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## **Motivation and linguistic mediation as factors in university language teaching in the context of translator and interpreter training in minoritised languages**

Keywords: Catalan and Galician, translation at sight, reformulation, longitudinal analysis, motivation

### **Introduction: motivation and linguistic mediation**

A multitude of studies exist on the motivation to learn languages — whether concerning the motivation to learn languages in general, or the motivation to learn certain languages in particular. English-centered studies prevail as, for many years, research on learning foreign languages focused predominantly on students of English outside English-speaking countries (Cenoz, Gorter 2023: 1). An important contribution to this body of knowledge was the study conducted by Dörnyei *et al.* (2006) that resulted in the modeling of the L2 Motivational Self System (see also Dörnyei 2009). The past decade has seen a growing number of studies focusing on other languages than English (Dörnyei, Al-Hoorie 2017; Duff 2017; Nakamura 2019) and addressing specific reasons for choosing particular languages or for learning minoritized languages (see Thompson, Vásquez 2015; Flynn, Harris 2016; MacIntyre *et al.* 2017; Dörnyei, Al-Hoorie 2017; O'Rourke, DePalma 2017; Flynn 2020), be they categorized as such or as a *minority language*, *regional language*, *smaller language*, *endangered language*, etc. (cf. Cenoz, Gorter 2023: 2–4). These include studies that focus on adult learners' motivation to learn minoritized languages within the respective linguistic areas in which these languages are spoken as well as those that

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focus on the motivation to learn minoritized languages in universities or language schools abroad. For example, Rosiak and Hornsby (2016) studied motivational factors in the acquisition of Welsh in Poland, and Rosiak (2022) analyzed the importance of language attitudes and ideologies for the motivation to learn Welsh among adult Polish immigrants in Wales. In such studies, minoritized language acquisition in the respective linguistic areas is the main subject of interest, while learning minoritized languages abroad is very often mentioned only in passing, or not at all, as exemplified by Cenoz and Gorter (2023) who limit their focus to the motivations of Basque learners *in Spain* and do not mention learners of Basque abroad (see also Urla et al. 2021).

One example of a different perspective on the matter is the thesis project carried out by Unai Lauzirika Amias, a former Basque lecturer at Leipzig University who analyzes the impact of Basque language promotion at the international level. In his project, Lauzirika Amias focuses on the history and development of Basque language teaching abroad and surveys, among other aspects, the motivation of students outside Basque-speaking areas to learn Basque.

As is so often the case in newly emerging fields of research, the terminological apparatus for investigating this phenomenon is not yet well established. Different perspectives and models for classification or explanation are still competing with one another, giving rise to a proliferation of widely diverse categories and a broad range of associated terms regarding mediation and motivation in foreign language education.

Research shows that one important aspect influencing motivation to learn a minoritized language is the difficult sociolinguistic situation in the respective linguistic areas. Another aspect that is closely related is the limited “utility” of the minoritized language. As these can be demotivating factors (Sinner, Bernaus 2016; Rosiak 2022), the sociolinguistic situation and the supposed limited utility are also seen as special challenges regarding when and how to deal with these aspects in the classroom (Sinner, Bernaus 2014, 2016). The nature of teaching also plays a major role, because for many minoritized languages there is no teaching material available that would be specifically designed for students learning the language abroad and meet state requirements for teaching in schools (see below). This element is relevant here because of the way the *CEFR* is considered, or completely neglected, when teaching minoritized languages.

Since the publication of the *CEFR* by the Council of Europe in 2001 (Europarat 2001), linguistic mediation has entered foreign language teaching as a so called *fifth competence*, first within the EU, and later in other

countries that adopted the *CEFR*. It is noteworthy that the implementation of the *CEFR* varies greatly between countries. These differences are particularly pronounced when viewed against the backdrop of how intra-linguistic mediation (between different varieties of a language) is taken into consideration, for example, mediation between regional dialects, translation into gender-inclusive language, or translation into Basic or Easy or Plain English (see The Plain English Campaign 2016). Differences in implementation can mainly be attributed to different preexisting conditions, the fact that translations of the *CEFR* were not always successful, and the fact that many authors of teaching guidelines or textbooks held an outdated view on translation, which had a strong influence on the way mediation was understood and implemented (Sinner, Bahr 2015; Sinner 2017). Many times, the first publications on linguistic mediation as a competence — meant to contribute to the implementation of the *CEFR* — distort what Translation & Interpreting Studies have been saying about linguistic mediation since the 1960s; the didactic proposals do not always correspond to what linguistic mediation is supposed to achieve, or are far from being able to fulfil their actual tasks (see Sinner, Wieland 2013; Bernaus, Sinner 2016). For the purposes of this article, language mediation is understood in the sense of the initial definitions drawn by the Leipzig School of Translation Studies as mediated bilingual communication (see Kade 1968, Jäger 1975).

