THE PRACTICE OF ARABIC-SPANISH INTERPRETATION IN THE UNITED NATIONS AND THE AFRICAN UNION AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

LA PRÁCTICA DE LA INTERPRETACIÓN ÁRABE-ESPAÑOL EN LAS NACIONES UNIDAS Y LA UNIÓN AFRICANA Y SUS IMPLICACIONES PARA LA FORMACIÓN

Bachir Mahyub Rayaa[1]: University of Granada. Spain
bachirmr@ugr.es 🆔 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5400-5374

ABSTRACT
Spanish and Arabic are official languages of both the United Nations (UN) and the African Union (AU). Given their professional interest to the students of the Arabic-Spanish linguistic combination (AR-ES), we wanted to explore the practice of interpretation in both languages in the two organizations. Given the paucity of previous literature, we opted for the hyphenated interview method. For this, we have the collaboration of two subjects of the UN and two of the AU. In this contribution, which emanates from our doctoral thesis defended on 03/12/2015 (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015), we start from the interest that both institutions arouse as interpretation providers and as a possible professional source of employment for the students that we train in AR-SP interpretation. This way, analyzing the practice of interpretation in these languages is of great academic and professional interest. The results obtained show surprising as well as novel data: the practice of AR-SP interpretation in the UN seldom occurs directly. To translate from Arabic to Spanish, the relay of the English or French booth is almost always used. In the AU, on the other hand, interpretation in these languages is reserved only for the annual summits of Heads of State. The interviews show relevant quantitative and qualitative results about how to work in the Arabic and Spanish booths, while having a direct impact on the professional future of the students and professional interpreters of AR-SP.

RESUMEN
El español y el árabe son lenguas oficiales tanto de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) como de la Unión Africana (UA). Dado su interés profesional para el alumnado de la combinación lingüística árabe-español (AR-ES), quisimos explorar la práctica de la interpretación entre ambas lenguas en los dos organismos. Ante la escasez de

---

Bachir Mahyub Rayaa[1]: University of Granada. Spain.
bachirmr@ugr.es

literatura previa, optamos por el método de la entrevista con guion. Para ello, contamos con la colaboración de dos sujetos de la ONU y dos de la UA. En esta contribución, que emana de nuestra tesis doctoral defendida el 12/03/2015 (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015), partimos del interés que ambas instituciones suscitan como proveedores de interpretación y como una posible salida profesional para los alumnos que formamos en interpretación AR-ES. De este modo, analizar la práctica de la interpretación entre estas lenguas se revela de gran interés académico y profesional. Los resultados obtenidos arrojan datos sorprendentes a la vez que novedosos: la práctica de la interpretación AR-ES en la ONU rara vez se da de forma directa. Para verter entre el árabe y el español se recurre en casi siempre al relé de la cabina inglesa o francesa. En la UA, por su parte, la interpretación entre estas lenguas se reserva solamente a las cumbres anuales de jefes de Estado. Las entrevistas arrojan resultados cuantitativos y cualitativos relevantes acerca de cómo se trabaja en las cabinas árabe y española, al tiempo que tienen una repercusión directa en el futuro profesional de los alumnos e intérpretes profesionales de AR-ES.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Interpretación de conferencias – Árabe – Español – Organismos Internacionales – Naciones Unidas – Unión Africana – Formación.

A PRÁTICA DA INTERPRETAÇÃO ÁRABE-ESPANHOL NAS NAÇÕES UNIDAS E A UNIÃO AFRICANA E SUAS IMPLICAÇÕES PARA A FORMAÇÃO

RESUME
O espanhol e o árabe são línguas oficiais tanto das Nações Unidas (ONU) como da União Africana (UA). Dado seu interesse profissional para os alunos da combinação linguística árabe-espanhol (AR-ES), quisemos explorar a prática da interpretação entre ambas línguas nos dois organismos. Ante a escassez de literatura prévia, optamos pelo método da entrevista com roteiro. Para isso, contamos com a colaboração de dois sujeitos da ONU e dois da UA. Nesta contribuição, que emana da nossa tese doutoral defendida em 12/03/2015 (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015), partimos do interesse que ambas instituições suscitam como provedores de interpretação e como uma possível saída profissional para os alunos que formamos em interpretação AR-ES. Deste modo, analisar a pratica da interpretação entre essas línguas se revelam de grande interesse acadêmico e profissional. Os resultados obtidos aportam dados surpreendentes ao mesmo tempo que novos: a prática da interpretação AR-ES na ONU rara vez é dado de forma direta. Para verter entre o árabe e o espanhol recorre-se quase sempre ao interprete da cabine inglesa ou francesa. Na UA a interpretação entre estas línguas se reserva somente as reuniões anuais de chefes de Estado. As entrevistas oferecem resultados quantitativos e qualitativos relevantes sobre de como se trabalha nas cabines árabe e espanhola, ao mesmo tempo que tem uma repercussão direta no futuro profissional dos alunos e interpretes profissionais de AR-ES.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: Interpretação de conferências; Árabe-Espanhol – Organismos Internacionais – Nações Unidas – União Africana – Formação.

How to cite the article

1. INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It has been said that interpretation, understood as the mediation between two people who do not communicate with the same code, is one of the oldest trades, since oral language arose much earlier than writing (Haensch, 1965). However, there is a practical unanimity among the current research community in locating the beginnings of the professionalization of the interpretation (consecutive and simultaneous) of conferences, as we know it today, after the First World War (Baigorri, 2000, p. 133- 164). According to Baigorri (2000, p. 211-246), this profession would have to wait until the conclusion of the trials of Nuremberg (1945-1946) to reach its age of majority.

