

A tracer study of graduates of the ASTI interpreter training programme (2004-2008 and 2008-2017)

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Abstract

This article aims at highlighting some of the limitations of the two previous studies carried out by the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) on its products since its inception in 1985. It also aims at completing the picture by analysing data for the periods 2004-2008, and 2008-2017 which were not considered in previous studies, with particular focus on products from the interpretation programme. The first study is “A Tracer Study of Graduates of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) from 1987 to 2003”, published in 2004, 16 years after graduating the first batch of translators (1987), and 15 years after graduating the first batch of interpreters (1988). The second study, commissioned by the Cameroon Government (Ministry of Higher Education) in 1997 and carried out between December 1998 and April 1999, is entitled “Survey of the Translation and Interpretation Job Market in Cameroon”. The author uses the same questionnaire instrument as those pioneering studies to elicit and analyse data for the periods targeted. Through the products of the programme, the study offers an interesting insight of how the credit system under which the programme operated between 1993 and 2008 ended. It also reveals how the programme fared under the current BMD (Bachelor-Masters-Doctorate) system between 2008 and 2017. This contribution stands as a “continuation” of the earlier studies, thus providing a more

comprehensive appraisal of the path covered by ASTI through its Division II (interpretation) products. It comes at a timely moment to fill a serious gap highlighted in the literature.

Key words: ASTI, Cameroon job market, graduates, survey, tracer study

Résumé

Le présent article vise à mettre en évidence quelques lacunes des deux précédentes études de suivi menées par l'École supérieure de traducteurs et interprètes (ASTI) sur ses diplômés depuis sa création en 1985. Il vise également à compléter ce tableau en analysant les données des périodes 2004-2008 et 2008-2017 qui ne sont pas couvertes par les précédentes études. L'étude s'intéresse cependant exclusivement aux diplômés du programme d'interprétation. La première des deux études précédentes s'intitule « A Tracer Study of Graduates of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) from 1987 to 2003 » ; elle a été publiée en 2004, 16 ans après la sortie de la première promotion de traducteurs (1987) et 15 ans après la sortie de la première promotion d'interprètes (1988). La deuxième étude, commandée par le Gouvernement camerounais (Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur) en 1997 et menée entre décembre 1998 et avril 1999, s'intitule « Survey of the Translation and Interpretation Job Market in Cameroon ». L'auteur fait appel au même instrument de recherche (le questionnaire) que ces deux études pionnières pour obtenir et analyser les données fournies par les diplômés des deux périodes visées dans l'article. Grâce à cette analyse, l'étude propose un éclairage instructif sur les diplômés sortis entre 2004 et 2008 (dernière année du programme sous le système de crédits en vigueur depuis 1993) qui vient compléter les résultats de l'étude publiée en 2004. Elle dépeint également, grâce aux données recueillies auprès des diplômés sortis entre 2008 et 2017 [sous le système LMD (Licence-Master-Doctorat) toujours en vigueur], le parcours de ces derniers. Cette contribution se veut une « suite » des précédentes études et

présente un tableau plus complet du chemin parcouru par l'ASTI grâce à ce regard sur ses diplômés de la Division II (interprétation). Elle arrive à point nommé pour combler un vide béant laissé dans la littérature des études de suivi des diplômés de l'ASTI.

Mots-clés : ASTI, diplômés, enquête, étude de suivi des diplômés, marché camerounais du travail.

1. Introduction

Two major studies have been carried out on ASTI graduates, including graduates from its interpreter training programme since the graduation of the first batch in 1987: the first entitled "A Tracer Study of Graduates of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) from 1987 to 2003" (ASTI, 2004), and a second entitled "Survey of the Translation and Interpretation Job Market in Cameroon" (ASTI, 1999). Apart from these, no record exists of any study on ASTI Division II products between 2004 and 2008 when the programme was still operating under the Credit system, and between 2008 and 2017 when it operated under the BMP system. Azambou (2019:384) suggests and strongly recommends that the ASTI interpretation programme be evaluated at most after every ten years and not after thirty years as was the case when the very first comprehensive evaluation of the programme was presented and defended as a PhD thesis in 2019. For such a recommendation to have any pertinence, past evaluation attempts, including partial ones, must have covered continuous periods. In an attempt to close the gap noticed, this article uses a similar methodology to the one used for the two previous studies to enlarge the picture for a more comprehensive perception of what has become of graduates of the programme since it was created. It therefore replicates those studies for the 2004-2008 and 2008-2017 periods respectively. Virtually the same questions are asked to the

new population. However, unlike the previous studies that targeted both translator and interpreter graduates, the present article limits itself to interpreter graduates.