There are also fewer teaching materials for lesser used and lesser taught languages (see O Riagáin 2001), particularly for languages that are lesser or seldom learned or taught as foreign languages, especially outside their respective language area (see Sinner, Asmus 2014). People who want to study a minoritized language are constrained by many impeding factors that include the lack of access to courses, language learning materials, and tools (Roediger, Pyc 2012; Godwin-Jones 2013; van Lieshout, Cardoso 2022). Many of the existing teaching materials are not intended for teaching outside the actual language area and/or as foreign languages. This goes hand in hand with the fact that for the less frequently learned languages — and especially those with no official or limited official status (see Núñez Martínez 2013) — few or no materials exist for use in foreign language classes in state schools, as these are not taught as foreign languages either in their own country or abroad. Accordingly, no ministry of education is responsible for approving the teaching materials. Consequently, there are no requirements for including language mediation as a competence to be considered in the teaching of these languages. At the same time, existing materials used in other contexts are often outdated and do not consider any of the requirements of the Council of Europe included in the *CEFR*.

To this day, and despite the repeated requests to do so, many of the recommendations for applying the *CEFR* to (mostly) smaller minoritized languages have not been implemented (see Council of Europe 2007 2017). At the same time, wherever teaching of these languages is dependent on internal and external funding, “[m]illennials’ understandable focus on the practicality of the courses they take make it unlikely for the lesser-taught languages to survive the slump [in enrollment]” (Votruba 2017: 95).

Contrary to this trend, enrollment for the minoritized Iberian and Ibero-Romance languages is relatively constant in the context of interpreting and translation training at the Leipzig University, where mediation is among the competencies being used to teach minoritized Iberian and Ibero-Romance languages. As these courses start at level A1 of the *CEFR*, students training to become translators and interpreters have the opportunity to learn these languages with no prior knowledge. Mediation as a competence contributes to the development of their language skills and allows students enrolled in different degrees to be taught together.

The aim of our research was to ascertain the students’ motivations for studying these minoritized languages and the role which language mediation played in students’ motivation and academic success. This article presents the results of a long-term observation carried out among students of translation and interpreting at Leipzig University enrolled in Catalan and/or Galician language courses, including surveys and analyses of students’ learning progress and the grades obtained. This analysis begins by providing the necessary context for how these minoritized languages are integrated into degree programs at Leipzig University before briefly outlining the approach to language mediation at the Institute of Applied Linguistics and Translatology (IALT), Leipzig University.

### **Contextualization: Minoritized languages at the Institute for Applied Linguistics and Translatology at Leipzig University**

At the IALT at Leipzig University, students from across multiple study programs have the opportunity to learn Catalan and Galician starting from the first semester of the three-year BA program in translation, through the last semester of the two-year MA program for Translatology or Conference Interpreting, i.e. for up to five years in total. Translation and interpreting techniques are used at an early stage in the acquisition of Catalan and Galician with the aim of conveying translatological skills while at the same time enabling faster language acquisition. The IALT specializes in training professional interpreters and translators, and integrating Catalan and Galician into the study program was only possible on the grounds

of a curriculum based on the modular structure of the translatology programs. The problem to overcome was that most students who enroll in these courses would have no prior knowledge of the language; for the other languages that can be studied at the IALT, language proficiency at level B2 or higher of the *CEFR* is required. In order to achieve a high level of language proficiency in a short period of time, we rely on the translational expertise and competence of the IALT, home of the so-called Leipzig School of Translation Studies and the first institute for translation studies worldwide. Research was being carried out on linguistic mediation here as early as the 1960s, a task that often required new paths to be forged (see Jäger 1975: 30; Neubert 2007; Sinner/Wieland 2013; and, in detail, Sinner *et al.* 2013). In addition to English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, the IALT has been offering Galician and Catalan to students with a translational profile since 2010. It further expanded its language offer in 2013 with the opening of the Basque department, which offers the most comprehensive program for the study of the Basque language and culture outside of Spain. The IALT also cooperates with the Institute of Sorbian Studies in an M.A. Studies program, which includes Lower and Upper Sorbian, and together with the Institute of Sorbian Studies offers both a study program in the field of Celtic studies and the BA program *European Minority Languages* through which students are able to study Romance minority languages at the IALT. All this makes the IALT the only institute in the world where the linguistic prerequisites for obtaining a specific degree can be met by studying any of the official and co-official languages of the Iberian Peninsula, i.e., they are not only offered as an additional subject. Without a doubt, this status contributes to the normalization of these languages (see Sinner 2022). However, the *conditio sine qua non* for translatology students remains the development of a translational profile. At the same time, the module structures at Leipzig University stipulate that BA and MA students also take modules from outside their own programs, meaning that students from other degree programs with different expectations and needs also have to be integrated into these courses. As a result, students of translatology and students of other disciplines, two groups with very different backgrounds and motivations for studying languages, often have to be taught together. The same applies to many cases of rarely taught minoritized languages, as teaching in these contexts entails a whole range of other peculiarities and problems (see Sinner, Asmus 2014; Sinner, Bernaus 2014). Even for major international languages, this situation is common in many countries when it is not possible to have separate courses or separate degree programs for philology, teaching, interpreting,