The experience of interpretation in Nuremberg was transferred to the newly created United Nations (UN). According to the information available on the portal of this organization, on 2/1/1946, pursuant to resolution 2 (I)[2] of the General Assembly (GA), Chinese, French, English, Russian and Spanish were established as official languages and English and French as working languages. On 12/7/1948, Resolution 247 (III)[3] determined that Spanish should be a working language of the GA. On 12/18/1973, Resolution 3190 (XXVIII)[4] determined to include Arabic as an official and working language of the GA and its Main Committees. To date, the UN has 20 member states with Spanish as their official language, 22 States in the case of Arabic. The two languages together include about 942 million native speakers[5].

The African Union (AU), on the other hand, is an organization set up on 9/9/1999 (Sirte, Libya) with the aim of strengthening political, economic and social cooperation among African States. Being an heir to the Organization for African Unity (OAU), the UA now houses eight states the official language of which is Arabic and two countries with Spanish: the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), which has both Spanish and Arabic as official languages, and Equatorial Guinea, with Spanish, French and Portuguese.

Apart from these two large organizations and their special missions - such as the United Nations Interim Force Mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL), currently chaired by Spain and in which, according to our own sources, we know that it is developing an intense activity of AR-SP translation and interpretation -, there are other international scenarios that are a fertile ground for the work of AR-SP interpreters. This is the case of relations between Latin America and the Arab world within the framework of

---

2 See: http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=a/res/2(i)
3 See: http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=a/res/247(III).
4See: http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=a/res/3190(xxviii),.
5 According to statistics from the Cervantes Institute for Spanish (490 millions), 452 millions for Arabic (Lewis, Simons and Fennig, 2014).

organizations such as ASPA (South America - Arab Countries). Another international organization that demands AR-SP interpreters with assiduity is the Union for the Mediterranean, headquartered in Barcelona.

However, despite the official nature of Spanish and Arabic in the UN and the AU, the great diffusion of both languages worldwide, the millions of speakers who use them as a language of communication, the notable professional demand for interpreters in both of them, as well as the full inclusion in the curricula of the Spanish university, AR-SP interpretation has been scarcely researched (Mahyub Rayaa, 2014). Therefore, although it is a language that, in combination with Indo-European languages demanded in the market, could serve as a perfect field of evidence, research into the interpretation of Arabic has not contributed so far to the resolution of the problems posed by the professional practice. Two could be, in our opinion, the main reasons: (i) professional interpreters in general and in the AR-SP combination in particular do not dedicate themselves to research, although some do dedicate themselves to teaching (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015, p. 189-196) and, on the other hand, (ii) teachers and researchers do not frequently engage in professional practice, so we observe a certain distancing between the two academic and professional spheres (Mackintosh, 1995, p. 120; Seleskovitch; & Lederer, 1989, p. 60, Iglesias Fernández, 2007, p. 102-103, among others).

Research on AR-SP interpretation or from Arabic to other languages within the international organizations was practically null at the end of our doctoral thesis (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015), from which this contribution emanates. This reality has hardly changed today, which could increase the distance between the professional and training spheres. To find some indication on this issue, we must resort to general works on interpretation in the UN (Baigorri Jalón, 2000, 2003 and 2004) or others that, although they focus on interpretation into Spanish in the UN, tangentially touch on some aspects related to the AR-SP combination (Del Pino, 2014), as well as to works that address AR-SP translation in the same organization (Feria 2013). Translation and interpretation within the AU, however, is still unexplored territory. We have only found the work of Colodrón (2001) that deals with the status of Spanish in that organization.

With this background, we undertook the elaboration of this paper, motivated by the desire to carry out a first exploratory study of the practice of AR-SP interpretation in the UN and the AU, and thus to bring the professional reality closer to the training of interpreters in the same line advocated by authors such as Seleskovitch and Lederer (1989) or Gile (1995), among others.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives we intend to achieve in this paper are:

a) Obtain quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the state of professional practice of AR-SP interpretation at the UN - mainly at the New York headquarters - and at the AU.
b) Understand how the interpretation service is coordinated in these organizations (claiming entities, linguistic combinations, interpretation modalities, number of interpreters, etc.).

c) Understand how these organizations deal with the needs of interpretation from Arabic and into Arabic in general, and in Arabic and Spanish, in particular.

d) Find out if AR-SP interpretation is implemented in any of its modalities (consecutive and simultaneous) within the UN and the AU.
Find out in what quantitative terms AR-SP interpretation is used in the UN and in the AU (work volume and periods of greatest demand).

e) Investigate possible qualitative aspects of interpretation of Arabic in general and in the AR-SP combination in particular.

f) Find out in what terms the results obtained could be useful for training in AR-SP interpretation.

3. METHODOLOGY

Given the scarcity of references mentioned above, in order to analyze the practice of AR-SP interpretation at the UN and the AU, we consider that the semi-structured written interview is the most appropriate qualitative method for this first approach to the reality that we propose to address. This method could provide us with more depth in the object of study, as well as allow us access to previously unknown data due to lack of previous literature. We believe that the staff of these institutions is the most reliable and appropriate direct source for the purpose of our study, even at the risk of their not having some precious data of the administrative scope of their organizations.

To ensure fluency and good understanding, these interviews were conducted in the native languages of the interviewees (Arabic in the case of subjects 1, 3 and 4 and Spanish in the case of subject 2). Although we were aware that the face-to-face interview could be more efficient, given our travel limitations and the fact that the interviewees' agenda is full, we finally opted for the telematic route. The informants were previously contacted by telephone to know their availability and to make known the objectives of the interview. The items of the interviews were adapted to the profiles of each subject.

