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## At a Certain Stage, one has to Deliver<sup>1</sup>: Why Professional Translation Masters' Matter

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### *Abstract*

*This paper starts by describing and deploring the persistent provincial nature not only of translation studies, but also of translation teaching, as opposed to a developing translation market that is to a very large extent globalized and changing fast. The author then attempts a description of the present state of this market, before proposing a brief historical outline of translation teaching, in order to show that, until recently (say, the early 1990s), this factor was of small importance and scale. However, things changed in the 1990s, and even more so with the Bologna process, to the point where the Western part of the EU has too many translation teaching programmes and Eastern Europe too few. Professionalization was also not a universal factor in those programs. A major factor in correcting those imbalances has been the EMT project, and especially its set of competences (2009 and 2017), which occupy the last part of the paper. Altogether, these varied parameters can be said to outline an ethics for translator trainers.*

One of the first things a legal translator has to learn is that, as Susan Šarčević puts it, “Unlike medicine, chemistry, computer science, and other disciplines of the exact sciences, law remains first and foremost a national phenomenon” (Šarčević, 1997: 13). This characterization is of course perfectly accurate, though subject to modulations (what about international organizations, treaties, and the like?). It is also used as a way to justify what we could ironically dub the extraterritorial nature of legal discourse, as

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank his esteemed colleague John Humbley for this expression, uttered during a student's master's defense, in 2015: it said it all...

opposed to just about any other discipline or genre. Indeed, it operates as a warning: *translator beware, if you are not, first and foremost, a lawyer!* This is debatable in itself. However, legal discourse is not the only genre to attract such judgment. In my former life as a translator, I personally heard it from all kinds of other professionals, and it is in fact commonplace in our field.

This denotes two time-honoured trends.

The first one consists in questioning the legitimacy of translation as such. The second one, which is to be observed both in the translation sector and in translation studies, is a passion for separating and differentiating; for insisting on the niche character of a host of translation-related activities, domains or fields of expertise; for focusing on micro-details and individual situations—which has seldom precluded anyone in the field from uttering broad generalizations.

Thus, for a very long time, to paraphrase Šarčević (*ibid.*), *Unlike medicine, chemistry, computer science, and other disciplines of the exact sciences, translation teaching and translation studies have remained first and foremost a local or, at best, national phenomenon.* Indeed, until recently, both curricula and research were organized on a national, or even subnational basis: if you were studying translation in France, all theoretical components of the curriculum were composed of French-speaking authors; in the German-speaking world, it had to be German authors (or authors based in German-speaking countries), etc. There would thus be a most telling sociological study to write about not so much what professionals with a degree in translation, and even translation studies scholars, have read regarding translation studies, than about what they are not even aware of, in a world that is, admittedly, lush with conferences and publications. I personally have been exposed to numerous, occasionally brilliant, theses or papers on translation which superbly ignored Nida, Baker, Toury, Hermans, Vermeer, Venuti, Cronin, Chesterman... and the list could go on forever. Strangely enough, and despite repeated attempts, translation studies do not translate happily; our theoretical maps are highly idiosyncratic, and considerable events. For instance the rift that split open the Anglophone translation studies communities between the followers of Mona Baker and Gideon Toury, at the beginning of this century, have gone perfectly unnoticed elsewhere.

This is a second paradox for a discipline that is meant to make communication possible across boundaries of all kinds. The same was for a long time true for translators' associations (for obvious legal reasons). And, until recently, the situation was even worse with professional translators themselves, who quite often were at best wary, or even defiant of translation studies or translation teaching. The common thread to those situations is

what we could call the curse of provincialism, which is turning into a genuine danger for the profession, for translation studies, and for translation teaching in this era of globalization and industrialization of the sector.

To counter this, we need to focus on the broader picture, as quite a few scholars already have (such as Chesterman, Gambier, Prunc and Even-Zohar) or to envisage translation in and across other regions, or periods of time (e.g., Tymoczko, Ballard, Balliu), to the point of exploring the conditions for the emergence of a truly “international translation studies” (Susam-Saraeva, 2016).

