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Going Localised – Getting Recognised. The Interplay of the Institutional and the Experienced Status of Translators in the European Commission

Abstract

This paper explores how and whether the different institutional and organisational contexts affect translators' professional activities and professional identities. The site researched is the European Commission, where the changing political impetus has recently instigated a new role for some of the translators. For them, the institutional framework has thus changed substantially. This presents an opportunity to research how institutionally expressed status affects the status as experienced by the translators themselves. The data consists of institutional documents as well as interview and observation data from two different settings, a traditional translation unit in Luxembourg (2004) and the local representation of the European Commission in Helsinki (2008). The results indicate that the institutional and physical space occupied by the translators can drastically change their experienced status and motivation even within a single organisational setting.

1. Introduction

The translator's profession is vast and varied, and people employed as translators work in numerous different settings, with different working conditions, professional roles and statuses. It is thus relevant to ask how and whether the different contexts have a bearing on their professional activities and professional identities. In this paper, I will approach this question from the perspective of one single organisational setting, the European Commission. The background for this study is the changing political impetus that has recently instigated a new role for some of the translators. For them, the institutional framework has thus changed

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substantially. This presents an opportunity to research how institutionally expressed status affects the status as experienced by the translators themselves: as the institutional status changes, does the experienced status also change?

In this paper I will compare and contrast two kinds of data: institutional documents as well as interview and observation data. First, the framework for the work of translators employed by the European Commission is analyzed on the basis of a number of institutional core documents and recent framework texts. Second, the emerging institutionalised image of the translators is compared to the findings of an ethnographic study (see also Koskinen 2008), in particular, of the focus group discussions conducted in a Finnish translation unit in June 2004. This set of data is then further contrasted with new group interview data, collected in March 2008 from the local representation of the European Commission in Helsinki, where three translators are currently employed as part of the implementation of “Plan D”, the Commission’s new communication strategy. This means that, although the global organisational setting remains the same as it was for the 2004 data, the tasks and role of these three translators, who had previously been employed in normal translation units in Brussels and Luxembourg, have since been framed in a new way. The question I wish to explore in this article is: how has this shifted institutional framework affected the role and status as experienced by the translators?

2. The Institutional Framework for Translation

2.1. Legal Framework

Multilingualism is fundamental to the European Union. The very first council regulation (1958) stipulated the official languages (then four, now more than twenty) and established the citizens’ right to address the EU institutions in any of the official languages and to receive an answer in that same language. The principle of the multiple authenticity of the documents and the requirement that the institutions both speak and listen to all official languages has later been further reinforced and amended for new languages in the successive EU enlargements (see Wagner et al. 2002: 4-7). Building a multilingual institution where no one language is allowed to dominate necessitates the staff being “overburdened” with translators and interpreters (Jean Monnet, cited in Ste-

vens 2001: 126). Translating and interpreting are thus among the core functions in EU institutions.

Since the EU administration is largely law-based (Stevens 2001), it makes sense to begin the search for translators' status in the documents laying down the basic juridical guidelines. The single most significant document shaping the status of the Commission translators is the Staff Regulations, the document laying down the rules all civil servants working for European Union institutions are subject to (Stevens 2001: 46). Significantly, in the Staff Regulations translators (or interpreters) are in no way singled out. In the past, there used to be a separate category of LA officials ("L" signifying 'language'), but even then these LA officials were subject to all the same benefits and duties as the other A-level officials (the highest rank in the system, requiring a university degree). The separate LA group has now been discarded, and there are no differences.

This could be interpreted as an indication of an institutional recognition of the central role of the language mediators in the multilingual public body. Interestingly, this is not quite how the in-house translators experience the situation. Translators provide a service, working *for* the other officials, but they also share the same A-level status and salary levels, i.e., they work *with* the other officials. The focus group material reflects this ambivalent role (for a more extensive analysis, see Koskinen 2008: Ch. 5). In the discussion several translators expressed their detachment from other officials, emphatically constructing for themselves a distinct professional niche. According to this discourse, translators are not in fact officials at all: "I do not think of myself as an official but rather as a translator" (Informant E).¹ There was also a lot of hedging, explaining that translators are not "real", "especial" or "actual" officials.

There is an in-built subservience in this discourse: translators feel they do not have "substance value" (Informant L), and they assume they are viewed by others as a "necessary evil", slowing and complicating the processes (Informant I). Translating as a stage is seen as sepa-

1 Both group discussions – in 2004 and 2008 – were conducted in Finnish. All translations into English have been produced by the author. Transcription conventions of the 2004 data have been slightly adapted here to achieve symmetry with the new data.

rate from the actual text production process, and translators detached from the core activities:

The translator doesn't have any other business, that is, nothing to do with the production of these texts other than just translating so that in that sense we are not really... we have the status of an official but in reality we are translators just as any other translators in the world. (Informant I)

Identification thus seems to rather veer towards the professional group of translators than towards the institutional peers. A further indication of a perceived difference is a consistent pattern of only referring to other A-level officials as 'officials' (in contrast to 'us translators'). Similarly, there is a noticeable tendency throughout the focus group material for the participants to refer to the other Commission officials in the third person plural (they), excluding the translators (we) from the group. The way of juxtaposing A-level officials and translators is revealing: in the hierarchy of offices, translators *are* A-level officials. But this discourse indicates that they may find it difficult to identify with their peers whose professional role and level of commitment to European ideals are perhaps different from theirs (see Bellier 2000: 56).