Justification of the study

The following sections attempt a justification to the present study.

Interpretation, not translation

“Translation is a cover term for a plethora of phenomena. The processes subsumed under the term translation can be interpersonal, psycholinguistic, intercultural, linguistic, textual, political, economic, but also cognitive and mental” (Dongho 2015:7). Likewise, translation is often a cover term both for the written (translation proper) and the oral (interpretation) form of translation. Therefore, as many of the processes involved both for written and spoken translation are similar or identical, many statements that apply to the one may apply to the other. However, this study targets specifically interpretation graduates, i.e. graduates from the oral translation programme, though it is carried out in an environment where several studies, including the ones previously mentioned on ASTI graduates, targeted mostly translation, yet claimed to bear on translation and interpretation.

2. Literature review

This section critically examines the previous works that are related to the current topic, including the ones the article is complementing.

The Cameroon interpretation job market and its stakeholders

Before the studies published in 1999 and 2004 respectively, it seems not to exist any serious study on an interpretation market in Cameroon where on the one side, there would be interpreters or interpretation services providers for the offer, and on the other,

interpretation services users for the demand. The aim of the 1999 study was to determine the needs of prospective employers in the public and private sectors. The study reached a number of conclusions and also made certain revelations in its nine (9) final summary points. Following are excerpts from some of those revelations:

Point number two: "Out of 277 translators and interpreters recruited in the Public Service, 73 have either left or are retired and 29 will retire in the next couple of years. [...]. About 150 translators/interpreters, will be needed in the next 5 years." (ASTI, 1999). In this recruitment data, a huge and prejudicial confusion is entertained between translators and interpreters; so much so that it is unclear among the figures presented how many interpreters are concerned.

Point number three:

Out of the 107 enterprises sampled in the private and parapublic sectors, 84 (78.5%) will need translators/interpreters in the near future. As a whole, expressed needs stand at 236 translators and interpreters comprising 183 for the national market and at least 53 for international organisations [...] (ASTI, 1999).

The above expression of needs does not make that of interpreters any clearer. It instead adds to confusion.

Point number four: "The study reveals that the overall need for translators and interpreters is about 439 distributed as follows: private enterprises and parastatals: 236 (53.16%); public service 150 (34.17%) and international organisations, 53 (12.07%)." (ASTI, 1999). The same confusion continues here in the expression of the overall needs, where still translators and interpreters are talked

about, not translators on the one side, and interpreters on the other.

Point number five: "Some translation services expressed the need for specialised translators/interpreters in certain areas such as medical translation." (ASTI, 1999). In the same line as above, it is unclear why 'translation services' should express the need not for translators, but for 'translators/interpreters'?

Point number six:

For cost effectiveness, most enterprises will prefer someone with a professional bachelor's degree in translation. This is true in the majority of cases, which is clear indication that nearly all enterprises consider a professional qualification as a guarantee for quality/reliable translation and interpretation. (ASTI, 1999)

An employee with a professional bachelor's degree in translation would probably be a guarantee for quality/reliable translation, but certainly not for quality/reliable interpretation.

Point number seven: "[...]. Some enterprises such as SNI, HYDRAC, SAGA, MOBIL, UCCAO and SNA function mostly in French. This trend needs to be reversed." (ASTI, 1999).

The report does not make it clear whether the observed trend is due to the total absence of translators or interpreters from these enterprises, or to other reasons. In any case, this seems a strange situation in an officially bilingual country like Cameroon.

Professional organizations in the Cameroon interpretation job market

In his foreword to the 2014 edition of the directory of the Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters of Cameroon (APTIC), its then President writes as follows:

As in previous editions, this 2014 APTIC directory is a platform for promoting and showcasing all the translators and interpreters who are members of the Association of Professional Translators and Interpreters of Cameroon (APTIC)-an Association that holds out translation and interpretation services for the local and international market. This edition has a two-fold objective in that regard: (i) protect the interests of the profession and (ii) guarantee service quality to clients and partners by giving them this Who is Who list in translation and interpretation (Tiga, 2014).