translation, cultural mediation, tourism, etc. In most cases, everyone studies together and specialization only takes place towards the end or even after graduation. Furthermore, there is a trend among students in some countries to prefer translational over philological degree programs (Sinner 2017). This is certainly a tendency that may change; it is fueled by the erroneous claims made by politicians and in the media that AI will promptly replace interpreters and translators. However, AI is not suitable for many areas and human expertise in the field of translation is absolutely indispensable for post-editing automatically translated texts. Today, many institutions worldwide face the same problem: having to organize translation and interpreting training for students who do not (yet) speak the languages they are supposed to interpret or translate according to the curriculum. As a consequence, in many universities, students are trained in language courses that are labeled as translation or interpreting courses and graduate without actually being prepared for the profession. In order to avoid problems regarding course labeling from the onset, the decision was made to consistently implement language mediation in the teaching of language courses offered starting from the beginner level at the IALT.

### **Linguistic mediation at the IALT**

It was clear from the beginning that language mediation should be taught in the narrow sense of the term and according to the fundamental ideas of the Leipzig School of Translation Studies regarding bilingual mediated communication (see Kade 1968, Jäger 1975). To reflect this, the course design has a strong focus on teaching the fundamental techniques of intralingual and interlingual language mediation: communicatively equivalent and communicatively heterovalent (i.e. non-equivalent) language mediation; modification; and adaptation (see Jäger 1975).<sup>2</sup> It was essential to avoid the implementation deficiencies that, mostly due to poor translation of the *CEFR*, are evident in many descriptions of language mediation

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<sup>2</sup> According to Jäger (1975), if the criterion of communicative value is used as a basis for classifying different linguistically mediated communication processes, two main groups can be distinguished: those in which both source text and target text are equal or equivalent in terms of their communicative value, and those in which both texts do not coincide in their communicative value and, therefore, are not communicatively equivalent. The Leipzig school called *translation* the main type of linguistically mediated communication process in which source text and target text are equivalent in terms of their communicative value. The second type, where source text and target text are not communicatively equivalent, is called (communicatively) heterovalent linguistic mediation.

and, as a consequence, can be found in many language mediation tasks in textbooks for foreign languages in some countries.

According to the Leipzig School, *Sprachmittlung* 'linguistic mediation' is a general concept to refer to the whole continuum of mediation activities between two languages: it covers such distinct aspects as the translation of written texts, the interpretation of spoken texts, sight translation (i.e., the conversion of a written text in the source language into a spoken text in the source language at the moment of reading), real-time subtitling or speech-to-text interpreting (i.e., the conversion of spoken texts in one language into written texts in another language, for example, for the hearing impaired; see Eichmeyer 2020 on speech-to-text interpreting and Alonso/Romero 2023 on interlingual live subtitling).

The term *linguistic mediation* as it is used in foreign language teaching today usually refers to the ability to facilitate people who are not proficient in a given language to participate in written or oral communication, no matter how rudimentarily (Decke–Cornill/Küster 2009: 192). On one hand, the term contains what is usually subsumed under non-professional mediation (cf. Knapp/Knapp–Potthoff 1985), and, on the other hand, encompasses the approach of the representatives of the Leipzig School who understand mediation in the sense of a content-processing transmission (cf. Jäger 1975). Examples of content-processing transmission would be linguistic mediation activities such as the partial translation of a menu in a restaurant (e.g., the selective translation of only the meat-free options for a vegetarian relative) or the paraphrased summary of a text written in language A in another language B (such as a short oral summary from a very long informative text displayed next to a painting in a museum).