The provocative components of the call for papers that fed this issue of *Cultus* are thus to be welcome: personal pride is best set aside in either translation or translation studies, it has sterilizing effects. “To what extent are traditional translator/interpreter roles and training relevant to real world employment in the near future?”; “what relationship can we imagine the mediator should have with technology?”; “As to the training, how necessary is it? Who actually provides it? To what extent should universities be involved?”; “to what extent has this investment in undergraduate and graduate training resulted in increased status for the profession? And for that matter, to what extent is the European Union’s ‘Master in Translation’ a way forward?” (Cultus 2019): those are highly relevant questions, and ignoring them would come (and sometimes does come) at our students’ expense. Remuneration aspects aside, it is our ethical mission to confront those issues: at a certain stage, one has to deliver, even as individual trainers or as translation programme heads. That means overcoming the comforts of provincialism, and acknowledging that there is a globalizing world out there—and one that is changing fast. And since we have a responsibility for students who are in the crucial process of choosing a job or profession, i.e. who are in the midst of existential choices, some degree of reciprocity may quite simply be fair.

I will thus try to advocate the relevance of (professional) translation programmes by first reflecting on the way the market is trending, before briefly attempting a long-term perspective on translation teaching, which should lead us to consider the present (European) situation, and especially the EMT (European Master’s in Translation) project — and its much discussed framework of competences. Is it the right recipe to guide the translation profession into an admittedly uncertain future? And honesty compels me to add a proviso: although I will attempt to sketch a broad view of the situation, the sources I intend to use in that endeavor still remain largely national (and even conspicuously French...) and rather patchy at the moment. The reader is free to blame it on personal incompetence and

national character of this author, of course, but it may also be construed as a symptom of the above-mentioned fragmentation: right now, aggregate measures are few, non-interoperable and often statistically fragile.

## 1. The translation market, now and tomorrow

For one thing, there is a big difference between, on the one hand, translation training and translation studies (persistent provincialism) and, on the other hand, the translation professions' market. Indeed, the latter has little consideration for national barriers: in this regard, it is way ahead of us. So what have we observed in recent years in this market?

- first, and this is contrary to many people's impressions, an overall growth in activity: of the order of 8% per year, according to the *Common Sense Advisory* (CSA, 2019) survey. Indeed, the annual compound rate is 7.9% for the period 2009-2019. This amounts to a size (turnover) of 49.6 billion dollars for 2019 (*ibid.*);
- which is accompanied by a consolidation phenomenon: large LSPs (language service providers, the term which has superseded the “agencies” of yore) tend to buy out smaller ones, in a real race for size and economies of scale;
- as part of this process, some of those LSPs are now full-blown multinationals, and some of them have gone public;
- this growth is taking place in a fast-changing world, with sectors and professions that are taking a beating (audiovisual translation, for example<sup>2</sup>), others that are developing at a rapid pace (post-editing, terminology, project management...), others that can be deemed mature (localization, literary translation), and yet others that are now declaring their independence (technical writing/communication, for example);
- after a series of technological breakthroughs, machine translation (MT) is no longer confined to research laboratories: in 2018, that is two years after the advent of neural machine translation, more than 50% of LSPs in Europe now claim to use it (EUATC, 2019);
- this progress, however, has two far-reaching psychological consequences. For some, it raises disproportionate expectations (the Reuters France press agency, for example, recently decided

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<sup>2</sup> See for instance Froeliger and Audinot, 2013, for a detailed account.

it could spare on its workforce by replacing human journalists by neural machine translation<sup>3</sup>). For others, it is the cause of unreasonable fears (many translators who have yet to understand that machine translation is based on translation memories whose origin can only be human if we want to maintain an acceptable level of quality);

