

# Translation and Interpretation: Building Connections for a Changing World

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**Abstract:** The technological revolution which accelerated so rapidly with the advent of the Internet, combined the increased mobility of populations, has brought about great changes in international communication. This has led to an increasing demand for translation and for greater intercultural understanding, which in turn has resulted in a proliferation of translator-training programmes. Translators and interpreters are needed to facilitate international exchanges, both commercial and political, and at the same time ever more sophisticated machine-translation programmes are being developed to cope with the growing body of material that requires translation. Unquestionably the role of the translator is changing and the confusion around the terminology of translation reflects growing discomfort with the traditional concept of translation as interlingual transfer.

**Keywords:** Translation, interpreting, terminology, multilingualism

**T**he twenty-first century is the great age of translation. Millions more people are moving around the planet than at any time in history: some displaced by wars, famine or persecution, some seeking better working opportunities and more economic stability, some simply taking advantage of cheap travel opportunities to explore other places. And as these millions move around, taking their own languages with them, they encounter other languages, other cultural frameworks and other belief systems, hence are compelled, whether consciously or not, to engage in some form of translation. Postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha has seen this mass movement of peoples as a new emerging global reality, a new international space where great numbers of people have come to live in a state of in-betweenness, endlessly negotiating

between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Translation today is an increasingly human condition and the rapid rise of electronic media has also served to heighten awareness of the importance of communicating across cultures.

According to Susan Bassnett,<sup>1</sup> in the light of this global phenomenon, it is not surprising that translation should have become an object of study in several disciplines and that, since the late 1970s, a new field of research, translation studies, should have acquired so much importance around the world. Major social and economic shifts are directly linked to major epistemological shifts. The increasing awareness of the complexities involved in translation provides a clear example of the impact of major-political changes in the world of academia. More people are moving between languages, hence translating more frequently. Around the world today there are translation agencies that provide translations on commission; translators are trained in universities; they are employed by international organizations such as the European Union, the United Nations, and UNESCO. Translation makes available material across a whole range of cultural activities that would be inaccessible to anyone who does not have access to other languages.

Translation and Interpreting Studies is a discipline which has witnessed unparalleled changes over the last years. One reason for this is the fact that the world market in translation/interpreting barely satisfies a fraction of the demand created by a global economy. New technologies are rapidly transforming the profession and localization is becoming essential. Another equally valid reason is that Translation/ Interpreting Studies has pioneered a number of key ideas and concepts, which have proved to be invaluable with regard to the study of cultural exchange in areas as diverse as social sciences, science, literature, drama, history, media, law, comparative religion, and philosophy. Translators and interpreters are needed to facilitate international exchanges, both commercial and political, and more sophisticated machine-translation programmes are being developed to cope with the growing body of material that requires translation. According to O'Hagan and Ashworth<sup>2</sup> the traditional forms of language support we know as translation and

1 Susan Bassnet, *Translation Studies* (New York, 1980).

2 Minako O'Hagan, David Ashworth, *Translation-Mediated Communication in a Digital World: Facing the Challenges of Globalization and Localization* (Clevedon, 2002).

interpretation are faced with new challenges that come from the new contexts for human communication and interactions afforded by technology. The multiplicity of electronic documents defines a new kind of literacy called electronic or digital literacy.

Malta's joining the EU in 2004 propelled the Maltese language into a status of an international language. Language and translation policies needed to be decided on a very pragmatic level: how to recruit translators and interpreters; what translation strategies to adopt; whether the Maltese politicians were to use their own language or a lingua franca, typically English. These questions still remain. Now that many translators have worked in the EU institutions for more than a decade, translation activity has been 'normalized, but there seems to be room for improvement. In interviews I found that the Maltese translators feel like 'a necessary evil'; they are both mentally and physically detached from the drafting processes and their role is often forgotten. This can easily be verified in recent high-level texts concerning the EU's democratic deficit and lack of popular support: in these documents, communication has a central role, but translators and interpreters are not even mentioned, although it is mainly through them that the EU communicates.

Bryne<sup>3</sup> and Baker<sup>4</sup> acknowledge the importance of technical translation nowadays, with the former asserting that it currently amounts to 90% of the world's total translation. The popularity of technical translation nowadays can be attributed to the increasing number of international institutions, such as the EU, which set out directives and legislation requiring texts to be translated in a number of official languages as well as a surge in international cooperation. In addition, as claimed by Baker, in the present globalized information society, there is a higher demand for 'product specifications, instruction leaflets' and 'user guides' in different languages. Technical translation differs from literary translation in that it places added constraints on the translator. Like literary translators, technical translators require sound knowledge of both source and target languages, but the latter must also have a basic understanding of the subject at hand. In Wright's terms, a technical

3 Jody Bryne, *Technical Translation: Usability Strategies for Translating Technical Documentation* (Dordrecht, 2006).

4 Mona Baker, *In other words: a coursebook on translation* (New York, 1992).

translator needs ‘at least an informed layman’s (or even journeyman’s) understanding of the subject field treated by the text’<sup>5</sup>.