As explained earlier, translation and interpretation are a fundamental part of the programs in Catalan and Galician language studies in Leipzig. Of the total 180 credits that students must obtain to be awarded a degree, students who choose Catalan or Galician as a second or third language in the undergraduate program are required to take 60 credits of Catalan/Galician. In addition to the Catalan/Galician language classes, which provide students with B1 level knowledge of the language within a single year, there are also obligatory courses in cultural studies from the first year of studies onward. Translation activities are introduced starting from the third semester, and different theoretical approaches relevant to Ibero-Romance languages and translation studies are also addressed (for a detailed description of the curricula, see Sinner 2017). This means that after the first semesters, language mediation in the context of language class runs parallel to translation classes. By doing so, translation forms an integral

part of language learning: students also learn Catalan or Galician by translating from German (L1) into Catalan or Galician, and by commenting on their own translations and those of their peers. Translation classes allow for differences between text types in German and the Romance languages to be addressed; for text typologies, genres, and text conventions to be compared; and, above all, for students to practice strategies for adapting language to a certain context, something that is of particular importance when working with assignments focused on text production or translation.

In teaching linguistic mediation in foreign language classes, teachers can make use of different techniques used in interpreting and translation, especially informal paraphrased interpreting, paraphrased summarizing of texts and text processing in the broad sense. As has been seen in previous analyses from a translational perspective, what foreign language teachers are supposed to do in the field of linguistic mediation is broadly equivalent to what could be summarized under informal paraphrased interpretation and paraphrased summary of texts (Sinner, Wieland 2013; Bernaus, Sinner 2016; Sinner 2017). Other approaches to the teaching of translation that can be undertaken in foreign language classes include the analysis of parallel texts to train reflection on textual conventions and on vocabulary in the usage context (see Sinner, Hernández Socas 2012). Specifically, this refers to deduction techniques, the formation of strategies for recognizing key words, memorization techniques, the use of synonyms or antonyms and the description of the meanings of words in order to fill in lexical gaps (see Kutz 2003 2009 and 2012: 413–444), as well as specific techniques and strategies of reception in interpreting that are linked to certain situations and contexts (see Kalina 1998: 115–118 on processes for strengthening understanding in context). An important practical and organizational reason for the extensive use of mediation in both language classes and translation courses at introductory and advanced levels is the fact that interactive mediation activities in class specially allow for the same courses to be taught in modules in which students enrolled in different degree programs and with different language levels learn together. This was mandatory as the total number of available teaching hours needed to be used in different modules simultaneously in order to allow for complete curricula in all different degrees.

It has been pointed out that when discussing linguistic mediation with students, it is important to address the question of what they believe the essence of translation and linguistic mediation is supposed to be. This is necessary because all members of a society will at some point be confronted, more or less consciously, with translations and linguistic mediation.



Therefore, they will usually transfer to linguistic mediation, and later to translation, whatever they may have heard about translation in their everyday lives (see Sinner 2024). For example, they might have learned that translation is *to say the same thing in other words* or they might have heard about the alleged problems of “free translation”, and struggle with the question of what degree of freedom is admissible so that a text can still be called a translation, or at which degree of distance from the original text it ceases to be a translation (see Sinner/Wieland 2013: 106).<sup>3</sup>

When minoritized languages were introduced into the IALT study program, no research results were available on the effects of integrating language mediation into foreign language teaching, and there were very few studies regarding the motivations that led to learning minoritized languages (see below). It therefore seemed all the more important to research both the mediation approach in minoritized language teaching and students’ motivations in learning these languages. The aim was to specifically address the role of linguistic mediation in the context of the minoritized languages offered at the IALT, taking into account possible correlations with variables such as the students’ performance, continuity in the language learning process, and academic success. This was accomplished by conducting surveys and follow-up studies on different aspects, employing (and combining) both quantitative and qualitative research methods, continuous observation, analysis of translation exams, and an accompanying long-term study on the overall effects.

### **Methodology: surveys, test analysis, student statistics**

Since 2010, in every first and second semester of each academic year (first, third, and fifth, and second, fourth, and sixth semester for BA students; first and third, second and fourth semester for MA students), students who have chosen to study a minoritized language in the language or translation courses have been surveyed regarding their motivations for doing so. In the first two years in particular, enrollment figures were significantly higher due to the novelty of the program, as Catalan and Galician was also a new study option for students in higher semesters. Over the years (and including the annual intensive spring courses), there was an average of

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<sup>3</sup> In very much the same way translation students transfer their previous experiences with translation from their language classes in school to their translation classes in university, including the mechanisms of the grammar-translation method (Sinner 2017), which very apparently still plays a certain role in language teaching and is still quite frequently defended (see Leonardi 2010: 19; for a historiographical consideration of the critical view regarding this method, see Bonilla 2013).