- between those two extremes, one thing remains certain: this development has started to reshape large swathes of the translation sector;
- at the very same time, migratory phenomena (including inside developing countries) are intensifying, which give rise to new needs in sectors and language combinations that until recently were not institutionalized in the least (see for instance Bellos, 2012, on the Sofitel case in New York, for example);
- one can also observe a slow narrowing of the divide between translation and interpretation, which is fed, among others, by the rapid development of distance or remote (yes, there is a slight distinction) interpreting<sup>4</sup>, a practice that is already commonplace in the USA, and gaining ground elsewhere;
- the geopolitics of translation and translation studies is also changing, and at a much faster pace, with, for example, the PAMCIT (Pan African Masters Consortium in Interpretation and Translation) project in Africa, or the creation of no less than 253 translation masters in China over the past 10 years, which is already making itself felt in project management, for example;
- we are also witnessing an, albeit modest, increased legitimacy of translation training in the eyes of professionals<sup>5</sup>, which, again, was not obvious until two or three decades ago: the world of translation had done very well without diplomas for a very long time;

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<sup>3</sup> See for instance <https://www.nouvelobs.com/medias/20190228.OBS0996/l-agence-de-presse-reuters-veut-supprimer-30-de-ses-effectifs-en-france.html> (accessed June 5, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> See among others <http://blog.sprachmanagement.net/remote-simultaneous-interpreting-muss-das-denn-sein-und-geht-das-ueberhaupt/>

<sup>5</sup> Two sets of figures to substantiate that claim: in the impressive (though mainly restricted to France) survey conducted by *Société française des traducteurs* in 2014 (SFT, 2015), 60.44% of the 1,400 respondents stated that they held a degree in translation (as against 52.07% in 2008), and the 2019 EUATC *Language Industry Survey* shows that awareness of a pan-European translation program network such as EMT (European Master's in Translation) is at 53% among language service providers, an admittedly still modest share, but the figure was seven percentage points lower the year before (EUATC, 2019, p. 30).

- this is accompanied by a trend towards the standardization of working conditions, with the publication of standards of practice (e.g. ISO 17100: 2015 series), the use of certification, the increased relevance of translation degrees as a proof of competence, with a concomitant race for quality, to which we will come back later on;
- finally, the role of professional associations, bringing together companies: EUATC, the European Association of Translation Companies or ELIA, the European Language Industry Association) at European level; or, nationally, for example, CNET, the *Chambre nationale des entreprises de traduction*; or freelancers. In France, in particular the *Société française des traducteurs*, SFT, which increasingly, and not insignificantly, now advertises itself as a translators' *union*, has taken on a new importance with more members, more initiatives, more visibility.

In brief, we have the impression, all things being equal, of waking up in the immediate post-war world: everything is changing at a rapid pace, the very rules of the game are being redefined. For a long time, translation, as an activity, was relatively easy to define: the transposition of a text from one language into another. This amounted to fairly simple forms of practice, with varied forms of exercise.

In the meantime, one form of diversity replaced another: in the past, the differences were in the individual backgrounds, personalities, and therefore on the relationships with the various players in the field. Today, the profession is becoming more homogeneous in sociological terms, but the core activities are much more diversified. To this must be added the persistence of a great variability in the conditions of practice (professional status), income, and the very definitions of what is expected of a translator. Because of this evolutionary variability, stating general truths about translation is more hazardous than ever. At least, those who favour the provincial, niche-focused view enjoy the certainty of knowing inside out what they are talking about; whereas there is a risk, in attempting to capture the broader picture, to take leave from reality altogether... The risk, however, is worth taking if we want to be—and, more importantly, to remain—relevant.