Terminology must be established, but also implemented, monitored, and updated to make sure it meets the needs of its users. Yet, most importantly, terminology needs to be standardized, so as to make communication, as well as translation and interpretation, easier and more efficient. At present, numerous international organizations make terminology easily accessible and, as Cabré<sup>6</sup> points out, a great deal of language terminology planning is underway. This is not only beneficial in terms of precision and efficiency but it also aids in creating terminological standards, especially since many international organizations work in unison nowadays.

We live in a multilingual world. In international cooperation, we can either use one language or adopt a number of official languages. French was the language of international relations for about three hundred years till the end of the First World War, when English was adopted as the second official language of the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. The EU is the only international organization where the languages of all member states have the status of an official language. This was established in the very first regulation (amended after each enlargement) adopted by the Council of Ministers in 1958. The regulation makes it clear that the member states themselves decide which languages should be the official and working languages of the institutions. The treaties also lay down the principle of multilingualism and state that every citizen of the Union may write to any of the institutions or bodies in one of the official languages and receive an answer in the same language. In practice, the right to use one’s own language is guaranteed through translation and interpretation. As societies are becoming more multilingual, the technological revolution has brought about major changes in communication, both locally and internationally. The expansion of translation technology has led to changes in translator training programmes in such fields as machine translation, dubbing and subtitling, and internet translation. These areas tend to draw upon communication studies, language engineering, and applied linguistics

5 Sue Ellen Wright, *Scientific and Technical Translation* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1993).

6 Maria Teresa Cabré, *Terminology: theory, methods and applications* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 1999).

rather than upon literary and cultural studies. According to Jorge Diaz-Cintas,<sup>7</sup> one of the principal researchers into audiovisual translation, audiovisual translation is an interdisciplinary field in its own right and, just as film and media studies seceded from literary studies in the 1970s, so we are now witnessing a shift towards audiovisual translation becoming another field of research independent from translation studies. As Michael Cronin suggests, globalization could not happen without translation!

Today, however, the language arrangements of EU meetings vary considerably, depending on the status of the meeting, the requirements of the delegates, and resources available. This involves a balancing act between the principles of equality, respect for diversity and democracy, and the need for efficiency. Especially in internal communication, English and French continue to be the main languages, while the dominance of English seems to be growing as it is the most common option if a member state cannot use its own language. Maltese is one of the languages which has been affected by the changes introduced over the last years. While flexibility is necessary, we need to ensure that Maltese continues to be used as a means of communication in all spheres of life – unless we are willing to return to a situation where only one language can serve as an instrument of international co-operation.

In the European context the need to simplify and clarify is most often associated with legal language. The constitutional crisis following the rejection of the draft European Constitution by French and Dutch voters in 2005 brought up the need to communicate European affairs to EU citizens instead of prescribing them by law. Simplification of non-legal texts does not, however, follow the same rules as legislative simplification. To deal with this new prerequisite, the European Commission has come up with several action plans to improve its communication policies. The Commission's simplifications plans from 2005 onwards have underlined the importance of communicating with the EU citizens in a language familiar and comprehensible to them. EU officials are specifically advised to avoid Eurojargon because it is confusing, complicated, and often elitist. Despite the foreground gained to communication, it is still difficult to disperse the fog in the EU language. The EU is a legal entity and most of its language

7 Jorge Diaz-Cintas, *New Trends in Audiovisual Translation* (UK, USA, Canada, 2009).

practices are dominated by the constraints of legal certainty and all-inclusiveness. These practices should, however, be suited to meet the growing demand for comprehensibility and transparency. The EU's simplification strategies should also be concretized. Even if all the recent plans mention the need for clarity, they very rarely refer to language as such. In addition, it is not always clear, what is meant by simplification. The plans also lack concrete means to fight the EU fog. Therefore we need European research on the EU language and its comprehensibility. Concrete results in the effort for a clearer EU language are only gained if we are provided with concrete means to work with.