19 students enrolled in Galician A1, and 10 students enrolled in Galician A1 and A2; 26 students in Catalan A1, and 18 students enrolled in both Catalan A1 and A2. On the other hand, there were, on average, 5 students in the highest offered level in Galician, and 7 students in the Catalan C1 courses. In total, more than 320 students of Catalan and over 100 students of Galician were surveyed (i.e., answered questionnaires or took part in the discussions in class) over the years.

Many students are rather reluctant to take part in questionnaire-based surveys, in part due to evaluation fatigue on account of the evaluation surveys that have to be carried out every semester following the instructions from the university rectorate. The questionnaire template used at Leipzig University already contains some questions about the reasons and motivation for choosing the corresponding course. Further, more specific questions addressing course content and teaching methodology were added to this official evaluation sheet. However, the courses are evaluated on a rotational basis and are therefore not usually assessed every year. For this reason, an additional survey regarding motivation was consistently conducted via informal classroom conversations with the students at the beginning of the semester and in evaluation sessions at the end of each semester. All additional data was gathered on the basis of field notes, memory protocols, and conversation summaries that were analyzed and classified directly after collection. In doing so, we followed a data collection approach that is common in ethnography and anthropology (see Ortner 2017), but has also long been established in linguistics (see Labov 1966) and Translation and Interpreting Studies (see Sinner 2020).

As the surveys and field notes are consistently conducted in anonymized form, it is not possible to determine the actual numbers of *different* students, i.e., developments on an individualized basis, but only to calculate the number of students enrolled in each course.

Furthermore, an evaluation of written translation exams (28 translation exams from Galician into German, 86 translation exams from Catalan into German) from the semesters 2010/2011 to 2020/2021, and from 2022 to 2022/2023 was carried out.

Quantitative analyses were carried out on the basis of anonymized student records from the student examination office within the student administration system. These were investigated with regard to the courses taken, the students' academic success, and the correlation between language courses and the grades obtained. Between October 2010 and July 2016 (the winter semester of 2010 to the summer semester of 2016), 180 enrollments in 22 courses in the field of Catalan translation were registered

via the student administration system, and 102 enrollments registered in 18 courses in the field of Galician translation.

The comparative follow-up study with the six-year period 2017–2022 that was originally planned was not suitable for comparison due to the significant changes in teaching and evaluation that took place during the Covid-19 pandemic between April 2020 (beginning of the summer semester in 2020) and February 2022 (end of the winter semester 2021–2022). This forced switch to a primarily digital form of teaching was generally not conducive to most students' motivation: during this time, there were almost no external stimuli such as traveling, summer courses, and contact with other students, especially students from international programs, Erasmus students, etc. Even with the most sophisticated and skillfully applied online formats, personal contact and direct and immediate interaction in language mediation activities in class were not even remotely comparable to “normal” classes. The very diverse oral mediation activities normally practiced in class could not be completely compensated for through online teaching. This gave rise to a temporary slump in participation, which was reflected in a drop in performance and grades, as well as in the decline in the number of students in the courses during the pandemic; hence, for this study, only the first cohorts were taken into consideration (see quantitative analysis below).

### **Motivation**

The analyses of the surveys confirm the results of other studies on this topic, especially the trends shown in other studies with regard to the reasons for the choice of minoritized languages. However, additional aspects appeared over time that have to do both with the status of the minoritized languages in general at the IALT, and with language mediation and its effects. Important reasons for choosing Galician or Catalan that did not vary over time were:

- personal reasons (10%) such as
  - family ties or
  - romantic relationships or friendships with people who speak these languages, often because they have already lived in the language area;
- pragmatic reasons (38%), such as
  - preparation for an Erasmus scholarship to study in Galicia or in a Catalan-speaking region
  - the goal of eventually living in Galicia or a Catalan-speaking region and being able to integrate well into the population;