In line with the objectives of this paper, we determine in advance the information we want to obtain. This was expressed in the form of questions that were previously submitted to piloting with experts from our department. The definitive items are as follows:

3.1. United Nations

1. In your opinion, what are the factors that motivated the recognition of the Arabic language as one of the official languages of the United Nations (UN)?

2. Could you tell me who was the first speaker to speak in Arabic at the UN? Do you know when it was? Do you have any information about the interpretation of that paper into the other official languages?

3. Could you tell me, even roughly, how many Arabic interpreters work at the UN? What are their linguistic combinations?

4.   Could you tell me if there is direct interpretation (simultaneous or consecutive) in Arabic and Spanish? If yes, please tell me about the situations in which this linguistic combination is used.

5.   From the professional experience that supports you, do you think that there are some peculiarities that differentiate interpretation in Arabic and other languages (eg Arabic-English, Arabic-French, etc.) from interpretation between Indo-European languages (v. Gr Spanish-French, French-English, etc.)?

6.   Other observations and comments that may be of interest for the training of new interpreters of Arabic and / or for this piece of research.

3.2. African Union

1.   Is Spanish an official language of the AU? If yes, when was it implemented? At the request of what State? What factors influenced its adoption?

2.   Could you tell me if direct interpretation (simultaneous or consecutive) is offered in Arabic and Spanish? If yes, would you know what volume of work it entails approximately? At what periods of the year is there greater demand?

3.   Could you tell me, even roughly, how many Arabic interpreters work at the AU? What are their major linguistic combinations? How many work with Spanish?

4.   From your experience as a user of interpretation from / into Arabic, what is your opinion about this service? What aspects would you change?

5.   From the professional practice, do you think there are some peculiarities that differentiate interpretation of the Arabic language into other languages (eg Arabic-English, Arabic-French, etc.) from interpretation between Indo-European languages (eg Spanish- French, French-English, etc.)?

6.   Other observations and comments that may be of interest for the training of new interpreters of Arabic and / or for this piece of research.

7.   It should be clarified that, in those cases in which there was a response that needed further clarification, the informants were contacted again to clarify those doubts. In all cases, the collaboration has been fully satisfactory.

In addition to these interviews, we were forced to gather more information, since in some cases the interviewees did not have the precise data or did not know them. Likewise, we have consulted bibliographic works and online materials, which we will cite throughout this study.

3.3. Subjects

The professionals who have collaborated in this paper have done it in two ways. Through the interview, in this case:

1. Subject 1: UN interpreter with Arabic and French as A languages and English as C, with more than fifteen years of work experience in this field. The subject performs simultaneous interpretation at the New York headquarters and also works as an interpreter who accompanies missions in the field.

2. Subject 2: UN AR-SP translator (New York headquarters) with more than twenty years of experience and invited professor in the Course of Specialist in Arabic-Spanish Translation (School of Translators of Toledo, University of Castile-La Mancha).

3. Subject 3: Ambassador at that time of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and its permanent representative to the AU. The subject performs sporadic interpretations for the delegations of the subject's country that visit the AU.

4. Subject 4: translator and interpreter at the AU with Arabic as A language, English and Spanish as B, with more than ten years of work experience in this field.

Or through specific consultations, in this case:

- United Nations Document Archive System.
- Head of the Spanish booth in New York (UN).
- Head of the Arabic booth in New York (UN).
- Interpreter of the UN (New York) with Spanish as A language, English and French as B, and invited lecturer in the Master of Interpretation of Conferences of the University of Granada.
- Professor of interpretation at the University of Salamanca and co-director of our doctoral thesis.

4. RESULTS

We present below the results of the interviews, divided by organization. As we have indicated before, to these results we will add the data collected from the specific consultations that we have made.

4.1. United Nations
4.1.1. Factors that motivated the adoption of Arabic as an official language of the UN

- Subject 1: "After the oil crisis in October 1973, specifically on December 18, 1973, the Arab States submitted a draft resolution to the General Assembly of the United Nations to include Arabic among the official and working languages in the Assembly and in the six Main Committees with effect beginning at the next session. On September 17, 1974, Simultaneous Interpretation from and into Arabic was put into practice for the first time. It should be noted that this session was chaired by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria at that time. A trust fund was created for this purpose, financed by the Arab countries to cover the costs derived from the use of Arabic for three years, and the UN Secretary General was asked to present a proposal to the General Assembly either to continue the situation as it was or for the total implementation of Arabic as an official language, the costs of interpretation being borne by the UN. In 1977, the Secretary-General presented a report recommending equality between the Arabic language and the other official languages of the Organization, as well as its funding from the regular budget of the UN. The 1973 resolution covered only the General Assembly and the six Main Committees of the Assembly. In 1981, the Economic and Social Council, with all its organs and entities, was subject to the resolution that led to the full implementation of the Arabic language in the Organization. However, the Security Council remained without an Arabic language until the General Assembly issued a recommendation to review this issue. The recommendation was accepted and the Arabic language was incorporated into the official languages of the Council (I do not have information about the exact date). "

- Subject 2: "As far as I know, there were many demands by several Arab countries for Arabic to be recognized as an official language. We must bear in mind that pan-Arabism had strength in the Arab world, but perhaps the straw that broke the camel's back was the oil crisis of 1973. From then on, it was decided to recognize the Arabic language"

4.1.2. The first speaker to speak in Arabic at the UN and its interpretation into the other official languages

- Subject 1: «I do not have that information».

