

Selim Earls – Research Statement

My professional work has been in two separate fields of applied language study. The first of those two fields is translation and interpretation. My academic research to date has both been inspired by and fed into that experience. After obtaining a Bachelor's degree in the language and history of modern China from the University of Pennsylvania and a Master's degree in simultaneous interpretation from the University of La Laguna in Spain, I began a thirty-year career working at the European Union. My duties there have included two-way translation and interpretation between Modern Greek and English, and from several other languages into those two. Some of the languages I've worked from – such as Mandarin, Hungarian and Turkish – present particular structural challenges for simultaneous interpretation.

That experience led to the dissertation for my second Master's degree, at the University of Geneva, on the challenges of simultaneous interpretation between languages with inverse structure. I later co-wrote the lead article for a book on the history and practice of interpretation in Turkey, which explored the effectiveness of techniques for coping with syntactic differences in interpretation between Turkish and English. My ongoing PhD thesis, building on eleven years of teaching and studying at the University of Louvain in Belgium, extends my previous research, but with a more empirical approach and a broader scope. My thesis first proposes an original method for parsing complex sentences semantically rather than syntactically. It then uses that method to collect and analyze statistics on indicators of difficulty in standard written translation, subtitle translation and simultaneous interpretation. The analysis examines difficulty associated with translation and interpretation from English into Russian, Hungarian, Turkish, Mandarin and Japanese.

The second field in which I have trained and worked professionally for many years is teaching Modern Greek to adults. I have taught numerous courses and workshops in Modern Greek at the European Union. That instruction has covered general language acquisition, as well as more focused areas such as simultaneous interpretation from Greek, modern Greek culture and politics, subtle aspects of Greek phonetics and grammar, Puristic Greek, understanding fast spoken Greek, Greek legal language, as well as specialized terminology from various social and scientific domains.

This is the next field into which I plan to extend my research activity – though I'm not yet sure what my specific subject of study will be. I know from experience what methods and approaches are most effective in teaching Modern Greek as a foreign language. And I plan to devote the next part of my academic career to exploring how such methods and approaches can be systematically identified and refined.