- the obligation to take additional modules, and Catalan or Galician modules
  - are open to all students regardless of prior language experience and are thus easy to enroll in;
  - fitted well into individual timetables;
  - seemed an easy choice because the students had previously learned or were currently learning other Romance languages and wanted to benefit from the similarities;
- professional and utilitarian considerations (31%): the wish to study a language that hardly anyone else learns and therefore be able to stand out professionally;
- individualism (18%): to do something different and have something of your own;
- philanthropy (16%):
  - interest in divergent, overlooked and ignored cultures;
  - empathy with mistreated, dominated, subjugated and minoritized people and nations;
- linguistic reasons (29%):
  - close relationship with Spanish or Portuguese;
  - that it is a hardly studied language, which makes it interesting from a linguistic point of view;
  - typological interest;
- curiosity (7%):
  - because they had never heard of it;
  - because it is something “new” (to them) and possibly “different”;
- because it is a small language and as such it is especially worth being learned (potentially “minoritized language collectors”) (16%);
- and some more specific reasons only stated by individuals and therefore without specifying percentages, such as
  - interest in Galician because of the special role of certain musical instruments;
  - interest in Galician because of a love for medieval *cantigas*;
  - curiosity about Catalan due to reading Catalan novels in German translation;
  - the “discovery” of Galician because of the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela on the Way of St. James.

In a number of studies, some of which were conducted in minoritised language contexts, motivations were further classified in the superordinate categories proposed in earlier studies (see Gardner, Lambert 1972, or Dörnyei

2001), e.g., *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation* or, depending on the aims of these studies, *integrativeness*, *utility*, *ideologies of authenticity and legitimacy*, etc. (for Welsh in Poland see Rosiak, Hornsby 2016, for Welsh among Polish immigrants in Wales, see Rosiak 2022). Some of the data for immigrants, such as the importance “of social access, belonging to social circles and integrating with local communities” (Rosiak 2022) that are strongly present in the data from Wales also apply for students in a university context abroad when the ultimate goal is to live in the respective linguistic area.

We will not propose any further categorization into supercategories here, as we believe that the overlap between the individual items gathered in the surveys is too large. A more precise classification would require more details to be collected regarding the different aspects mentioned. While this data could not be collected via our surveys, the details of such results could be made more transparent in the extensive interviews conducted by Rosiak (2022), for example.

Some categories clearly overlap, such as pragmatic and professional/utilitarian reasons; individualist reasons and the decision to learn a language that is different from other languages in order to stand out professionally; or the interest in less commonly learned languages and the typological interest shared by some of the students of linguistics. In some cases it seemed impossible to identify an appropriate category. For example, when someone states that they enjoy learning languages, this is in fact a pseudo-justification that would apply equally to any other language. On the other hand, some persons stated that they simply enjoy learning “small” languages, or had learned other minoritized languages before or while studying Catalan and Galician, meaning that it seems appropriate to consider a separate category of “minoritized language collectors” overlapping with those who chose Galician or Catalan “because it is a small language”.

After minoritized languages were offered for several semesters at the IALT, it became clear that students also had other motivations for learning these languages that were more practical in nature, many of which were apparently based on word of mouth, and these are equally important. The reasons that were added gradually with experience could be related (1) to the special quality of the teaching and (2) to the “near omnipresence”, as one student put it, of Galician and Catalan (and Basque) at the IALT, that is, the fact that these languages are perceived very positively in any context in which they appear at the IALT: they are presented and dealt with on an equal footing to all other languages offered at the institute. This becomes

evident, for example, in the positive view of the presence of the minoritized languages in the weekly mock conferences, simulated conferences held as an opportunity for students to practice interpreting under realistic conditions and in front of an audience. The conferences are open events that can be attended by anyone who is interested in interpreting as well as the topics discussed and interpreted there. Of course, Basque, Catalan, and Galician all have their own booths in these mock conferences. Furthermore, these languages are mentioned in module descriptions or course descriptions across all courses offered for students at Leipzig University, further increasing visibility and prestige.

Among the motivations that have been added over time are:

- personal reasons (27%) such as
  - friend(s) at the IALT wanted to study it, so they joined in so they could do it together;
  - positive feedback on the courses from friend(s) at the IALT who were already studying Catalan/Galician/Basque and seemed to love it;
- pragmatic and utilitarian considerations (65%):
  - there are few students and, relatively speaking, more scholarships available;
  - there are more cultural activities taking place during the semester than for other languages;
  - there is more diversity in the course offer;
  - the student-teacher ratio is particularly good and as a translation student you can experience much more intensive teaching and individualized support;
  - the language mediation and translation classes in Galician and Catalan are extremely useful, because:
    - you learn and practice techniques that are relevant for working with German and other Ibero-Romance languages such as Portuguese or Spanish;
    - you learn and practice techniques that are relevant for working with German and Romance languages in general, such as French and Italian;
    - you learn and practice techniques relevant for interpreting and translating in general, regardless of the language combination;
    - you receive much more personalized feedback in mediation classes in Galician or Catalan;
    - these classes make it easier to take your first steps in interpreting;

- you are more likely to succeed in the entrance exam for the M.A. conference interpreting degree program;
- professional considerations (33%):
  - to have a unique selling point on the labor market;
  - to be one of very few certified translators for the Galician or Catalan language and to get many of the overall fewer jobs/clients and not just a few of the overall more jobs/clients for other languages;
  - to be specifically attractive to companies that work with these regions and to receive regular translation or interpreting assignments from them (as well as for Spanish).

