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Quo vadis, institutional translation?

This paper[1] deals with institutional translation in the context of the translation services of EU institutions and focuses on related challenges drawing on the example of the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission (DGT). The focus lies on the main factors and drivers influencing the organisation and provision of translation services by the DGT. The following are some of the questions that are being addressed while transforming the translation delivery model on its path to shaping the future of translation in the DGT:

–   How does the general drive for more efficiency in the public sector and more specifically in EU institutions affect the provisions of translation services?
–   How is the DGT benefiting from technological progress to become an agile data-driven translation service?
–   How is technology transforming the translation operation as well as the roles and functions in the translation process and in the overall content delivery pipeline?
–   What new skills do translators and translation support staff need in a technology-enhanced working environment?

An ever-important factor driving change in the translation world is the constant search for efficiency in order to deliver translations and other linguistic services faster and cheaper. European Union institutions and their translation services are likewise intent on using resources effectively and efficiently to provide better regulation and better services for EU citizens. The DGT is resorting to a flexible mix of resources combining in-house translation, outsourcing and technology as the basis for a modern, agile translation service in the digital age.

Today, the main driver for and enabler of transformation in translation services and the profession as a whole is clearly technological progress. In recent decades, rapid advances in language and translation technologies have left a heavy mark on the way technical/legal translation is organised in both the private and public sectors. Technologies have not only enabled efficiencies in translation delivery but have also enhanced linguistic quality. Over twenty years ago translators started working with translation memories in the CAT environment which allowed an efficient and consistent translation of repetitive source text. Today many translation services rely on machine translation as an additional tool for smarter delivery. Over time, technology has revolutionised the translation process and environment

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[1]   Summary of the presentation at the EFNIL Conference in Tallinn, 9-11 October 2019

beyond recognition. In particular, the combination of the human element with translation memories, statistical and now neural machine-translation output, integrated terminological databases and many other support tools has undoubtedly led to better quality and higher productivity.

In line with the Commission President's objective of a fully digitalised Commission, the DGT has been at the forefront of digital transformation in the translation profession, introducing and developing eTranslation, its machine translation system, sponsored by the Connecting Europe Facility. As one of the Commission's state-of-the-art machine learning applications, eTranslation is based on human translation produced by the DGT's in-house staff and external language service providers. Together with the language services of other EU institutions, the DGT has built up unparalleled language resources in the form of translation memories amounting to 1.2 billion segments stored in the Euramis database as well terminological data in the terminology database IATE (about 7.8 million terms). In addition to some 2 million pages translated each year by its expert in-house staff and external service providers, the DGT processes over 41 million pages via eTranslation, which is available to all EU institutions, universities offering a European Master's in Translation (EMT) and EU national administrations, as well as more recently to Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs). The DGT is continuously investing in technology in its integrated translation environment and in the underlying multilingual data assets such as translation memories and terminological data.

The main challenge for the DGT now is to marry its wealth of human intelligence, which remains essential for the DGT´s mission of translating for the Commission in the quality required, with the new neural machine translation technology. In other words, the DGT combines human and machine capabilities to provide quality translations more efficiently.

The ongoing technology-driven change in the translation profession has made it important to accompany and support the DGT's staff with systematic upskilling and training. In parallel, this change has brought about a redefinition of the tasks and functions essential in a modern translation pipeline, highlighting the importance of multitasking, computational linguistics related tasks and data curation. In this context, the DGT continues to build advanced digital skills and to equip its staff with state-of-the-art tools to ensure accuracy, consistency and efficiency in their work. The DGT is developing a data management strategy to curate linguistic data for re-use in machine translation and other translation technology tools. The DGT will move towards a collaborative translation environment from 2020 onwards which opens an opportunity to further review working arrangements and simplify processes as much as possible. At the same time, the DGT is also aiming at more streamlined and automated translation management workflows.

Over the years the DGT has forged close cooperations with the language industry (Language Industry Expert Group) and promoted the translation profes-

sion via a wide range of initiatives such as the EMT network, Translating Europe fora and workshops, European Day of Languages workshops, the Juvenes Translatores translation competition for schools and the Visiting Translator Scheme. The DGT has also contributed to the creation of the EMT Translator competence profile.

To sum up, the DGT's strategy for the next five years will focus on continuing to support the Commission's work at speed in 24 languages. To this end, the DGT will invest heavily in language technology and in the skills of its staff, using a flexible mix of in-house staff, freelance translation and language technology resources. In its role as a world reference for translation, the DGT will also continue to promote multilingualism and support the development of the translation profession through its outreach work.