## 2. Translation training, taking the long-term view

Trying to escape provincialism through reflecting on translation training in the longer term only leads to another paradox. On the one hand, there is a rich history of translation training programmes the world over, from ancient China to the present day. Important periods include the late Han dynasty (see for instance Xu, 2005), 8<sup>th</sup> century Baghdad, 12<sup>th</sup> century Toledo (see Ballard, 1992) and 17<sup>th</sup> century *Ecole des jeunes de langues* founded in Istanbul, now still extant in Paris under the name INALCO (*Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales*, see Balliu, 2002). On the other hand, the translation profession as such is a recent phenomenon, and one that has yet to reach its full development. Of course, mankind has always had a need for interpreters, in the first place, and then of translators, ever since the invention of writing. But among those, only a minute fraction actually devoted themselves to that sole occupancy for extended periods. One *acted in the capacity* of a translator or interpreter, according to circumstances. Those that had some knowledge of foreign languages could use it as an occasional source of livelihood: by its very nature it was an amateurish sector. And this century-old phenomenon has left profound traces in the way translation is still viewed today in our societies: something anybody with a decent enough grasp of foreign languages can take to. In other words, not a profession, but a mere activity. To have a regular profession, one needs agreed upon rules of conduct, regulatory bodies (professional associations, training programmes, official recognition (from government, from the scholarly world), a collective consciousness, and the like. Indeed, according to Wittorski (2014), professionalization is a three-pronged operation:

- to start with the obvious, it describes the process of forming a profession: “It is the process whereby an occupation is turned into a profession, with statuses, its own organization (professional associations, a professional order...) and of accepted procedures which can guarantee its recognition and place within society” (my translation);
- it is also about ensuring the long-term efficiency of the individuals involved, hence the need for post-graduation updating and updating of (one’s) competences (lifelong learning...), which presupposes a certain durability of the occupation in question (from Wittorski, *ibid.*, my rephrasing);
- it is also about producing professionals through training. Hence the need for degrees that will make a difference in the market. In



this context, “a professional is somebody who, at the end of his or her training is considered capable of practising the profession which he or she has been preparing for.” (Wittorski, *ibid.*, my translation).

This calls for two remarks. First, the three aspects are part of the same system: all three must interact. Second, at this juncture in the history of translation, this process is still in the making.

In fact, translation training as we know it today was born in Switzerland in 1941, with the creation of *École d'interprètes* (renamed ETI: *École de traduction et d'interprétation* in 1972, and more recently *Faculté de traduction et d'interprétation*). It grew on a modest scale in the late 1950s', with the birth of ESIT (*Ecole supérieure de traducteurs et d'interprètes*) and ISIT (then *Institut supérieur d'interprétariat et de traduction*, now *Institut de management et de communication interculturels*) in Paris, and that of ISTI (then *Institut supérieur de traducteurs et interprètes*, now a translation department within the *Université libre de Bruxelles*), and only became a large scale phenomenon in the 1990s' and even more so after the Bologna process in 2005 (see, on all those aspects, Froeliger, 2012).

Thus, if we see things from the vantage point of the market, training is a recent phenomenon; or, to be precise, one that has only recently gained prominence. Translation is thus only now becoming institutionalized. As witness thereof, we can cite the publication of various regulatory documents on translation, such as the ISO 17100: 2015 standard, which mentions the existence of a degree as a quality parameter for translators (among other factors, it must be said). Yet, this recent phenomenon coincides – and possibly conflates – with tremendous short-term changes due to the coming of age of information technology (IT) and artificial intelligence (AI). There is thus a comico-tragic element in the present vagaries of translation training: at the very moment it is asserting itself, it sees its legitimacy challenged. This is sometimes the cause of Shakespearean self-questionings among its actors, which is where the European factor enters the picture.

### **3. The EMT network: purposes, achievements, future**

What we have described thus far can be summarized in very simple terms: we are witnessing an increasing interconnection of players in the translation professions. One of the mainstays of this evolution since 2009

has been the EMT network, due especially to its competences framework. The project itself was born as a means to correct a double imbalance. On the one hand, there were too many translation programmes in the West (in particular since the Bologna process began), many more than the market could absorb, with varying degrees of quality (here to be construed as a synonym for professionalism, i.e. the ability for graduates to find decent jobs or assignments in the sector). On the other hand, training for translators in the nine countries that joined the EU in 2004 (the infamous “Big Bang”) was felt to be scant and clearly irrelevant to the needs of large organizations such as the EU Commission, Parliament or Court of Justice. And we are all aware that being able to interact in one’s national language, however small in terms of speakers, is a core component of the European construction, and of democracy in Europe. The EMT project thus was designed as both a quality label, separating highly professional programmes from the chaff; and as a hub for sharing good practices, achieving a level playing-field and reflecting on common issues. It was launched under the auspices of the DGT (the EU Commission’s Directorate General for Translation), which provided—and still provides—the logistical support and European legitimacy to the whole project, as well as taking the political decisions on where to set the cursor for applications (assessed by external experts, every five years in principle, see below).