- Subject 2: "According to an information leaflet issued on the occasion of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the introduction of Arabic as an official language, Jamal Abdel Nasser was the first leader to deliver a speech in Arabic to the UN General Assembly in the session of presidents [sic] on 09/25/1960, which supposed that it has been interpreted to other official languages of this organization, Spanish among them».

4.1.3. Number of interpreters of Arabic in the UN and their linguistic combinations

- Subject 1: «I do not have that information».

- Subject 2: «I consulted the personnel section. I am told that, as of June 2009, the Arabic Interpretation Service would be composed of 37 interpreters in the following labor regime:

Of the group of permanently contracted, eight have been in service with the UN for more than 20 years. Specifically, two have 25 years, another 27, two 28 and three 30. Of the other permanently contracted, practically all have around ten years of experience.

If we observe these groups by country of origin and type of contract, we obtain that:

- Permanent contracts: Algeria (1), Egypt (7), United States (1), France (1), Jordan (1), Lebanon (3), Morocco (1), Syria (2) and Sudan (1).
- Temporary contracts: Egypt (2), United States (8), Lebanon (2), Morocco (2) and Syria (3).
- Contracts in trial (permanent futures): Canada (1) and Lebanon (1) ».

4.1.4. Is there direct Arab-Spanish interpretation in the UN?

- Subject 1: «Of course there is AR-SP interpretation. The interpreters I know with this combination work in Europe: Chawki Rayes and Ibrahim Koulaimah. However, this occurs in the private market, that is, outside international organizations. As for the UN, the interpreter can work from / into any language he knows, in addition to the required languages. However, Arabic is not required of Spanish interpreters, nor are Arabic interpreters required to work from / into Spanish. The only two languages that are required of the interpreters of Arabic, as well as those of Spanish, Russian and Chinese are French and English, while French interpreters must work with Spanish or Russian, in addition to English. Finally, English interpreters must work with Spanish or Russian, in addition to French. As you can see, they all share two languages: French and English, the two pivot languages. Allow me to explain it with an example: I do not speak Spanish, Russian or Chinese, so when a delegate has the floor in the room in one of these three languages, what I will do is change the input channel, from the room to the interpreter of English or French to interpret from one of these two languages. By the same rule, if a delegate speaks in Arabic, I will interpret into French and the rest of my colleagues will do it from my interpretation (the interpreters of the French booth will rest at that moment). Nothing prevents me from learning Spanish to interpret from it, but it is not a requirement».

- Subject 2: «I do not know that there is direct interpretation in Arabic and Spanish. To interpret from one language to the other, the relay is always used. Although some mission may require interpreters in the two languages … ».

4.1.5. Peculiarities of interpretation in Arabic and other languages

- Subject 1: « I am afraid that I can not contribute much to you about the differences between interpretation from / into Arabic and from / into European languages since I only interpret from and into Arabic and because the UN is a world dominated by linguistic routine and normative phraseology. The speeches rarely leave a previously delimited frame. I would say in a general way that the interpreter is required to possess certain general cultural knowledge. Culture is universal. Maybe the Arabic interpreter needs to know something about Koran and Bible, some poetry and proverbs, since some Arab speeches can be loaded with rhetoric and because all the interpreters are going to translate from the Arabic interpreter».

- Subject 2: «Of course there are peculiarities that differentiate translation and interpretation in Arabic and other Indo-European languages when compared to other linguistic combinations, such as in French and Spanish. I believe that everything is summarized in how symmetrical or asymmetric the pairs of languages are. The cultural difference, syntax and formulation of thought are notorious from Arabic to Spanish."

4.2. African Union
4.2.1. Recognition of Spanish as an official language of the AU

- Subject 3: "I think, without being very sure, that it was in the mid-nineties and it was at the request of Equatorial Guinea and with the support of the SADR"

- Subject 4: « I do not remember the exact date. It could be from the year 2000[6]. I think that was requested by Equatorial Guinea and had the support of the Sahrawi Arab Republic».

4.2.2. Is there any interpretation in Arabic and Spanish at the UA?

- Subject 3: "At present, due to bureaucratic and budget problems, only direct Arabic-Spanish interpretation is used during the work of the Summit of African Presidents held twice a year. According to the latest information I have, the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs continues to finance the expenses of this interpretation until the Union assumes the costs of implementing Castilian and Swahili in the AU».

- Subject 4: « Not much, especially at high level summit».

4.2.3. Number of Arabic interpreters at the AU and their linguistic combinations

---

[6] This answer requires more precision: The AU was created on May 26, 2001 in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) and started on July 9, 2002 in Durban (South Africa). as an official language, it is possible that Spanish was not integrated as a working language until years later due to the lack of interpreters.

- Subject 3: « Only freelance interpreters are summoned during the summits, normally 2 to 3 times a year».

- Subject 4: "I have no record of having staff interpreters due to lack of work. Yes, there are staff translators, as is my case and Arabic-Spanish translation is provided, although sometimes through English."

4.2.4. Peculiarities of interpretation in Arabic and other languages

- Subject 3: "I have suffered it myself when I had to do some interpretation for Saharawi delegations. I marvel at the mental capacity that interpreters have, especially those of Arabic. There are terms that do not have a direct translation and they manage to get the idea. I think other European languages do not have this problem because they are born from a common branch».

- Subject 4: « In my opinion, the peculiarities of Arabic always influence the target language. I notice it a lot in the official and protocol discourses. Arabic seeks a more ornamental and elaborate way that creates real headaches when translating into another language such as Spanish or English. In order to sound natural in these languages, you have to be very free with the risk that it implies in these areas».

