Conclusions

Translator Profile

What skills for a changing market?
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Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission

Background

On 29 September 2011 the EC Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) organised a **Symposium on the Translator Profile**, where experts from the European Master's in Translation (EMT) Network, European institutions, language industry and former winners of the Juvenes Translatores translation contest gathered in Brussels to tackle the challenges the translation profession is facing today.

Some of the questions addressed were: *Is the profession changing as a result of the changes in society, and how? Which skills are essential for translators to adapt to the new scenarios, and which can we expect to be required in the future? What do employers expect from translators? What do they expect from universities and training institutions? What do translators expect from their employers and customers? What are the expectations and needs of the clients and how can we best respond to them? Are the requirements for translators working in the private and public sectors different and, if so, to what extent?*

The fruitful debates, panels and workshops carried out throughout the day resulted in a set of forward-looking conclusions summed up in the conclusions and recommendations drafted by the three respective workshops on **Perspective for translation professions**, **Institutional Translator Training** and **Professionalisation and Employability**. These conclusions are presented by workshop in the following pages.

Main conclusions
A few points came up repeatedly and in different contexts and perspectives, showing how a general agreement can be reached among all actors when it comes to the requirements and future perspectives.

- First of all, everybody agrees that the image of translators as lone figures, working in their rooms shut away in front of their computers, belongs to the past. Today translation has become a "social" profession, where **team work** is a must and the ability to **interact and network efficiently** and effectively has become an essential requirement. Translators need to be able to interact with their clients, to sell their services, and to understand what they need. Cooperation and exchanges with colleague translators are also important, as is the ability to work with IT experts to exploit to the full the opportunities offered by the new technologies.
- Secondly, words like flexibility, adaptability and, more generally, **mind-openness** have also been a sort of *leitmotiv*, accompanying the whole debate. When speaking about flexibility, the first thing which comes to mind is the **willingness to use the new technologies** which have been strongly impacting the profession in the past years. Flexibility, however, should be understood in a wider sense, notably as willingness to perform new tasks, side by side with the actual translation, e.g. project management, marketing, budgeting, and relations with the clients.
- The training of translators, including the continuing training and the re-training of experienced translators, is another burning issue. The whole responsibility of training cannot be left to universities. More **synergies** should be created among the various actors, notably **training institutions and the industry**, to offer well adapted and targeted training opportunities. Traineeships and internships – for students but also for trainers – should be promoted and should become a generalised practice. In this respect the cooperation and synergy between the academic world and the industry could and should be reinforced and new strategies should be explored.

1. ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY

The use of translation tools and automated translation will increase due to the sheer volume of material to be translated. The job of the translator will become more diverse with increased use of tools such as machine translation.

What benefits do MT systems bring and what challenges do we face?

Many of the large corporations are already successfully implementing in-house machine translation for a variety of purposes. Microsoft has mastered machine translation for its white papers and developer site, and Symantec uses hybrid human/MT workflows for all of their materials.

The Big Bang of MT came when Google began offering statistical machine translations of websites, asking their users to improve translations for free. The idea of "free" translation has had both a positive and negative affect on the perception of translation in general. Many users of Google Translator's Toolkit and other free web translation tools underestimate or are simply unaware of the consequences on intellectual property rights when using free online tools. Non-professional use of statistical MT is increasing, and many translators seem unable to combine pre-translation with proper post-editing, so that final results are often substandard.

In light of this, the most pressing issues seem to be:
- What will the role of the translator be with these systems in the future?
- Will translators become post-editors or MT drafters?
- Are these tasks meant for other groups of people with different linguistic training and backgrounds?
- Will translators become system developers (for rule-based systems or hybrid statistical MT and CAT systems)?

How widespread can MT become?

MT is not made for every type of document, nor every language pair. Some language pairs, such as English/Spanish, are far more advanced than others, such as French/Russian, and this must be taken into consideration when generalizing the success of MT in the future. This discrepancy is due to the lack of existing translations for these languages pairs as well as the very minimal demand for MT for these language pairs. The cost of setting up an MT system for a particular language pair and the continued development involved in maintaining and improving a system for use would by far outweigh the benefits of the system in such cases.

With the increasing use of MT in a number of language pairs, will this put more pressure on other language pairs to prepare systems for them? Will pre-editing and system tuning be higher in demand in niche language pairs once use with more mainstream language pairs becomes more widespread and more successful?

In some market sectors, the fact that a company does not use MT is becoming a selling point, a mark of quality. This may indicate that the presence of MT will further accentuate the

fragmentation of the market. Some companies may choose to concentrate on high-level human language services, and buy in their technology needs.

Is MT better than bad human translation?

From a cost-benefit perspective, this may indeed be the case. However, there is a risk of overuse of MT, and the translator must still learn to translate and possess and continue to possess an above-average command of their respective language, otherwise they will remain at the bottom end of the market.

What other technology may influence our profession and the perspectives of the translator in the future?

Without a crystal ball, it is difficult to know what other tools we may use in the future. Speech recognition software has not seen widespread use in our industry with the exception of niche markets, although this may change with the spread of multimedia content and the need for translation of it into various languages. dotSUB, for example, uses it to script some of its content for translation.

2. EFFECTS ON THE FUTURE OF THE PROFESSION

How will technology affect the future of our industry in the coming five years?

There is a fear that technology could cause the deprofessionalisation of the translator as it becomes more accessible to those who cannot translate but can implement automation to provide the service.

Many organizations are already using crowdsourcing for translation without maintaining control. Many amateurs translate within these groups, some for free, others for pay.

