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Standing Committee for the Humanities
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Las Palmas, 13 June 2011

Dear Professor Fuchs,

I am writing to you in your capacity as Head of the Standing Committee for the Humanities of the ESF. This is a public letter regarding the vexed position of Translation & Interpreting Studies (TIS, henceforth) as a discipline within the terms of reference of the SCH, as made apparent by the distorted portrayal of the quality of some TIS journals in the 2011 ERIH rankings.

Many of the 4,000+ European translation scholars negatively affected by the ERIH assessment of TIS journals work in Spain. We have an Iberian TIS learned society, AIEI, which I have the honor of representing. Your website claims that “feedback and structured stakeholder involvement will lead to revisions and updates of the lists”. I therefore consider that you might be interested in what I have to say: this is feedback, I represent many stakeholders, and we want to be involved to pave the way for both a revision and an update of the ERIH list.

The ERIH webpage states that, in order to create the rankings, “a list of core disciplines was identified as central to the European humanities community”. TIS has no separate listing of translation and interpreting publications, which implies that our field was not considered central to the European humanities community. I know that researchers often tend to think that their own fields are of fundamental concern to all, so I will not bother you with my potentially biased point of view. Instead, I wish to remind you of yours.

Your webpage declares the function of the SCH to be to explore “the origins and products of the human capacity for creativity and communication”. If this is the perspective that informs decisions regarding which fields make it onto the list, no one in the SCH could ever imagine that translation and interpreting is not a central concern to the European humanities community. Evidence to the contrary is so incontrovertible that I can only conclude the exclusion of TIS has been an oversight. How else could the SCH seriously aim to encourage an “exchange between different currents and traditions of Humanities research”—indeed, of any kind of research—but through translation?

In fact, TIS and ESF's views on translation and interpreting do not seem too far apart. The ESF database of publications in the humanities includes Burke & Po-Chia's (2007) *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*. The entry portrays ESF as a corporate author as well, and the—probably ESF approved—abstract reads (my italics):

Although translation is *central* to the transmission of ideas, the history of translation has generally been *neglected* by historians, who have left it to *specialists in literature and language*.

I cannot but agree with this statement. Indeed, not only its history but also TIS as a whole has been neglected by Academia. Translation scholars contend that “language and literature” is too wide a label to be of any use. Finding a translation scholar (or a cognitive linguist, for that matter) by looking for a language and literature specialist is like expecting to find a genome researcher by searching through people working in the life sciences. You will no doubt find some, but you will have overwhelmingly more misses than hits.

Under this generic umbrella of language and literature you may find, among others, people who work on literature and on technical writing, people who know how to describe language in general (linguists) or just individual languages (language specialists), people who analyze the norms of language (grammarians and stylistics scholars), specialists in language learning (applied linguistics, first and second language acquisition) and specialists in connections between the use of different languages in different contexts (TIS). All these profiles may seem close to each other, but only to outsiders. Is not obtaining insiders' views the objective of ERIH procedures?

Well, this insider would like to call your attention on the fact that TIS is not considered a branch of linguistics any longer, because its true interdisciplinary nature has already gained recognition, however slowly. For instance, Spain has university research organized into knowledge domains and the government removed the terms *Applied Linguistics* from the label of domain 814, “Translation and Interpreting” back in 1996. This was done because it is nearly common knowledge that, although some translation scholars do work within linguistic frameworks, many others adopt approaches from e.g. Communication Studies, Cognitive Science, Literary Criticism & Theory, or Computer science.

In the last 30 years, when both postgraduate and undergraduate translation and interpreting programs in Europe have more than doubled, TIS has become much more important, both in Academia and in society in general. Just search for the word translation at the ESF website and you will be amazed at the variety of the 460 documents listed. Of course, you might argue that the need for translation and interpreting and the need for TIS are two different things. However, as a learned body, I think the SCH should be interested in the study of the tools it uses to reach its goals. That is, plainly, good science, and you do not need me to elaborate on that.