5. DISCUSSION

Next we will analyze and discuss the most relevant results. For this, we will rely on the collected references and data.

5.1. The implantation of Arabic in the UN and its historical context

From the historical point of view, everything indicates that the main factor that motivated the inclusion of Arabic as an official language of the UN was the first oil crisis of 1973. In the introduction to this paper, we referred precisely to resolution 3190 (XXVIII), adopted at the 2206th plenary session, on 12/18/1973, which approves several amendments to the GA regulation. As regards interpretation, article 52 as amended would read: "speeches delivered in any of the six official languages of the General Assembly will be interpreted into the other five, on the understanding that interpretation from Arabic and into Arabic will be performed only in the Assembly and in its Main Committees».

However, the subject states that interpretation from/into Arabic was not implemented until the next year, with more accuracy until 9/17/1974 in a session of the GA chaired by the Algerian Bouteflika. However, the implementation of Arabic in the subsidiary bodies of the UN would not occur until 12/17/1980, by virtue of the resolution 35 / 219A[7] of the GA, which requested the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council to include Arabic before January 1, 1983. This way, as of 1974, we can already speak of interpretation in Arabic and Spanish in the UN. Later we will see how this interpretation is performed.

---

7 See: http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=a/res/35/219

It should be noted, however, that the first speech delivered to the GA of the UN was on 09/25/1960 by Jamal Abdel Nasser, in his capacity as president of the United Arab Republic. This piece of information, which we have learned thanks to an informative brochure disseminated by the organization itself on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the introduction of Arabic as an official language, would mean that interpretation in Arabic and Spanish occurred much earlier than 1974, although with all probability it has been carried out through the relay [8] of the English booth, if we take into account the annotation included in the minutes in Spanish of that 873rd session (page 152): "English version, provided by the delegation, of a speech delivered in Arabic". In this regard, it is important to highlight that, in the general debate of the UN GA, it is possible to use the official language of any of the member states, provided that it provides an interpreter to one of the five official languages.

5.2. Recognition of Spanish as an official language of the AU

The AU, according to what appears in its foundational statutes [9] (Art. 25), recognizes four working languages (Arabic, English, French and Portuguese), in addition to those of all countries of the Union whenever possible.

Asked about the date in which Spanish is implanted in the AU and at the request of which Member State, our interviewees are hesitant about the exact date of implementation; nevertheless, they coincide in the official nature of the Spanish language and in the countries that propose it. According to the data that we have been able to locate, Spanish was incorporated as an official language of the AU at the summit held in Lusaka (Zambia) on 07/9/2001 (Colodrón, 2001). Equatorial Guinea was the country that requested it with the support of the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). As in the case of the UN, the importance of this information lies in knowing the exact date from which interpretation in Arabic and Spanish within this body began.

5.3. Interpretation in Arabic and Spanish at the UN

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, as well as the consultations we have carried out, it could be confirmed that there is no direct interpretation in Arabic and Spanish, unless some interpreter of the Spanish booth who speaks Arabic -as we know that some non-permanent interpreter has done so at the UN headquarters in New York-wants to take directly from the Arab or Spanish speaker. If we except this and other cases in which UN institutions [10] require AR-SP interpreters on a timely basis, it could be said that, in the great majority of the multilingual meetings held in this organization, direct interpretation in Arabic and Spanish is not provided. This end has been by the heads of the Spanish and Arab cabins respectively in New York, as well as by Del Pino (2014). In order to translate the Arabic speeches into

---

8 The relay (relay interpreting) consists in not interpreting directly from the original language but from the version provided by another interpreter (pivot) that does understand that language.

9 See:http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/idep/unpan003043.pdf

10 Also know that, in organizations that depend on the UN such as FAO or at Nairobi headquarters, there are two interpreters who have Arabic and Spanish among their working languages.

Spanish, the interpreters of the latter language must resort to the interpretation that the Arabic booth offers into English or French. Exactly the same thing happens in the opposite case, when it is interpreted from Spanish. This way, the relay technique becomes the way to avoid the lack of direct interpretation in Arabic and Spanish.

From what we have been able to confirm, this fact is not exclusive to the Arabic language, but also to Chinese and Russian. In practice, this situation means that, unlike the English and French languages, direct interpretation is not provided into either Spanish or Arabic from the other five official languages of the UN (Del Pino , 2014, p. 147).

Although professional standards recommend avoiding abuse of the relay, organizations such as AIIC recognize that exceptions may occur, especially in the case of languages with limited dissemination, and particularly in multilingual conferences held in countries where most interpreters have only two working languages, or in countries where several official languages coexist (Mikkelson, 1999 and Shlesinger, 2010). However, due to the reality of Spanish and Arabic within the UN, as well as the historical trajectory referred to above, we believe that they would not precisely enter into the group of languages with limited dissemination. Similarly, the data obtained indicate that the use of this technique is not exceptional in the UN, but rather it is the norm.

To Del Pino (2014, p. 147) "the main cause of this situation is the huge deficit of conference interpreters who can work from Arabic, Chinese or Russian into Spanish in th UN Interpretation Service and in those of its specialized agencies".

Although Mackintosh (1983 *apud* Shlesinger, 2010, p. 276) has not found significant differences between direct interpretation and that performed from the relay as far as a loss of the message is concerned, except for the existence of greater omission or distortion in certain segments in the relay, there are many authors who consider that this practice reduces the quality of interpretation because it increases the lag and exposes interpretation to greater loss of information. In this sense, Gebhard (2001) argues that «while relay cannot be excluded in multilingual meetings, it remains a second-best solution as it unavoidably introduces delays in transmitting information and a loss in precision».