At a 2009 conference (published in 2012), reflecting on what was at the moment a very young innovation, I attempted a reflection on the possible evolutions of this network: “This encouraging endeavor must still be considered a strategic and political affair. There is a risk that it proves either too lax or too restrictive for the various stakeholders, and the European authorities will have to make the right choice between strong involvement and withdrawal into themselves.” (Froeliger, 2012: 582, my translation).

What can be said about these issues, ten years after?

- Expansion, in terms of figures, has been steady but controlled. Some 32 programmes were admitted in 2009, a number that reached 54 two years later<sup>6</sup>, 64 in 2014, and, since June 2019, 85<sup>7</sup> (including 3 non-EU programs, two in Switzerland and one in

<sup>6</sup> This was an interim admission exercise, to make up for what was felt as flaws in the first run.

<sup>7</sup> See [https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/european-masters-translation-cmt/universities-and-programmes-cmt-network\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/resources-partners/european-masters-translation-cmt/universities-and-programmes-cmt-network_en) (accessed June 5, 2019).

Lebanon).

- The members of this network—and, more importantly, their programmes—have benefited greatly from this project. At long last, we, translation programme directors, were able to envision things on a pan-European level, and to make informed comparisons, using similar indicators. It was a milestone for most of us, thanks to regular meetings (at least two per year), and a variety of spin-off projects, the most notable one being OPTIMALE (Optimising Translator Training in a Multilingual Europe, now defunct<sup>8</sup>). This has considerably levelled the playing-field, while enabling members to reflect on broader, occasionally non-European, terms.
- This broader view also had national consequences. In France, it gave the impetus for reviving AFFUMT (*Association française des formations universitaires aux métiers de la traduction*), an association of translation programmes that can boast a number of achievements since then: free CAT (computer aided translation) software from the SDL company and software provider for its members, much better student and stakeholder information through a common website (<https://affumt.wordpress.com/>), better scholarly recognition through a translation studies portal ([www.recherche-traductologie.fr](http://www.recherche-traductologie.fr)), the creation of a “*mention*” (official classification) for translation and interpretation, alongside linguistics, applied languages, and foreign languages and culture, regular roundtables on questions of common interest (in 2019, how to accommodate MT in our curricula, as well as selection processes; in 2018, how do we deal with the ever increasing number of applicants with disabilities...). It is probably no coincidence if, in 2019, all five new French members of the EMT network had also previously joined AFFUMT. So, here again, interconnection is increasing. And rewarding.

Altogether, it is thus not exaggerated to consider the advent of EMT as groundbreaking. Although reactions have on the whole been largely positive, it has however not been met by universal acclaim. Recognition, for one thing, remains less than satisfactory: according to a recent EUATC (2019, *ibid.*) survey, only 54% of European LSPs are aware of the

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<sup>8</sup> The OPTIMALE web page is not available anymore, but information on it can be accessed here: [https:// euatc.org/universities-internships/item/328-optimale-project-optimising-professional-translator-training-in-a-multilingual-europe](https://euatc.org/universities-internships/item/328-optimale-project-optimising-professional-translator-training-in-a-multilingual-europe) (accessed November 20, 2019).

existence of the EMT network. True, the trend is encouraging (the figure was 47% the year before), but still not overwhelming. Interestingly, the only real resistance to the process came from two actors only. Firstly, Germany, which boasts Europe's largest economy and population, has been conspicuously underrepresented in the network ever since its inception. Two programmes were admitted in 2009, and that figure has remained the same since then. For the sake of comparison, in 2019, France has 15 programmes (7 in 2009); The United Kingdom, 14; Spain, 8; and Poland, 4. There is room for further investigation here.