Thus far I think it can be said that our perspectives are similar and that your goals can only be attained by actively supporting not only translation and interpreting but also TIS. Hence, there must be something else behind this oversight. I have been seeking a cogent reason for the absence of TIS. It cannot be a problem of the homogeneity of approaches and orientations of researchers within the field, for Gender Studies and Religious Studies have panels and they are at least as varied as TIS. It cannot be social or economic importance. It cannot either be the number of publications; with over 100 specialized academic journals and over 50,000 academic publications (90% published in the last 30 years), TIS is far larger than Classical Studies and Archeology, which have their own panels.

Finally, I was left with only one obvious answer. If we dig deep enough into any discipline, we inevitably uncover unjustified assumptions, political decisions and beliefs of all parties involved on questions that actually shape disciplines. In this case, the answer seems to be that all these other panels had at least one champion on the SCH board. For instance, many scholars might have mistakenly included Musicology within a panel for the Arts or, rather, might have proposed one panel for each of the main art forms, but Musicology is the only art form to have its own panel. And the only one to have an SCH member. This is by no means an exception within ESF. In the Social Sciences, Demography is apart from Geography—which is surprising for an outsider—and the SCSS has two members from Departments of Human Geography, i.e., Demography.

By this, I do not mean there was any intentional wrongdoing, but the downgrading of TIS journals has coincided with the retirement of the prestigious translation scholar Andrew Chesterman, who was active on the SCH Linguistics panel until 2008. Hence, TIS seems to have a problem of visibility within the SCH. This could also explain why the ranking fails to list many TIS journals, especially those in languages other than English. For example, ERIH has excluded 11 out of 15 scholarly TIS journals from Spain, and there are no journals from Portugal or Latin America, either in Spanish or in Portuguese. Not even the reputed Brazilian journal *Cadernos de Tradução*. Of course, some of these journals do not meet ERIH's stated requisites, so it is logical that they are not on the list. But others are at least comparable to journals that made it into the ranking.

Reviewing often entails evaluating. ERIH may well declare that the ranking is not “intended as bibliometric information for use in assessment processes of individual candidates, be it for positions, promotions, research grant awards, etc.” but this is barely credible. These are the only reasons for choosing, evaluating, and classifying journals. This is what a reference index is, a “way to systematize and present achievements”. This is what your 2008 Vienna conference was about. This is why you state that ERIH “has triggered lively debate among humanities researchers and funders on topics such as research evaluation, impact assessment, bibliometrics, and publication cultures in the humanities”. And this is why our colleagues from EST feel dismayed with the 2011 ranking and suggest that affiliates do not to use ERIH.

I recognize that the current merger of ESF and EUROHORCs is not the best moment to introduce changes in ERIH, but it is now that the new rankings have been published and this is therefore a decisive moment. We are not just dealing with some offended editor or with the wounded pride of a certain trend within language and literature studies. It is definitely not a problem of resisting accountability for quality and results in the humanities, for TIS has always been in the forefront in this regard. We are talking about jobs, tenure, accreditation, research funding, department and institute development, and the public image of the discipline as a whole. The SCH states it is “well aware that the ESF is the only European agency where the Humanities have a place next to the other sciences and where European projects are reviewed, developed and subsequently operated”. No wonder our colleagues from CATS are requesting an explanation for the downgrading of *Meta* and *TTR* (a request AIETI supports).

Nonetheless, we consider the whole affair to be a mistake, part of the process of building ERIH. I see that there is an ongoing adaptive process within ERIH, because Anthropology and History & Philosophy of Science have been reaccommodated. This is exactly what I think should happen with TIS. I would like to suggest that the SCH include at least one translation scholar in its number and that there be a separate panel for TIS. We have scholars such as Mona Baker (UK), Javier Franco (Spain), Daniel Gile (France), Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit (Finland), Luc van Doorslaer (Belgium), Gerd Wotjak (Germany), who might be interested and whose help would certainly be invaluable in redressing this situation (they have not been consulted, but I would be happy to do so). Of course, I would not venture to tell you what to do. I am merely suggesting that this problem may be easily dealt with, to every one's satisfaction, in your plenary meeting in November or even at your Helsinki meeting. Meanwhile, I would request that you reply to this letter.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ricardo Muñoz', with a stylized flourish below it.

Ricardo Muñoz
President of AIETI