Over the semesters, one reason increasingly mentioned by students was that learning another Ibero-Romance language would enable them to present and market themselves as experts not only for Spain and Spanish, but for Spain as a plurilinguistic country and thus as an expert for more than “just” Spanish. Apparently, this can be attributed to the examination of Spain’s multilingualism in the transversal courses offered by the Ibero-Romance department that are obligatory for students of all Ibero-Romance languages (and Basque).

The motivations regarding better positioning on the labor market were well thought out and students did not at all “romanticize” these minoritized languages: the students were aware that Galician or Catalan would only be a good additional option when combined with one or more other highly sought-after languages, but hardly a functioning standalone option.

Some statements could be clearly attributed to specific political developments and notably only occurred within a certain period: from 2017 and until the Covid-19 pandemic, minoritized languages increasingly became the center of attention among students. Several students explained that they were explicitly interested in Catalan because of Spain’s treatment of the independence movement in Catalonia and the persecution and condemnation of Catalan politicians, which they found shocking and undemocratic. One student explicitly chose Catalan instead of Spanish, which she stopped learning in reaction to the violations of international law and pictures of young Spaniards giving the Hitler salute at anti-Catalan demonstrations.

Particularly noteworthy are the references to the student-teacher ratio, the personalized feedback, the possibilities to learn and practice important techniques, and the advantages the skillsets conveyed provide in interpreting courses and in the entrance exams for the MA Conference Interpreting degree program. Some students even stated that they had actually already

completed Galician or Catalan but were taking some courses again because of the language mediation practice element. One student of Galician stated that she had studied Galician for her entire BA and MA programs and had taken all the courses in Galician-German translation, sometimes multiple times, in order to practice the techniques for interpreting also required of the other languages in the MA Conference Interpreting program. The student explicitly pointed out that in other languages in the MA Conference interpreting there were fewer opportunities for such intensive practice with detailed, direct feedback in the language mediation exercises as in Galician. And word spread: In the surveys, students increasingly state that training provided by the language mediation tasks in Galician or Catalan seem particularly relevant for translation and Translation Studies; the relevance of “completing an Iberian portfolio” as an argument has grown over the years.

The statements about the impact of language mediation activities speak for themselves. Accordingly, the major translation problems are also those that are most likely to be detected when performing sight translation, reformulation or paraphrasing and, above all, structural analysis in the context of the discussions of the resulting translations. Those problematic aspects are therefore also the ones that can be reduced most effectively in class. One aspect that can be particularly highlighted and trained through language mediation exercises is how students recognize and deal with stylistic preferences of the languages involved. We had already established this view in the study of the first six-year period (Sinner 2017), and these results were underpinned by the surveys in the second stage of the study. Clearly, this approach results in the development of a particularly effective automatism regarding the ability to recognize problematic structures. It motivates students to move away from foreign language syntax, to restructure content and thus transfer the message that is to be communicated more easily and idiomatically into the target language. For future translators and interpreters, such skills based on language mediation practice are indeed an important value.

This was also evident in the above-mentioned analysis of 114 translation examinations (L2 into German) — examinations that are obligatory in both BA and MA programs that include minoritized languages. Particular attention was paid to how structures that are regularly dealt with in language mediation/translation courses were handled, regardless of the respective topics (e.g., the practical orientation in specialized translation); additional attention was also paid to structural interferences. On average, the results were better than in the corresponding translation examinations



from Spanish to German in the same period, especially in terms of how students restructured and broke down very long, complex sentences, something that is routinely done in sight translation tasks.

For future translators and interpreters, skills such as these (developed through language mediation practice) are an important asset. The fact that the acquisition and improvement of such skills are perceived to be closely linked to learning Galician and Catalan contributes significantly to the students' motivation to continue to take the corresponding courses.