Secondly, the EMT process and the ability of its members to train full-blown, immediately productive, professionals has been questioned and negated on repeated occasions. For example, comments have even been made during EMT conferences<sup>9</sup> by representatives of LSPs themselves.

The argument was simple: *We (companies) find that graduates that enter the field still have so much to learn that it is impossible for us to pay them a decent rate until we have finished the job of training them...* This discourse has been around for a while: it was commonplace in the 1980s and 1990s, before professionalization gained its full momentum. However, it turns a blind eye toward the huge effort made by professional programmes in terms of professional relevance, and is therefore outdated. In fact, it has even proved counter-productive, and has since been abandoned in favour of a more collaborative approach. And I firmly believe that the main argument that helped translation programmes counter it was the EMT competence framework.

#### 4. The EMT competence framework, 2009 and 2017

The focus on competences is part of an overall trend in the philosophy of higher education, not just in translation teaching. The general idea is that the ability to function inside a given profession can be broken down into a series of identifiable individual competences, *that can be taught*, in order to deliver learning outcomes. The concept of competence has thus started to replace that of *talent*, and also departs from many time-honored ways of teaching. It is defined by the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning as “the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study

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<sup>9</sup> Since those comments were always presented orally, the only evidence we can provide is the memory of the EMT representatives or conference participants that heard them.

situations and in professional and personal development.” (Education and Culture DG, 2008: 11). According to Guy Le Boterf (2002), it is itself made up of three components: knowing how to act, being able to act, and being willing to act, and comprises two levels: required competences (“those that are listed in the competence framework”) and actual competences (“those that are constructed by each individual”, Le Boterf, *ibid.*, my translation).

In translation studies themselves, the subject is hardly new. It started with the works of group PACTE, in the 1990s’ (see among others PACTE, 2000, and Hurtado Albir, 2008 and 2015) and can boast a very wide array of contributions since then (see Carré, 2017, for a review of those works). However, it remained first and foremost a research effort, with very little, if any at all, trickle-down effect on the way translators were actually trained for the profession.

By contrast, the EMT 2009 reference framework was a political endeavor, explicitly aimed at rewarding professionalization, through the award of a quality label. Since I already expounded on this in another publication (Froeliger, 2019, and also Schlamberger-Brezar, 2016), I will be very brief here. The general idea was to insist on the translation services provision aspect of the profession, which, graphically, was placed at the centre of a wheel comprised of five other groups of competences (language competence, intercultural competence, information mining competence, technological competence, thematic competence), some of which were divided into two parts):

### The EMT "Wheel of competences"

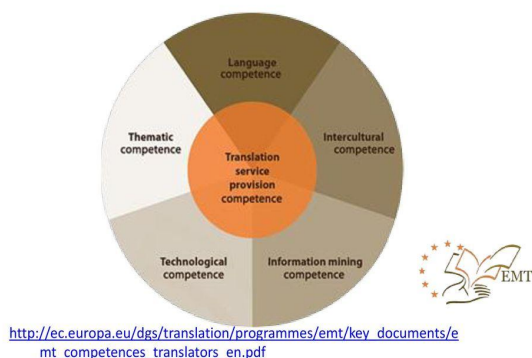


Figure 1: The 2009 “Wheel of competences”

This amounted to 48 individual competences, of which only three were directly linked with language, another political message, meant to depart from the philological approach to translation (a tentative explanation for the low uptake of EMT in a few countries).

The success of this particular framework as opposed to its predecessors was due to its inclusion as touchstone for the EMT selection: to become part of the network, a programme had to prove (in detail) how it was preparing for each of the individual competences. It thus acted both as a sieve (to select the genuinely professional programmes) and as an awareness raiser, which, in the long run, may be its most beneficial effect. As a consequence, a number of programme directors were forced to reflect on those various competences (which was by no means a foregone conclusion), and some even reshaped their curricula accordingly.