The EU's impact on the Maltese language has been a focus of debate since the country became a member 13 years ago. The idea that the language used by public authorities – legal language included – should be comprehensible to most citizens has been firmly rooted in Maltese society. In practice the legal texts often fail to meet this ideal and their shortcomings have often been traced to EU directives. This comparative analysis of EU directives and their Maltese implementing laws suggests that the former have not affected the syntax of Maltese legal discourse, which remains consistent. Many legal experts still think that the Maltese statutes do show an influence. Several individual cases have shown that wordings of the directives are transferred untouched to the Maltese implementing laws. Preventing the increase of obscure expressions in Maltese legal language calls for measures on both national and community level: the unintended obscurities should be cleared before the directive is adopted or, at the latest, when the directive is implemented. The member states should seriously reflect on their role in promoting good quality of language while drafting the community legislation. They should also consider the possibilities of multilingualism in enhancing comprehensibility.

The accession of Malta to the EU was a watershed for the Maltese language which suddenly became one of the languages of a major international community. It was now possible to speak Maltese at the meetings of this community and its most important documents were also translated into Maltese. Such extensive use of the Maltese language in the international arena was unprecedented, as was the fact that Maltese officials were now involved in preparing Community statutes drafted in many languages. At least in theory, officials are in a position to influence

the Maltese formulation of documents, as the Maltese negotiators review and revise translations prepared by Community institutions. As actively involved parties, these officials know what the document seeks to achieve, whereas the translator often only has the text to work with. This would therefore seem to offer scope for closer co-operation.

University-based courses have been developed to strengthen Malta's capacity to meet its operational demands in the area of translation, arising from EU membership. The Department of Translation, Terminology, and Interpreting Studies of the University of Malta as it is known today was founded in October 2003 and was designed to open new avenues of thought while providing a firm foundation in the discipline of Translation, Terminology, and Interpreting Studies. As an area of study it combines the underlying theoretical issues involved in literary, technical, screen, legal, scientific, and commercial translation, publishing, localization, and management with the practical aspects of the translation process. The programme is of interest to all graduates whatever their future career route: commercial, legal, scientific, or technical translation; literary or screen translation; localization; research; teaching; or management. The programme caters for a wide range of students who wish to acquire a critical understanding of contemporary issues in translation alongside the practical skills required in today's fast-evolving translation industry. Versatility and employability are thus enhanced. Graduates of the department have found work as freelance/permanent translators and interpreters for EU institutions.

Research is an essential component of the department as can be witnessed by the many publications of the staff members. Over these years the department has also accumulated a rich database of terminologies related to different sectors which have been transferred to a Digitization of Maltese Terminological Collections for Special Purposes and to the creation of a Termbases Project. The department has established links with several foreign universities and European programmes, such as the European Masters in Translation, Optimale, Eulita, and EMCI.

Multilingualism goes beyond its dictionary definition of 'speaking or using many languages'. It is a fundamental principle with the additional meaning of 'equal rights for all official languages'. Equal status for the official languages goes to the heart of what the EU is all about. Language

is a part of national and personal identity. The languages of Europe are part of its immense and diverse heritage and they should be cherished. Translators in the EU institutions must not expect excitement or drama; almost every day, they will have some jobs that are repetitive and boring. But, if they can keep an enquiring mind and a positive attitude, they will realize the bigger picture of EU activity and enjoy being part of it. For translators interested in learning languages, understanding other nationalities, and immersing themselves in new and sometimes abstruse areas, EU institutions provide unparalleled opportunities. Translators working in the EU, whether as in-house or freelance, are members of a team made up of revisers, legal revisers, and, of course, politicians, officials, and others who will have their say on both style and substance in the course of the co-decision process.

The famous Italian author, Umberto Eco,<sup>8</sup> sees translation as negotiation. This is what he says in his book *Mouse or rat? Translation as negotiation*: ‘When speaking of negotiation I do not mean to suggest a sort of deconstructionist idea according to which, since translation is a matter of negotiation, there are no lexical or textual rules that can be used as a parameter for telling an acceptable from a bad or incorrect translation. The possibility and even the advisability of negotiation do not exclude the presence of rules of conventions.’

**Prof. Joseph Eynaud** is Head of the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies. He joined the University of Malta as a lecturer of Methodology related to the teaching of Italian as a Foreign Language. He introduced the area of study *Glottodidattica* in the Department of Arts and Languages in Education. In 1987 he joined the Department of Italian where he taught Italian Theatre and Italo-Maltese Literature. In 2003 he founded the Department of Translation and Interpreting Studies in the Faculty of Arts of which he is Head of Department. He set up the first Interpreters’ Laboratory and Terminology Centre with the help of EU financial aid. Eynaud served as President of the International Association of Italian Professors (2002–08) and organized several international congresses. In 2003 he was awarded the title of Cavaliere della Repubblica Italiana. His publications include studies on Italo-Maltese Literature, Translation and Interpreting Studies and textbooks for students reading Italian as a Foreign Language.

8 Umberto Eco, *Mouse or rat?: translation as negotiation* (London, 2004).