### **Quantitative analysis: performance and achievements and correlations with qualitative data**

The previously mentioned quantitative analyses based on 282 anonymized student records from the winter semester of 2010 to the summer semester of 2016 revealed some remarkable insights. On average, students who studied Catalan or Galician (and therefore translation from L2 into German) in their first and second year of study also achieved better grades in the translation courses in the other languages they studied. The correlation between taking these translation courses and the better average grades in the other language combinations is statistically significant (see Sinner 2017). However, these results do not allow a clear causal relationship to be established. The possibility cannot be ruled out that students of other languages with above-average language and translation skills will tend to take additional foreign language courses (and thus potentially Galician and Catalan).

However, considering the students' statements about their personal opinions regarding the positive influence of the language mediation exercises on their translation skills, it is much more likely that the causal relationship between Catalan or Galician language mediation and the achievement of better grades in other translation courses (and interpreting, see below) actually exists. The overwhelming majority of students (92%) in the cohorts from 2010 to 2016 stated that they felt that the language mediation exercises in Galician and/or Catalan—specifically sight translating with paraphrasing and restructuring—led to better results when translating from other foreign languages into German. A majority of over 80% stated that they have fewer interferences (and above all fewer syntactic interferences) when translating from the other languages they have studied into their native language, German (see Sinner 2017).

With regard to interpreting, it certainly appears that the proportion of those who transition from the BA Translation program to the MA Conference Interpreting program is higher than the average, although these

conclusions are provisional due to the overall low figures. The data can be interpreted as an indication of a possible trend, as the statistics cannot necessarily be transferred to higher numbers of students (i.e., they cannot be generalized as they are not statistically significant (although in many qualitative other studies such quantitative aspects are either supposedly justified or completely disregarded)).

It is worth remembering here that the results from the surveys and interviews etc. can be correlated. Several students in the MA Conference Interpreting program who had taken the language mediation exercises in Catalan or Galician during the BA program explicitly stated that they felt that the language mediation exercises had made it easier for them to perform well in the first interpreting courses they had to take (usually in the sixth semester of the BA program). The idea of studying for an MA with other languages as a major subject had only arisen as a possibility for some because of this experience.

Finally, it is essential to point out that enrolling in one of the minoritized languages seems to make a significant contribution to the students' motivation for their studies. In the course evaluations for these languages, students repeatedly stated that these were among their favorite courses and that they always looked forward to them. Several of the students from the MA programs emphasized the important role of the minoritized languages offered as part of the degree programs in their decision to continue studying at the IALT after the BA.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of this study was to uncover students' motivations for studying minoritized languages at the IALT and what role language mediation played in the students' motivation and academic success. The analyses show a wide range of general, professional, and ideological motivations (as also reported in other surveys on the matter), in addition to a series of motives closely linked to the specific study programs and the linguistic mediation activities carried out as part of the courses.

In particular, language mediation in Galician and Catalan language and translation courses was shown to decisively improve students' performance in translation-related subjects in other languages, as well as to help reduce stylistic and structural interference in other linguistic combinations. Furthermore, the study showed that enrolling in one of the minoritized language courses makes a significant contribution to students' motivation for their studies.

Most importantly, the results could perhaps be read as a basic conclusion that is also important for other institutions that offer programs with minoritized languages: it makes sense to communicate that studying these languages has many advantages, and it is important to present these advantages systematically as an argument in favor of studying minoritized languages. Even if emotional aspects play an important role as a motive for studying these languages, the positive balance with regard to functional and even material aspects should also be emphasized. Perhaps a parallel could be drawn to what has been done to vitalize teaching of the Sorbian language in primary schools in Germany, where the major “selling argument” to monolingual parents were cognitive advantages and better future prospects in education. The argument often put forward against learning minoritized languages — that other languages are economically more important — can be brushed aside as irrelevant. Since it is the only such offer, it is embraced, and this ultimately strengthens the minoritized languages and contributes to their normalization abroad. What is more, those students who learn minoritized languages often remain closely attached to them, emotionally, practically, and even professionally (see Sinner 2020).

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## Summary

The contribution presents the results of a long-term observation regarding motivation to learn minoritized languages carried out among students of translation and interpreting at the Leipzig University and regarding the role language mediation played in students' motivation and academic success. The studies include surveys and analyses of the students' learning progress and the grades obtained in two minoritized languages, Catalan and Galician. The analyses show a wide range of motivations also reported in other surveys on the matter, but additionally demonstrate a series of motives closely linked to the study programs and the linguistic mediation activities that are part of the courses and that decisively improve students' performance in translation-related subjects in other languages, playing an important role as a motivating factor.

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