However, this first EMT competence framework was not totally flawless. As everything European ever since the Vienna Congress (1815), it was the result of a compromise, which is not always conducive to clarity. It also contained some repetitions, and its use of metalanguage was not always perfect. Another, more important, problem was (is, and will be) the rapid evolution of the translation profession, which cannot but give rise to new competences. This is why a working-group was set up in 2016, in order to produce a new framework, with Daniel Toudic and Alexandra Krause at the helm. The revised set was made public in 2017, and subsequently used as one of the key components of the EMT 2018-19 campaign.

Generally speaking, it was more an upgrade than a complete change in philosophy. The number of items was streamlined to 35 (against 48), which is due, on the one hand, to treating the language and culture components as prerequisites: they are mentioned in the new framework, but considered as having to be mastered on entry. And therefore not counted. However, candidate programmes have to prove that the students they are admitting are being screened accordingly (with at least a C1, and preferably C2 level in their first two working languages). The wording was also slightly altered: instead of groups of competences; we now have very broad competences, broken down into skills (“the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems”, Education and Culture DG, 2008, *ibid.*). Graphically, instead of a wheel with translation service provision as its axis, we now have a production chain, starting with the prerequisites (language and culture), building on the “translation” aspect proper, going on to technology, personal and

interpersonal components, and reaching its conclusion with the translation service provision competence:



**Figure 2: EMT competence framework, 2017, graphic organization**

If we reason in terms of groups of skills or competences, then classification differences between the 2009 and 2017 versions are as follows:

EMT 2009 Framework	Number of competences	EMT 2017 Framework	Number of competences
I. Translation Service Provision Competence 1. Interpersonal Dimension	13	Language and Culture	Treated as prerequisites
I. Translation Service Provision Competence 2. Production Dimension	7	Translation*	14
II. Language Competence	3	Technology	6
III. Intercultural Competence 1. Sociolinguistic Dimension	3	Personal and interpersonal	6
III. Intercultural Competence 2. Textual Dimension	8	Service provision	9
IV. Information Mining Competence	6		
V. Thematic Competence	3		
VI. Technological Competence	5		
<b>Total</b>	48		35

\* Includes “Ability to interact with MT”.

**Table 1: The 2009 and 2017 EMT competence frameworks, broad categories**

A major difference was also that candidate programmes did not have to ascertain that they were preparing students for each individual skill: there was thus a degree of leeway, which was a way to recognize the diversity of situations across the continent (see our introduction).



So far, few critiques have arisen regarding this new framework (though the following two should be mentioned):

- the first one gave rise to a long debate inside the working-group. It was about including a “Translation” competence as a subdivision of the “translation competence framework”. Some argued, first, that this entailed a risk of confusing subordinate and superordinate terms, and was therefore unclear; and, second, that this was giving the impression that all other skills were expelled from the translation part, whereas what was needed was the broadest possible definition for translation, thought from the professional side of the mirror. And therefore including all the other aspects. This was resolved in an addendum entitled “EMT Competence Reference Framework – Key Concepts and Definitions” (2017, “circulated inside the EMT network only”) in the following terms: “With regard to the distinction between subordinate and superordinate levels, we clearly state in the main introduction, and in the introduction to the translation section, that the overarching competence presiding over the whole framework is ‘translation service provision’.
- another critique stemmed from the students and programme directors the framework was submitted to: competence number 1 as such is so dense that it could be broken down into four or five elements, and therefore difficult to ascertain statistically (see below): “Analyse a source document, identify potential textual and cognitive difficulties and assess the strategies and resources needed for appropriate reformulation in line with communicative needs” (EMT, 2017: 8).

Granted, these are minor defects, and as I mentioned earlier, they did not preclude the network from taking in more than 20 newcomers after the 2018-19 exercise, which attests to its good health and increasing recognition.