Shlesinger (2010) and Gebhard (2001), on the other hand, emphasize the stress that the pivot interpreter could suffer, that is, the one that transmits the relay to the rest of the booths. In fact, Gebhard herself calls it the "Strasbourg syndrome", as the European Parliament's own interpreters often refer to it:

> They also underscore the stress that comes from working under such circumstances and knowing that the whole team depends on their translation. What they fear most is the 'Strasbourg syndrome': Intense stress-induced ailments stemming from working as the sole 'pivot' for 10 other booths at the EP's plenary, a nightmare of technically complex, politically sensitive speeches usually delivered at break-neck speed .

In this sense, AIIC (2015) considers in its professional standards that, if this technique is used, it is convenient to reinforce the pivot booth:

Teams of interpreters must be put together in such a way as to avoid the systematic use of relay. However, when there is no alternative to the use of relay for a given language, the team shall comprise at least two interpreters to provide a relay from that language. In addition, if the relay is provided from a two-way booth, at least three interpreters shall work in that booth[11].

In spite of this professional reality, we could confirm that, in the field of AR-SP interpretation training in Spain, neither the theoretical nor the practical plane addresses the necessary strategies to work in a relay (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015, p. 219-223). We believe that it would be very useful for the future AR-SP interpreters to know the needs of the pivot interpreter, the pressure to which he is subjected (Shlesinger, 2010, p. 277), as well as the impact that the relay has on the lag in interpretation and its quality. If the teaching institutions want to be up-to-date on what happens in professional practice, interpretation by relay should be included in the curricula of these centers. Authors such as Marzocchi and Zucchetto (1997), Waliczek (2003) and Lim (2002)[12] also believe that the needs of the pivots, as well as those of the relay interpreters, should be reviewed and specific skills of these two tasks should be introduced in teaching for the possible situations in which this technique is used.

On the other hand, according to the UN portal[13], teams composed of three interpreters work in Arabic and Chinese, since in these two languages *both ways* are worked, which means that these booths work throughout the event, unlike the other languages. This way, the pressure of the relay is aggravated by the difficulty of the retour, that is, that the interpreter pours into his B language instead of doing it into his A language or mother tongue. On the incidence of retour and the directionality in the quality of interpretation, we recommend the reading of these two recent pieces of research: Mahyub Rayaa 2017a and 2017b. In fact, Gebhard (2001) argues that the tandem relay and retour could impair the quality of simultaneous interpretation.

5.4. AR-SP Interpretation at the AU

According to the information provided by the interviewees, in the AU AR-SP interpretation is performed directly, that is, without recourse to the relay of other languages, at least twice a year (see section 4.2.2). This would be a difference with the interpretation service of the UN, in addition to respecting the aforementioned professional standards that discourage the abuse of the relay. However, according to what is stated by subject 3 (see section 4.2.3.), the volume of work is limited, since it is limited to the two annual summits of African Heads of State. To the reduced workload, bureaucratic and budget problems mentioned by the same subject are added.

---

[11] AIIC Professional Standards (2015). Available at: https://aiic.net/page/6746/
[12] Cited by Iglesias Fernández (2007, 67).
[13] See: https://careers.un.org/lbw/home.aspx?viewtype=LCEFD&FId=2.

5.5 Number of interpreters of Arabic in the UN and their linguistic combinations

The information provided by subject 2, facilitated in turn by the UN personnel section, offers an initial count of the interpreters of the Arabic section, their countries of origin, years of service to the UN and types of contracts. These results, although initial, are very valuable to capture a first overview of the reality of the body of interpreters of Arabic of the UN, composed of 37 interpreters in total. In this count, the freelance interpreters that this agency may contract at certain times for the headquarters of New York would not be included.
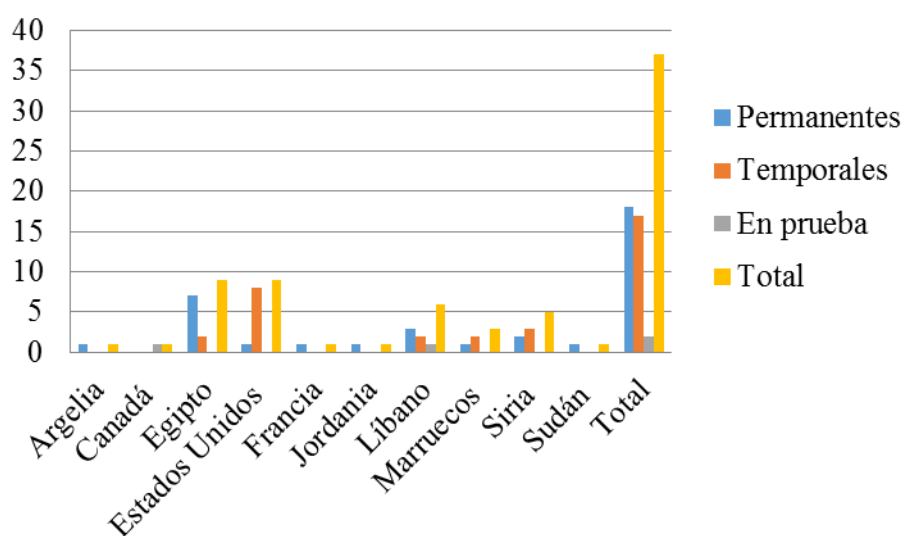
Graph 1 . Number of interpreters according to country of origin and contractual figure.