It appears clearly from this statement by the most authorized voice of the then lone professional association of translators and interpreters of Cameroon that: (1) the association accommodates both translators and interpreters; there is no professional association in Cameroon that brings together only interpreters. The latter therefore have no forum dedicated to looking only at interpreters and interpretation concerns. (2) It takes care only of those translators and interpreters who are members of the association. There is no membership obligation for young interpreter graduates who are released in the market every year, and who may start operating out of control from the association. Under such circumstances, they are under no obligation to respect any code of conduct or ethics. (3) The President, speaking obviously on behalf of the association, vows to “protect the interests of the profession”, but he blatantly fails to indicate how. In other words, it appears nowhere how the association will actually operate to fulfill this mission. Tiga (2014) also promises to “guarantee service quality to clients and partners by giving them

this Who is Who list in translation and interpretation". And the question goes as to know whether giving a Who is Who list in translation and interpretation can be enough to "guarantee service quality to clients and partners". One should have expected more stringent strategies to be envisaged for such an important endeavor for a profession; for example, using possible feedbacks from clients to call defaulters to order, among other possible measures. For this to be possible, there is need to have full control over the stakeholders of the interpretation market in Cameroon.

The observations made under section 2.2.1 could have gone unnoticed if the report had been produced just by any stakeholder of the translation/interpretation complex of Cameroon. It was produced by ASTI, the then lone translation/interpretation training institution in Cameroon. The confusion or mix-up between translators and interpreters indicates that at the time of the report, the distinction between both disciplines had not made enough impact for authors to consider separating both categories. The changes that have occurred in both global and local environments of the programme(s) call for redress in subsequent studies. The above language was therefore deliberate and legitimate; however, its repetition in further studies would create some discomfort in the reader's mind. It is public knowledge that ASTI has three separate divisions: the first two are Division I in charge of translator education, and Division II in charge of interpreter education. It is unclear whether the interrelations between both training programs may enable a final ASTI graduate from either program to operate equally as a translator or as an interpreter. Only a special program bearing both on translation and interpretation could enable interactions likely to graduate products that would show proof of both translation and interpretation aptitudes. Only then can a study indifferently and

legitimately mention translators and interpreters as its object. Whether the present study which targets exclusively interpreter graduates of ASTI will reveal similar trends is an interesting question to ask. Such a question increases the timeliness of this study which brings more clarity on the fate of ASTI interpreter graduates of the targeted periods.

Other findings of the previous studies

Another important category of stakeholders in the interpretation job market of Cameroon are potential employers. Even though the report of the 1999 study commissioned by the Cameroon Government has the weakness of lumping together translators and interpreters, it has the merit of clearly identifying the main employers in the Cameroon interpretation job market. Thus, it states the following:

Over 90% of the graduates are employed in the public service; a good number work in international organisations such as OAU, WHO, UN on a full time or part time basis. Others started working as translators in SONARA, SOWEDA, BICEC, AMITY BANK, INSURANCE COMPANIES – CNA, SATELLITE, etc. now hold managerial positions [sic]. Some have been appointed to senior positions in the Administration (ASTI, 1999:1).

As of the time of publication of the study, up to 90% of the graduates were employed in the public service. Though the figure does not apply to interpreters specifically, one can imagine that their percentage is not quite different from what applies to both translators and interpreters. One thing worth noting is that translators and interpreters, unlike in the public service where “there seems to be no upward mobility as far as their careers are

concerned unlike in other professions in the Public Service” (ASTI, 1999:2), can more easily be promoted to managerial positions in private enterprises. Even if “some have been appointed to senior positions in the Administration” (ASTI, 1999:1), this might simply be the exception that proves the rule. It is not indicated that the said managerial positions are still related to interpretation. It would be interesting to find out whether the trend has been maintained, and whether this reality is factored into the current curriculum.

Besides, the report fails to mention two categories which are increasingly occupying space in the employment scenery. These are NGOs and freelancing. One reason for this weakness may be that at the time of drafting, the phenomenon of NGOs was not as developed as in these recent years. Freelancing also was not as developed and attractive as it is nowadays.

