

## DESCRIPTION, PROFESSION AND TRAINING OF SWORN TRANSLATORS IN THE ORIENTAL REPUBLIC OF URUGUAY

### I

The "Public" or Sworn Translator is in Uruguay a university professional, as established in article 28 of Law nº 12.997 of November 28, 1961. He practises a liberal profession, and full faith and credit are to be given to all his official acts. His activity is eminently intellectual in nature.

The practice of his profession covers a wide range of knowledge - which implies a constant updating, commensurate with the constant widening of the field of science and technology; total idiomatic expertise is required of him, for the mastery of the languages in and with which he works is a *sine qua non* condition for the practice of his profession.

The translator must also possess a vast culture, indispensable in his activity as intermediary between peoples and ethnic groups with different life styles and concerns, which he must know in all their manifestations: legal, civic, social, cultural, scientific, commercial, literary.

At official level, his intervention is mandatory in our country for the procedures concerning all documentation coming from abroad that is presented to governmental agencies to be used in any proceedings there, as well as for any documents issued by Uruguayan agencies that are to be officially presented abroad (letters rogatory, powers of attorney, court decisions, Civil Registry documents, authentic copies, contracts, certificates of study, commercial and technical documents in general, etc.). This has been so since the first corresponding laws so prescribed it in the second half of the XIX century, preceded, in turn, by usages and customs dating from colonial times, in view of the strategic, commercial and political importance of the port of Montevideo.

The translator's profession, it must be remembered, has always played an important role along the different historical stages of the constitution of the Uruguayan state, which is one of the most representative democracies on the American continent, that eventually became an actual melting pot through the arrival of immigrant contingents, who have always been welcome to these lands, to which

they came in search of freedom and job opportunities that were denied to them in their native countries.

This tradition continues in force in the provisions that make it mandatory for translators to act whenever a foreigner who does not know the national language is in need of their services in official instances. This is so much so that whenever a foreign document reaches the country, drawn in a language for which there is no Sworn Translator in Uruguay, a legal solution is provided for by customary law in order to solve the problem posed by the interested party, namely, resource is had to experts in foreign languages –frequently provided by Embassies- who are registered with the Colegio de Traductores Públicos del Uruguay upon the verification of their proficiency, thus being qualified to act together with a graduate translator, who is responsible for the corresponding translation.

## II

The issuance of the degree of Sworn Translator in Uruguay has gone through several stages. The first Organic Law of the University, dated July 14, 1885, vested on the Facultad de Derecho y Ciencias Sociales (School of Law and Social Sciences) the issuance of the degree of Sworn Translator. Later on, in successive periods, the degree was issued by the Escuela Superior de Comercio (The School of Commerce) (1915), the Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y de Administración (School of Economics and Administration) (1932), the Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias (School of Humanities and Sciences) (1964) and since 1976, again by the Law School, which is the current seat of the studies for prospective translators. There, students enter upon having finished the second cycle of Secondary Education, as an indispensable cultural basis, after passing a severe eliminatory examination both in the Spanish language and the foreign language elected by the candidate (so far, English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese). The student is required, then, to possess a high level of proficiency in the knowledge of the foreign language, that presupposes long years of study to reach the real mastery thereof.

The Law School does not have, then, the specific purpose of “teaching” languages, but that of imparting high level technical “specialization” in the foreign language and, obviously, in the Spanish language.

Studies in Uruguay are absolutely free, and there are no admission quotas, therefore all students who have passed said exam, thus proving their linguistic proficiency in their mother tongue and in the foreign language, may commence their studies without any further requirements. University authorities have always understood that the excellence of the professional training depends on the excellence of their professors, whereby all teaching positions are provided by means of competitive exams, as is traditional in this country, and said professors are periodically evaluated for their renewal and continuity in office.

Currently there is a four-year study plan in force, including 17 subjects, taken annually and regularly, of compulsory attendance and with a system of chronological subject priorities, divided in two basic fields: the linguistic and the legal. The latter is particularly attended to in the last two years of said studies, in which consecutive and sight interpretation have been introduced. (See Study Plan attached hereto, which includes subjects specific to these studies, such as Comparative Law). At present the addition of three optional subjects is being implemented, viz.: Terminology / Neology, Interpretation Techniques and Tradumatics.

With reference to postgraduate studies, the Courses have now a new post-graduate speciality: "Diploma of Specialization in Literary Translation" in English, French and Portuguese, soon to be followed by the implementation of a "Diploma of Specialization in Interpretation in the Legal Sphere" in, English, French and Portuguese.

### III

Uruguayan Sworn Translators are represented at the Colegio de Traductores Públicos del Uruguay (Association of Sworn Translators of Uruguay), the senior institution of its kind in America -its first stage goes as far back as 1932, and the present one, started in 1950, is already 60 years old-, which was, at the same time, the first Latin-American association to become a member of FIT.

Our Colegio has taken part in numerous national, regional and international congresses, and its voice has been heard in them, telling of the country's achievements in the professional training of translators, who have always excelled on account of their competence and their prestigious work in international agencies. Its journal is the Revista del Colegio de Traductores Públicos del Uruguay, that used to

circulate among the different members of the Federation, asserting among other things, together with its commitments, the high ethical principles established in the Code of Ethics of the institution.

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Montevideo, December 2010