Thanks to these results, we know that the group of permanently contracted, made up of 18 interpreters, is very polarized in terms of years of service. While eight members have more than 25 years of experience, the remaining ten barely exceed the decade. The average years of service of that population is 15 years with a pronounced standard deviation of 10.06 years. It is convenient to clarify that the dates that we use to calculate the years of service are those of entry as official by contest to the body of interpreters of the UN.

From these data, it is inferred that the group with more years of service would be about to retire at that time and, therefore, that the organization will again demand the services of more interpreters. As confirmed by the head of the Arabic booth in New York[14], the UN, to cover this pressing demand, plans to incorporate several Arabic interpreters with English and/or French in different types of contract, from paid internships, which require passing an examination to its conclusion, to the permanent contract by contest. This could be an incentive for the students trained or in the training phase in AR-SP interpretation.

---

[14] By personal communication

As far as the linguistic combinations of these professionals are concerned, although we have not obtained a specific answer from the interviewees, due to our inquiries and consultations with the heads of the Arabic and Spanish booths, as well as other interpreters or ex-interpreters of the service (García Hurtado and Baigorri Jalón), there would only be two interpreters who have Arabic and Spanish among their working languages, one with Arabic and Spanish as active languages and the other with Spanish as the first language and Arabic as a passive language (see footnote on page 10). All other Arabic interpreters of this organization work with English and / or French.

This reality has direct implications for the student body of AR-SP interpretation, namely: if this policy does not change, they are required to have English or French as active languages in order to access the job opportunities offered by the UN. As there is no real indication that this situation may change in the short-medium term, it is necessary to alert the students that are trained in AR-SP interpretation in Spanish and Arab universities of this reality.

The AU, on the other hand, does not have AR-SP interpreters on its staff, but rather calls freelance professionals to cover specific events that are held "two or three times a year". This could be due to the small volume of work, on the one hand, and the budget constraints of this organization, on the other hand (see section 5.4).

5.6. Peculiarities of interpretation in Arabic and other languages

While the content of interpretation at the UN is "dominated by linguistic routines and normative phraseology" and " speeches rarely leave a previously defined framework", as claimed by one respondent, to interpret from and into Arabic requires universal and specific cultural knowledge of the Arab-Islamic world, since the Arabic rhetoric bases its register elevation on sociocultural references (poetry and proverbs) and religious intertextuality (Koran and Sunna). This is what subject 2 qualifies as "asymmetry" of Arabic with Indo-European languages.

In the case of the AU, it is insisted on these peculiarities that emerge during the practice of interpretation. Subject 4 argues that "Arabic seeks a more ornamental and elaborate way that creates real headaches when translating into another language such as Spanish or English."

In our doctoral thesis (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015, p. 290), in which we carried out a triangular study among professors, interpretation students and professional interpreters on the peculiarities of AR-SP interpretation, we reached the conclusion that:

> The main peculiarities detected are: the variety of registers, diglossia (standard modern Arabic and the dialectal varieties), code-switching , the variety of accents, the sociocultural factors, diatopic variation of the specialized terminology (in the signifier and/or in the meaning) and the frequent intertextuality of difficult interpretation (passages from the Koran, poetic quotations, etc.). This conclusion could also be extrapolated to other linguistic combinations that include Arabic and another Indo-European language (AR-AL, AR-FR, AR-IN, etc.), since, a priori, they have similar asymmetries.

These peculiarities could be a difficulty not only for the interpreters from Arabic to English / French, but for all other languages, since they would be taking the relay from the Arabic cabin, as confirmed by subject 1. This statement has been verified by Feria (2013, p. 47) in the field of the AR-SP translation of UN texts : "the two main pitfalls faced by the translation process of human rights texts written in Arabic and in other official languages of the United Nations when they include Islamic concepts: variation and idiosyncrasy».

In order to train in interpretation of Arabic, it would be advisable to offer methodological solutions and approach strategies, which will require the definition of a specific teaching approach that accentuates its differentiating characteristics, in the same sense indicated by authors like Wilss (1978) or Gile (1995), among others, for other pairs of asymmetric languages.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the set objectives, the obtained results and their subsequent analysis and discussion, we can conclude that:

1. The objectives proposed in this paper have been met, as we have been able to gather sufficient quantitative and qualitative data that have allowed us to better understand the state of professional practice of AR-SP interpretation at the UN and at the AU.

2. Arabic and Spanish are, for decades, two official and working languages of the UN and the AU. However, interpretation in Arabic and Spanish at the UN is rarely done directly. In order to interpret the two languages, the relay from English or French is used.

3. In the AU, direct interpretation in Arabic and Spanish is practiced, albeit in a still very small volume.

4. Conclusion 2 requires that the relay technique be addressed during AR-SP interpretation training, given its implications for professional practice (Mahyub Rayaa, 2015: 219-223 and Shlesinger, 2010: 277).

5. The UN has a body of Arabic interpreters composed of 37 registered professionals, mostly permanent (18) and temporary (17). The AU does not have AR-SP conference interpreters in its staff. To meet its needs for interpreters in this combination, it uses freelance professionals.

6. Among the linguistic profiles of the UN interpreters, the AR-SP linguistic combination is rarely found, although the two languages are official languages of this organization. The majority combinations with Arabic are English-Arabic and French-Arabic.

7. The linguistic profile suggests that the training of interpreters of Arabic and Spanish is not enough if you want to work in these international organizations, since you will always need English and/or French as active languages if you are going to work in the Arabic booth, passive languages if it is going to be done in the Spanish language. This fact has to be taken into consideration in the training of future AR-SP interpreters (Del Pino 2014 and Mahyub Rayaa 2015).