When asked for the reasons which motivated them into choosing interpretation as their future career, many candidates in the competitive entrance examination into Division II (Interpretation) of ASTI regularly mention good earnings among other motivating factors; yet, the final report of the ASTI (1999:2) survey of the translation and interpretation job market in Cameroon states as follows:

With the drastic reduction of the salaries of civil servants, the financial situation of most translators and interpreters is alarming. In addition, there seems to be no upward mobility as far as their careers are concerned unlike in other professions in the Public Service. Even though decree No. 98/273 of 22 October 1998 reorganizing the Presidency of the Republic creates several positions for translators and

interpreters, the general feeling is that it will benefit mostly those who are privileged to work in the Presidency. Consequently, even though quite a good number welcome the change, many of those in the ministries and other establishments think that they should be made to benefit from such decrees.

It is therefore clear that the financial motivating factor holds only if the future interpreter envisages seeking employment out of the Cameroon Public Service which offers neither salary satisfaction nor career profile satisfaction, except for those interpreters who may be lucky enough to work in the Presidency. Thus, there exist a good number of frustrations in the profession at the level of the Cameroon Public Service. But the Cameroon interpretation market is not limited to its Public Service.

Many of the interpreters who finally leave the Cameroon Public Service are employed by local international organizations or local private institutions. The 1999 survey reveals that 28% of enterprises use interpreters in international conferences, 17.7% of enterprises use them in board meetings, 11.2% during guided tours and 12.1% on other occasions. According to the figures, out of the Public Service, international conferences are the settings where interpreters are most needed. Indeed,

Popularly, it is believed that a translator is an interpreter and vice versa. While most of the officials feel that they are bilingual enough to do without interpreters. Others simply think that trained interpreters would not have the technical expertise to work in their enterprise. In general, there is a lack of awareness of what the interpreter's work is and of the usefulness of interpretation. However, in international

organizations [sic], interpreters are in very high demand (ASTI, 1999:9).

If the correlation between high demand and adequate treatment as known in economics is respected, it can easily be anticipated that unlike in the public service where political reasons among others may motivate the recruitment of interpreters, the latter are recruited in international organizations because their usefulness is understood; their earnings will therefore be more substantial.

The report also indicates that the cumulative needs of enterprises and parastatals and international organizations stand at 65.83% of the national total need for translators and interpreters. Even though the figure does not discriminate between the need for translators and the need for interpreters, it can be imagined that the trend is similar in both cases separately. It is not clear whether this reality is factored enough into the ASTI interpretation curriculum. There should be components in the curriculum and the teaching methods and practices which clearly prepare graduates to operate in other settings than the public service. Internship sessions for example must target both the public service on the one hand, and enterprises, parastatals and international organizations on the other.

3. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical management-oriented CIPP (Context-Input-Process-Product), and investigates more specifically products of the ASTI interpreter training program between 2004 and 2008, and between 2008 and 2017. As a systems-based model of program evaluation, the CIPP model was developed by Daniel Stufflebeam from 1971 onwards. Its original purpose was to “delineate, obtain, and provide useful information

for judging decision alternatives” (Stufflebeam, 1971:267). The model distinguishes four types of evaluation:

- Context evaluation – which helps in planning and developing objectives;
- Input evaluation – which helps to determine the design by examining capability, resources and different strategies;
- Process evaluation – which helps to control operations by providing on-going feedback;
- Product evaluation – which helps to judge and react to the program attainment in terms of output and outcomes.

Evaluating the “Product” aspect of a program consists in gathering information regarding the results of the educational intervention to interpret its worth and merit. This paper specifically gathers and analyses information regarding the graduates of the ASTI interpreter training program between 2004 and 2008, and between 2008 and 2017 to fill a gap noticed in previous studies that have targeted the “results” of that particular intervention in the past.

4. Methodology

The present study proceeds from the fact that the two previous studies it intends to complement left out serious periodic gaps that must be filled: the 2004-2008 period and the 2008-2017 period. As a study commissioned by the ASTI administration following a considerable change in the job market and considering other factors like the time factor, the methodology of the 2004 tracer study used a questionnaire as data collection instrument. It covered four years more than the 1999 survey. It is “somehow complementary to that *Survey of the Translation and Interpretation Job Market in Cameroon*” (ASTI, 2004:4). As a replication of these previous studies, this article also uses a quantitative approach

with a questionnaire as its data collection instrument. The same questions were asked to the research population, as this research is complementary to the above-mentioned tracer studies, but limited to interpreter-graduates.