This framework was thus explicitly devised, and reviewed in 2017. It then served as a baseline for EMT application. However, it could very well have another more lasting impact, in that it is a tremendous tool for raising awareness about those competences. As I mentioned earlier, it did serve that purpose for programme directors and teachers; but some of us also had the idea, in the course of time, to use it in the classroom, both as an indicator of progress (through surveys conducted at entry and on

completion of the program), and quite simply in order to explain to students what the translation profession is all about these days. This would then help them, in due time, to explain ‘translation’ to their future clients and employers.

This started in 2013 as a modest, in-house, endeavour (see Froeliger, 2019, *ibid.*), but has since been presented to all EMT members at the Vienna Conference (2018), and has now turned into a research project, CATO: Competence Awareness in TranslatiOn. In its trial phase, at the time of completion of this paper, the project involved 12 programmes throughout Europe, as well as representatives of the *Société française des traducteurs*. A possible development would be its extension to all EMT members, as well as to the professional world. It is meant both as an area of research and as a pedagogical tool; and could provide the theme for a translation studies conference in the not so distant future.

## 5. Conclusion

How is the world likely to evolve in terms of exchanges between countries and cultures in the next decades? Of course, answering this question in a straightforward way would entail more prediction than actual forecasting. What actually matters are the stakes involved in the various options we can, at the moment, discern. Three competing outcomes seem to be emerging: generalization of one or a few lingua(e) franca(e); all-inclusive machine translation (MT) and a more pluralistic diversity of situations for a wide variety of needs, such as trade, cultural exchange, law enforcement, citizenship, technical developments, cultural diversity, involving both a good grasp of present-day technology and of the human aspect of the task, what the French, in particular, increasingly dub *biotranslation*<sup>10</sup>. Though I would not claim to be an expert in that field, I would be tempted to put this, IA tools included, under the umbrella of the term mediation—and I think it is clearly the most desirable option for society as a whole.

This, to me, is clearly the preferred option, not because it favours translators as mediators, but because it has the potential to deliver a better service to society. This is why we need competent, professional

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<sup>10</sup> The neologism *biotranslation* (*biotraduction*, in French) has achieved increasing popularity in the wake of the Tralogy conferences that were held in Paris in 2011 and 2013 with the explicit aim to serve as an open space, an agora, where human translators, IA linguists, and trainers could exchange their views on the evolution of the profession. See for instance <http://lodel.irevues.inist.fr/tralogy/index.php?id=195>, accessed November 20, 2019.

translators. In other words, the development and increased legitimacy of the profession is not an aim in itself: it is a means. To put this means in practice, society needs strong and visible professional associations, as well as solid and efficient translation programs. The combination of these two sources provides the continuous education, and therefore the sustainability that is so important in the translation fields—and whose importance can only increase, in translation as elsewhere. This will make it possible to accommodate—and influence—the rapid changes that affect the industry the world over. The EMT, and especially its competence framework, is therefore to be seen as a blueprint for the translation sector as a whole, and not solely for the EU (which is already apparent in its accepting several non-EU members in its fold with an observer status<sup>11</sup>).

The EMT project thus has a welcome stabilizing and comforting effect. This however, is not sufficient as such. We should not sink into utilitarianism, that is to consider that everything, in training, has to serve practice in an immediate way. We also need to take a broader view of the issues at hand, if only to ensure the sustainability of the whole edifice. In other words, in order to have an efficient translation sector, we also need strong, productive translation studies, with numerous PhDs that are in line with today's and tomorrow's agendas in this sector. There is a tendency, in academia, to pit those two aspects against one another: professionally oriented teaching and research. This tendency must definitely be resisted. If only because the ability to articulate critical discourse can only improve the achievement of expertise in the professional field. Indeed, we should not content ourselves with training good translation technicians—if only because a good technician must also be aware of the stakes of his or her practice. This is where the ethical dimensions come in: as a foundation upon which efficient and professional programmes can be built. And those are expressly considered in the EMT competence framework (EMT, 2009 and 2017). Indeed, at a certain stage, one has to deliver.

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<sup>11</sup> At the time of writing, the future status of the UK vis-à-vis the EU is still undecided. If and when Brexit eventually happens, the now 14 British programmes will have the same status.

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