8. The Arabic booth, like that of the Chinese one, at the UN headquarters in New York, performs direct and inverse interpretation, which is why the teams of interpreters of these languages are composed of three professionals, instead of two. These booths work both ways throughout the multilingual event, which could imply that they perform reverse or retour interpretation.

9. The Arabic language in the field of interpretation, either from it into Indo-European languages or vice versa, has some peculiarities typical of its asymmetry with these languages. These peculiarities must be taken into account by the interpreters, just as they must be addressed with specific approaches during the training of Arabic interpreters (Feria 2013 and Mahyub Rayaa 2015).

The results of this exploratory paper encourage the development of future empirical research to study the effects of the relay on interpretation in Arabic and Spanish within the framework of the UN institutions, as well as the retour in the Arabic booth.

7. REFERENCES

Baigorri Jalón, J. (2000). *La interpretación de conferencias: El nacimiento de una profesión: De París a Nuremberg.* Granada: Comares.

Baigorri Jalón, J. (2003). La calidad de la interpretación simultánea en las Naciones Unidas en el cambio de milenio: reflexiones desde la cabina. En Á. Collados *et al.* (Eds.), *La evaluación de la calidad en interpretación: docencia y profesión* (pp. 239-248). Granada: Comares.

Baigorri Jalón, J. (2004). *Interpreters at the UN: A History*. Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad de Salamanca.

Colodrón Denis, V. (2001). El español, "lengua oficial africana". *Cuaderno de lengua: crónicas personales del idioma español,* 1. Recuperado de http://cuadernodelengua.com/cuaderno1.htm.

Del Pino Romero, J. (2014). La interpretación al español en las Organizaciones Internacionales y la formación de intérpretes de conferencias de lengua española. *V Congreso Internacional de Español para fines específicos*. Ámsterdam.

Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM). Recuperado de www.un.org/depts/DGACM/.

Feria García, M. (2013). Algunos obstáculos en el proceso traductor de textos de las naciones unidas sobre derechos humanos redactados en árabe, o redactados en otras lenguas oficiales si incluyen conceptos islámicos. En I. Alonso, J. Baigorri

& H. J. L. Campbell (Eds.),*Translating the Law. Theoretical and methodological issues* (pp. 47-55). Granada: Comares.

Gebhard, S. (2001). *Building Europe - or back to Babel?* Association International des Interprètes de Conférence (AIIC). Recuperado de http://aiic.net/page/526/lang/1.

Gile, D. (1995). *Basic Concepts and Modes for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Ámsterdam/Filadelfia: John Benjamins.

Haensch, G. (1965). *The technique and cunning of the diplomatic interpreter*, Múnich: Max Hueber Verlag.

Iglesias Fernández, E. (2007). *La didáctica de la interpretación de conferencias*. Granada: Comares.

Instituto Cervantes, Centro Virtual. (2012). *El español: una lengua viva. Informe 2012*. Recuperado de http://cvc.cervantes.es/lengua/anuario/anuario_12/i_cervantes/p01.htm.

International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC): https://aiic.net/.

Lewis, P., Simons, G., & Fennig, Ch. (Eds.) (2014). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition.* Texas: SIL International. Recuperado de http://ethnologue.com/17/language/arb/.

Mackintosh, J. (1995). A review of conference interpretation: practice and training. *Target* 7(1), 119-133.

Mahyub Rayaa, B. & Zarrouk, M. (2013). *Interpretación Simultánea (Árabe-Español). Método para la enseñanza-aprendizaje*. Toledo: Escuela de Traductores de Toledo.

Mahyub Rayaa, B. (2014). At-taʕaruf ʕala khasāʔis al-lugha al-ʕarabiya wa at-tassadī lahā fi tadrīs at-tarjama al-fawriya min al-ʕarabiya ʔila al-ʔisbaaniyah. En V. Aguilar *et al.* (Eds.), *Arabele 2012: Teaching and Learning the Arabic Language (pp. 221-232).* Murcia: Universidad de Murcia.

Mahyub Rayaa, B. (2015). *La interpretación simultánea árabe-español y sus peculiaridades. Docencia y profesión* (Tesis doctoral inédita). Granada: Universidad de Granada.

Mahyub Rayaa, B. (2017a). La evaluación del *retour* en interpretación simultánea árabe-español: transmisión del discurso original. *European Scientific Journal*, *13* (11), 261-279.

Mahyub Rayaa, B. (2017b). Directionality assessment in arabic-spanish simultaneous interpreting: the use of Spanish. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, *55*(1), 12-26.

Mikkelson, H. (1999). Course Profile: Relay Interpreting: A Solution for Languages of Limited Diffusion?. *The Translator 5* (2), 361-380.

Seleskovitch, D. & Lederer, M. (1989). *Pédagogie raisonnée de l´interprétation*. Paris: Didier Erudition.

Shlesinger, M. (2010). Relay Interpreting. En Y. Gambier & L. Doorslaer (Eds.), *Handbook of Translation Studies* (pp. 276-278)*.* Ámsterdam/Nueva York: John Benjamins.

UN Careers: https://careers.un.org/

Wilss, W.l (1978). Syntactic anticipation in German-English. En D. Gerver y W. Sinaiko (Eds.), *Language interpretation and communication* (pp. 343-352). Nueva York/Londres: Plenum Press.

AUTHOR

Bachir M. Rayaa
PHD in translation and interpretation from the University of Granada. Professor of Arabic –Spanish translation and interpretation at the UGR, where he teaches these subjects in grade and postgraduate studies. He is the author of works in this discipline and collaborates in national and international postgraduate programs.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5400-5374