To prevent or undermine deprofessionalisation, some corporations only hire translation graduates, but many also only hire from certain institutions because the quality of training varies greatly.

There will always be good translators and there will always be a need for good translators. There are markets for all types of translation, e.g. crowdsourced, volunteer, high-standard, etc.

For those who translate with a passion, how can they turn that into a living?

There has been an explosion in translator training programmes in an attempt to produce more qualified translators to meet the demand for translation. However, the quality of these programmes varies significantly, so are they serving their purpose?

In some countries, these programmes are useful, and many organizations do hire on the basis of university degrees; however, they tend to choose graduates according to the university rather than the qualification.

Are there too many translation programmes?

A lot of training is being provided outside of university training programmes. Many organizations train their employees on the job; some take advantage of training offered by groups such as Proz or the technology providers themselves.

Schools say they need to spend more time teaching language skills than was the case 10 years ago. Writing skills have deteriorated.

Maybe the profession has come so far thanks to technology that translators and post-editors are, in fact, not the same person. It seems that the needs of our industry have diversified and will continue to diversify enough that new jobs can be created and post editors require minimal second language training (if any) to post edit well.

There will be a need for community-based contemplation of language, as is the case in Australia. This is currently lacking in Europe. Moreover, there will be an increased need for teamwork within the increasing number of communities, with different roles and authority levels required.

3. FUTURE CORE SKILLS

What skills will future language specialists and translators require?

It will become increasingly important to train to translate first and then use technology. The danger is that tools will play too large a role in education and translator training so that basic skills will be neglected.

Translators will need to operate more heavily on the visual and audio aspects of language, not just on the written, as is currently the case. **Specialisation** will play a more significant role. This involves specialisation not only in fields, but also in tasks such as pre- and post-editing, translation, curator or MT administrator.

Many of the skills required in the future are those that have been required in the past:

ETERNAL TRUTHS
- TL writing skills (flexible and differentiated)
- Communication skills in general, to talk to clients and colleagues, rather than live in a cave.
- Marketing skills
- IT literacy
- Research skills
- Ethics
- How to work in a home office
- Thematic knowledge

However, some things will become more important:

NEW TRUTHS

- Learning translation technology skills
- Learning to learn about new types of tools
- Preparation of terminology for MT
- New translation tasks such as post-editing and pre-editing
- Increased specialization
- Social networking skills
- Priority languages will be Chinese, English, and German.
- Into English work will be editing TTs written by non-natives
- Move to English as a source language. There will be an increased demand for technical drafting in English, with controlled authoring skills
- Continuing professional development, with new short-term training formats that may be offered by private companies rather than universities.

Workshop 2 – Institutional Translator Training

Moderators: Gurli Hauschildt (*DGT*), Helen Campbell (*Optimale*)

There are only a few differences between the private and the public sector.

 ➢ in many private companies only MA graduates are accepted, in public institutions BA is enough

Recommendation: Examine link between level of education and training and competition results

 ➢ different perceptions about quality:
   private sector: university education is not good enough
   public sector: not enough awareness about quality in national institutions

Recommendation: Raise awareness about EMT label, to enhance visibility of and respect for translation profession

Recommendation for public and private translator employers:
 ➢ Promote and maintain translators' flexibility and adaptability to changing working conditions
 ➢ Increase continuous competence development and awareness raising
 ➢ Diversify services; in this context, look at expected developments in specialised sectors, especially in the context of the current economic crisis.
 ➢ Learn how and for what to use MT and other tools
 ➢ Offer traineeships/internships to university students

Recommendation for universities: Multi-competence is an added value of translation studies Broad competences including, general knowledge, client awareness, cost awareness communication skills (body language), interpersonal and social skills. Include IT tools but keep focus on translation training basics

Workshop 3 – Professionalisation and Employability

Moderators Yves Gambier (*EMT*), Mirko Silvestrini (*EUATC*)

The objective was to discuss ways to organise the passage from university to the translation profession considering that the roles/tasks of a translator, the practices and tools seem to be multiplying.

The discussion turned around four major questions:

What will be the working languages in the future?

The spectrum of languages on the translation market is broadening. Therefore, the universities should open up to non- European languages and also include Arabic, Chinese, Turkish.

How will cloud computing and other IT developments affect the translator's work?

The ways we work and cooperate are changing. This has to be taken into account in the training. It has to be noted that new methods such as crowdsourcing can have an impact on the quality.

Where does the market go - to hyperprofessionalisation or to deprofessionalisation?

No generalisation is possible because there are different types of requirements and quality in different contexts.
Moreover, the parameters of professionalism (individual) and professionalisation (collective) are not the same.

How can the employability of graduates be enhanced?

The answer to the reversed question "What is an unemployable translator?" doesn't help to find an answer because it is difficult to fix any features.

Universities have the responsibility to train their students in specialised areas. Revision, quality control, time management, ethics should be included in the study programmes. The trainers need to adopt the principle of Lifelong Learning.

To make employers aware of the programmes the visibility of translation study programmes needs to be enhanced. One possibility could be that external experts are invited to evaluate the curricula and propose their own criteria for assessing certain translations.

The training at the universities needs to be complemented by external measures; internships play an important role in this regard.

Recommendations

In the framework of EMT

- ➤ Develop continuous training of trainers
- ➤ Promote internships for trainers and students
- ➤ Promote synergies between trainers and professionals (respecting diversity of roles and responsibilities) in order to develop and implement curricula.

In the framework of EUATC

EUATC offers to invite their members to host trainees from EMT universities, both students and trainers for a period of 1-3 months.