5. Data presentation and analysis

The survey instrument was administered as follows:

Administration of the survey instrument

The graduates were sampled for the periods 2004-2008 and 2008-2017. For 2004-2008, a total of 19 were administered the questionnaire and 10 effectively participated in the study, making a return rate of 52.6%; for the 2008-2017 period, a total of 34 were administered the questionnaire and 22 effectively participated, making a return rate of 64.7%. By way of reminder, the total intake for the 2004-2008 period stands at 31; out of this number, 7 dropped out, leaving the number at 24 (Azambou, 1999:351). For the 2008-2017 period, the total intake stands at 86; out of this number, 52 dropped out, leaving the number at 34 (Azambou, 1999:351). Thus, for the 2004-2008 period, 19 graduates out of 24 (79%) were administered the questionnaire, and for the 2008-2017 period, 34 graduates out of 34 (100%) were administered the questionnaire. Altogether for both periods, 53 participants were administered the questionnaire and 32 effectively participated in the study, giving an overall return rate of 60.4%. Table 1 summarizes the results.

Table 1: State of data collected

Instrument code	Instrument label	Issued			Returned			Return rate		
		Online	Hardcopy	Total	Online	Hardcopy	Total	Online	Hardcopy	Total
1	ASTI graduates (tracer study) 2004-2008	12	7	19	4	6	10	21.1	85.7	52.6
2	ASTI graduates (tracer study) 2008-2017	28	6	34	17	5	22	50.0	83.3	64.7
Total tracer study 2004-2017		40	13	53	21	11	32	39.6	84.6	60.4

Indeed, it was noticed that the response rate from the internet was not up to the expectations; this situation justified and reinforced the need to administer physical versions of the questionnaires.

Language combination

The language combination of graduates was almost equally shared between English A-French B 46.9% (4) and French A-English B 50.0% (5). Table 2 summarizes the results.

Table 2: Language combination of graduates for the 2004-2008 and 2008-2017 tracer study

Language combination of graduates	2004-2008		2008-2017		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
English A-French B	4	40.0	11	50	15	46.9
Fr (A)-Eng (B)-Spa (C)	1	10.0	0	0	1	3.1
French A-English B	5	50.0	11	50	16	50.0
Total	10	100.0	22	100	32	

Where working at the moment

The 2004-2008 graduates were mostly working at the National Assembly while the 2008-2017 were mostly working as freelance professionals. Table 3 summarizes the results.

Table 3: Where graduates are working at the moment

Where graduates are working at the moment	2004-2008		2008-2017		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
ASTI	1	10.0	2	9.1	3	9.4
DLB/SG/PRC	1	10.0	0	0	1	3.1
Freelance	2	20.0	11	50.0	13	40.6
National Assembly Cameroon	4	40.0	0	0	4	12.5
Presidency of the Republic of Cameroon	1	10.0	1	4.5	2	6.3
Unemployed	0	0	2	9.1	2	6.3
Work in Libreville	0	0	1	4.5	1	3.1
Ministry of defense	0	0	3	13.6	3	9.4
Prime Minister office	0	0	1	4.5	1	3.1
Projects	0	0	1	4.5	1	3.1
MINEDUB	1	10.0	0	0	3	3.1
Total	10	100.0	22	100	32	100.0

Type of jobs for graduates

The 2004-2008 graduates were mostly permanent workers while the 2008-2017 were mostly freelance professionals. Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4: Type of jobs for graduates

Type of job	2004-2008		2008-2017		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Freelance	2	20.0	11	50.0	13	40.6
Permanent	8	80.0	7	31.8	15	46.9
Do freelance work though working as a permanent staff	8	80.00	9	40.9	17	53.1
Total	10	100.0	22	100	32	100

This table shows that from the 2004-2008 group to the 2008-2017 group, it has become harder for interpreters to find permanent jobs, since the percentage of permanent jobs dropped from 80.0% to 31.8%. It should be reminded that the first group is made up of PGD Translators/Interpreters graduates while the second is Masters’ Degree Interpreters graduates.

