receive translation requests from my clients, prepare files for translation, provide quotes for the projects, coordinate the in-house translation and editing process, and wrap up the final deliverables for the client,” said VanNorman. “It sounds simple but can get quite complex!”

The extensive study of two languages throughout college prepared VanNorman for working with additional languages, he said. “I can format Chinese text or place Arabic text correctly in a document -- not because I can read those languages, but because I’m used to languages and how they work,” he added.

VanNorman has a bit of advice for current CTS students:

1. Pay attention in CAT courses. “In the translation industry you quickly learn that there are a ton of translation management tools that are used. At Argo we use Wordbee and the fact that I know Trados Studio allowed me to pick up Wordbee almost instantly,” he said.

2. Become very familiar with translation tools, different types of files, and how they are treated by the translation tools.

3. Do not be afraid to ask questions. “I run into lots of issues that could have been solved if the translator had just asked a question,” said VanNorman. “Clients usually don’t care; they would rather you ask questions than return poor work. Also, you can always collaborate with editors.”
Faculty News

Waïl S. Hassan, CTS Director and Professor of Comparative Literature and English, published “Arabic and the Paradigms of Comparison,” a contribution to the American Comparative Literature Association’s 2015 State of the Discipline Report. At the ACLA’s 2015 annual conference in Seattle, he led a workshop called “Teaching Arabic Literature Comparatively: South-South Trajectories.” Hassan also published an Arabic translation of a Brazilian novel, Alberto Mussa’s O enigma de Qaf, which appeared last spring in Cairo, Egypt, under the title, Lughz al-qaf (2015). In July 2015, he participated with Mussa in an author-translator conversation held at the Departamento de Letras Orientais e Eslavas, at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Hassan is currently writing a book on Arab-Brazilian literary relations and editing The Oxford Handbook of the Arabic Novel.

Professor emeritus Rajeshwari Pandharipande delivered a talk, “Ideology of Translation: Theory and Practice,” at the translation workshop held on campus in June.

Assistant professor Lane Schwartz was recently awarded three grants: first, a four-year grant from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency for research in grammar induction for low-resource language; also, corresponding awards from the University of Illinois School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics and Bloomberg in support of the first machine translation marathon in the Americas. This fall, Schwartz and UIUC colleagues Bill Bryce, Chase Geigle, Sean Massung, Yisi Liu, Haoruo Peng, Vignesh Raja, Subhro Roy, and Shyam Upadhyay contributed to a submission on workshop proceedings for Statistical Machine Translation (WMT, Sept. 2015); and he also co-authored “Effects of Word Alignment Visualization on Post-Editing Quality & Speed” for Machine Translation Summit (MT Summit XV, Nov. 2015).

Events

Timothy Friese, a practicing legal translator, gave a presentation to CTS students and faculty on October 15 on “Experiences of a Legal Translator.” Friese is a professional translator and interpreter from Chicago who specializes in legal and technical subjects from Arabic, Hebrew, Spanish, and Portuguese into English. His work ranges from contracts, laws, and internal documentation for corporations, international bodies, and NGOs to journalism, opinion pieces, and current events analyses.
In August, Dr. George Henson joined the Center for Translation Studies as an affiliate faculty member, after completing a PhD in Translation Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas.

Dr. Henson’s literary translations include works by some of Latin America’s most notable authors, including Elena Poniatowska, Miguel Barnet, Alberto Chimal, Juan Villoro, and Leonardo Padura. In March, Dr. Henson published *The Art of Flight* (Deep Vellum Publishing), the first of three literary memoirs by celebrated Mexican author Sergio Pitol.

The passage below is taken from *The Journey* (Deep Vellum Publishing), the second volume of Pitol’s *Triology of Memory*, in which the author recounts a trip he undertook in 1986 to the Soviet Republic of Georgia, while serving as Mexico’s ambassador to Czechoslovakia.

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Even on the plane I found it hard to believe that I was heading to Tbilisi, *Tiflis* in Spanish (an obsolete name; even in Spanish publications the Georgians write *Tbilisi*), where I arrived at ten at night, replete with a splendid moon. Sensation of treading on royal ground! From what I was able to glimpse by moonlight, it is a splendid city, different from all other Soviet cities. Today I started my tour, I began to touch the strata that make it up, a constant process of mental construction or deconstruction, a trip through various cultural layers that have been superimposed on the region, leaving vestiges of what it has been: Hellas, Byzantium, Persia, the Slavs of the first millennium, the Christian churches of the fifth century, the influence of Central Asia, Sufism. Visually, bathed in evening light, Tbilisi is an Andalusian town nestled in the Caucasus. The Persian presence is equivalent to the Arab presence in Andalusia.

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Ni siquiera en el avión lograba creer que me dirigía a Tbilisi, *Tiflis* en español (nombre obsoleto; pues aún en sus publicaciones en castellano los georgianos escriben *Tbilisi*), adonde llegué a las diez de la noche, con una luna espléndida. ¡Sensación de pisar tierra real! Por lo que pude vislumbrar a la luz de la luna, es una ciudad espléndida, diferente a todas las soviéticas. Hoy inicié el recorrido, empecé a tocar los estratos que la componen, una operación constante de construcción y deconstrucción mental, un viaje a través de varias capas culturales que se han sobrepuesto en la región, dejando vestigios de lo que ha sido. La Hélade, Bizancio, Persia, los eslavos del primer milenio, las iglesias cristianas del siglo V, la influencia del Asia Central, el sufismo. Visualmente, bañada por la luz nocturna, Tbilisi es una ciudad andaluza enclavada en el Cáucaso. La presencia persa equivale a la árabe en Andalucía.
What We’re Reading

Memories in Translation: A Life Between the Lines of Arabic Literature, by Denys Johnson-Davies. (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2006): The memoirs of Denys Johnson-Davies, the doyen of translators of modern Arabic literature into English, offers rare glimpses into the lives of numerous important writers that the author has known, as well as into his approach to literary translation. Born in Canada to English parents in 1922, Johnson-Davies grew up in Egypt, Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya, before moving to England at the age of twelve. In Egypt in the 1940s, he was the first to translate a short story by Naguib Mahfouz, who was later to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. Since then, Johnson-Davies has published over two dozen novels and short-story anthologies by many of the most significant Arab writers.