Positions held by graduates

A question was asked about the position held by graduates. Out of the 10 graduates of the 2004-2008 who effectively participated in the study, 8 had an administrative position, making 80.0% as against 50.0% (11 who held an administrative position out of 22 who effectively participated in the study) for the 2008-2017 graduates.

Promotion

The majority of graduates 75.0% (6) from the 2004-2008 group were promoted since they started working and 63.6% (7) for the 2008-2017 group.

Continuous training

The question was asked as to knowing if the respondent would like to enroll as a student if there is a PhD in interpreting studies at ASTI. In overall, the majority 53.1% (17) of graduates would like to

enroll as a student if there is a PhD in interpreting studies at ASTI and this interest is more pronounced among the 2008-2017 graduates with proportion of 59.1% (13) as against 40.0% (4) for the 2004-2008 group. One explanation here would be that the BMP system directly enables Master's graduate who qualify to enroll for a PhD whereas with the 2004-2008 PGD group, their certificate did not enable enrolling onto a PhD program. Another detail worthy of note is that some respondents (10.0% for the 2004-2008 group, and 13.6% for the 2008-2017 group) would enroll for a PhD Degree but on scholarship. It is therefore thought that scholarships could be offered to encourage students further their studies at PhD level, especially in areas like interpreting studies to encourage research. Worthy of note, 4.5% of Master's graduates of the program (2008-2017 group) are already enrolled into a PhD program in translation studies.

Computer literacy

Graduates generally perceived to be computer literate with proportion of 96.9% (31), the same proportion makes use of ICT in the course of performing their interpretation tasks. All of them however would like to enroll and request their Ministry or Service to sponsor them if there is a 4-6 weeks intensive course on the role of ICTs in improving interpreters' career.

School alumni/social network

Graduates' network was poorly maintained as in overall, only 37.5% (12) of them knew the names and addresses of some classmates or colleagues who have left the public service for the private sector or got jobs abroad and this proportion dropped from 50% (5) for the 2004-2008 group to 31.8% (7) for the 2008-2017 group. Ties among classmates loosen with time when they are not all in the public service.

Research development

Interest in research increased over time as 40.0% (4) of the 2004-2008 graduates would like to be affiliated to a research team at ASTI as against 72.7% (16) for the 2008-2017 group. It would be important and timely to find ways of keeping this interest in research.

6. Discussion

A total of 46.9% (4) of English A-French B, 50.0% (5) of French A-English B, and 3.1% (1) of French A-Eng B-Spa C from the 2004-2008 interpreter graduates participated in this study, as against a total of 50.0% (11) of English A-French B, 50.0% (11) of French A-English B from the 2008-2017 interpreter graduates. The results show that most graduates of the 2004-2008 period were permanent workers while most graduates of the 2008-2017 period were freelance professionals. This suggests that from the former Credit system which ended in 2008 to the BMP system which was effective from 2008, the products of the program went more and more freelance professionals. By way of reminder, from the year 2000, “public sector employment became allegedly saturated and graduates from the university had to turn to the private sector for employment” (Azambou, 2019:2-3). Thus, after 2008 (PGD Translators/Interpreters graduates), it became harder for Masters’ Degree Interpreters graduates to find permanent jobs (drop of permanent jobs in percentage from 80.0% to 31.8%). It calls for further investigation as to knowing whether the BMP reform might have had such an impact on employability in terms of permanent jobs.

As of the time of data collection (2018), the study shows that from the 2004-2008 to the 2008-2017 group, it had become harder for young graduates to find a job (permanent or not). From the

statistics, it is clear that the market has narrowed down and that new ways of reopening up and re-extending the market should be devised.

Concerning career profiles, there was no dominant position held by graduates of both groups. As for the 2004-2008 group, the positions they held were very diversified with equal weight of 12.5%. They were Head of English Booth, Chargé d'études, Instructor, Head of Division, Research Assistant, Research Officer, Senior Research Officer, Translator/Senior translator and Translator/Interpreter. Concerning the 2008-2017 group, they were Translator/Interpreter (20.0%), Translator/Senior translator (20.0%), or Instructors (20.0%), and Chargé d'études (10.0%), Research Assistant (10.0%), Research Officer (10.0%), or Interpreter (10.0%). None of them was Head of English Booth, Head of Department/Division or Senior Research Officer.

A good number of graduates have enjoyed promotions since they started working (75.0% (6) for the 2004-2008 group, and 63.6% (7) for the 2008-2017 group. In all, 53.1% (17) of graduates would like to enroll as students if there is a PhD in interpreting studies at ASTI and this interest is more pronounced among the 2008-2017 graduates with a proportion of 59.1% (13) as against 40.0% (4) for the 2004-2008 group. One explanation here could be that the BMP system directly enables Masters graduates who qualify to enroll for a PhD whereas their certificate did not enable the 2004-2008 PGD group enroll directly into a PhD program. The BMP system therefore offers more perspectives to the best graduates of the Master's interpretation program for enrolment for PhD studies. It was noticed that 4.5% of Master's graduates of the program (2008-2017 group) are already enrolled into a PhD program in translation studies, with the option to carry out their research in

the area of conference interpreting. Another detail worthy of note is that some respondents (10.0% for the 2004-2008 group, and 13.6% for the 2008-2017 group) would enroll for a PhD Degree but on scholarship. It is therefore thought that offering scholarships could encourage students further their studies at PhD level, especially in areas like interpreting studies where research is still in its infancy in Cameroon.

As concerns computer literacy, graduates generally perceived to be computer literate with a proportion of 96.9% (31), the same proportion makes use of ICT in the course of performing their interpretation tasks. All of them however, would like to enroll and request their Ministry or Service to sponsor them if there is a 4-6 weeks intensive course on the role of ICTs in improving interpreters' career.

Graduates' network was poorly maintained, as only 37.5% (12) of them knew the names and addresses of some classmates or colleagues who have left the public service for the private sector or picked up jobs abroad and this proportion dropped from 50% (5) for the 2004-2008 group to 31.8% (7) for the 2008-2017 group. Ties among classmates loosen with time when they are not all in the public service. Yet, professional ties are useful in that generally, interpreters are recruiters among themselves, for they always work as teams.

Finally, interest in research increased over time as 40.0% (4) of the 2004-2008 graduates would like to be affiliated to a research team at ASTI as against 72.7% (16) for the 2008-2017 group. It would be important and timely to find ways of keeping this interest in research.

7. Conclusion

The “Tracer Study of Graduates of the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) from 1987 to 2003” (ASTI, 2004), and the “Survey of the Translation and Interpretation Job Market in Cameroon” (ASTI, 1999) had the main limitation of targeting both graduates from Division I (translation) and from Division II (interpretation), thereby entertaining some confusion as to whether their findings apply to graduate translators or interpreters. Also, these studies did not cover the periods 2004-2008 and 2008-2017, leaving a serious historical gap that the present article fills at a time when ASTI is celebrating its ruby jubilee (40th anniversary). The article, for the first time, exclusively targeted interpreter graduates since the institution started that program in 1987. The contribution also stands as one of the manifestations at ASTI, of the irreversible turn that conference interpreting studies and conference interpreting research (CIR) took in the mid-to-late 20th century when they started setting aside from translation studies. The study calls for further studies on the program’s graduates, especially

1) to cover the periods from 2018 after data collection, for the Tracer study from 1987 to 2003 (ASTI, 2004:30) states the following:

The *alma mater* of a professionally-oriented training institution like ASTI is also key to its growth, especially when alumni are organized into associations. Alumni are indeed in a better position to indicate how adapted the training they receive is and, where necessary, make constructive suggestions for improvement.

2) to assess interpreters’ employment situation after the Cameroon Government’s decision through a Press Release of 20th November

2019 to recruit five hundred (500) translators and translators/interpreters into the Public Service over a period of five (5) years.

This calls for further studies on the graduates of the program for feedback is all the more important as the profession and its practice are going through profound changes in this time of artificial intelligence when no area seems to be spared by innovation. Some tracer studies may also be carried out on the program's graduates outside Cameroon in order to assess the dynamics between interpreter training in ASTI and the forces of globalization.

It is hoped that this article contributes in providing that necessary constructive feedback the interpreter training program of ASTI needs from its graduates for improvement.

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