The translator's profession is ambivalent at heart as the duality of reader/writer, source/target creates a fundamental undecidability as to where the translators' loyalty should be directed (see also Koskinen 2000). As for EU translators, the Staff Regulations stipulate that officials are bound by a loyalty to the European Communities:

An official shall carry out his duties and conduct himself solely with the interests of the Communities in mind; he shall neither seek nor take instructions from any government, authority, organisation or person outside his institution. He shall carry out the duties assigned to him objectively, impartially and in keeping with his duty of loyalty to the Communities. (Article 11)

It has been suggested that the Staff Regulations are too vague and thus prevent the general internalisation of moral attitudes or a specific ethos of accountability (Stevens 2001: 69). The civil servants are bound by an abstract service ethos, but left to figure out for themselves what it entails and how it affects their relationship to the outside world. For the translators, the spelled-out "duty of loyalty to the Communities" might actually alleviate the ethical dilemmas inherent in the process of

translation. However, the limited identification with other officials and strong professional ties with other translators in the world (I will return to this below) reduce the steering effect of the Article (see also Koskinen 2008: 98-101).

2.2. Political Framework

In spite of the central role of language issues in the very origin of the European communities, they have not always been high on the agenda during the past fifty years. In the Commission, the *Service de traduction* (SdT) was for long a mainly administrative unit with, as the name implied, a perceived service function. Recently, this state of affairs has changed noticeably. Institutionally, the SdT was upgraded to a full “DG” status in 2003. It is now the Directorate-General for Translation, “DGT” (see also European Commission n.d.). There is a multilingualism unit in the DGT and in the DG of Education and Culture and a Commissioner for Multilingualism, but no separate DG). These structural changes signal a heightened awareness of the political significance of languages, and they are also in tune with a simultaneous new emphasis on active citizenship.

This new emphasis on citizens and participatory politics is a universal trend of both national and transnational governance. Its origins can be traced to the legitimacy crisis of the OECD at the end of the 1990s, leading to a new participatory and transparent communication strategy (see, e.g., OECD 2001). Similarly, as the EU faced a defeat in referendums concerning the European constitution in the Netherlands and France, it was forced to rethink its relationship with the citizens.

The participatory turn also implies new, more dialogic forms of communication with the aim of narrowing “the gulf between the European Union and the people it serves”, by improving the consultation processes and by clarifying EU law (European Commission 2001). The White Paper on European Governance (European Commission 2001: 4, 8) discusses the need for “up-to-date, on-line information”, “stronger interaction with regional and local governments” and “more systematic dialogue”, and “more clarity and effectiveness in policy execution”.

In spite of the communicative ethos, there is scarcely a reference to the linguistic aspects of these goals in the entire document, and translation is not explicitly mentioned – nor is it reflected on in the fol-

low-up report on European governance (European Commission 2004), except for a lament that the need to accommodate the new languages has stalled the simplification of EU legislation. Implicitly, however, the White Paper includes translational aspects as it emphasises the need to communicate more actively with the general public, and to deliver information at the national and local level. This information “should be presented in a way *adapted to local needs and concerns*, and be available in *all official languages*” (2001: 11); emphasis added). It also states emphatically that achieving the goal of openness requires paying attention to the ways language is used in communication:

The Institutions should work in a more open manner. Together with the Member States, they should actively communicate about what the EU does and the decisions it takes. *They should use language that is accessible and understandable for the general public.* This is of particular importance in order to improve the confidence in complex institutions (European Commission 2001: 10; emphasis added).

If one were to infer a translation policy from the White Paper, it would be a reader-oriented one, empowering the translators to adapt the texts to local needs. This policy would also encompass all kinds of texts, not only the glossy brochures traditionally labelled for the “general public”. If anything, the White Paper puts forward a proactive role for the translators. At the same time, however, the implicitness and invisibility of translation in the document sends another kind of message: that of translation as a mechanical process unnecessary to dwell on when pondering the best ways to reach the people of the multilingual Europe.

Perfectly in line with the policy, the translators are willing to place strong emphasis on readability. However, this can be interpreted rather as an indication of professional ethics of translation than as a conscious attempt to adopt a particular policy. In all likelihood, the translators would have responded the same way even before the policy documents were even drafted – and no reference to any policy papers is made in either of the two groups. As one of the informants put it: “but isn’t it so that a translator **always** thinks of the receiver, always of the reader” (Informant I). In practice, however, they feel they are often unable to do that because they lack the necessary information of the intended audience or purpose of the text:

If I were to think about the target audience, which I too do not often do, well, there is a big obstacle in that one does not know what happens to the text after it leaves me and how many rounds it will circle in some procedure, before it even ends up in front of this Finnish reader, and when it does end up in front of the Finnish reader then who is that Finnish reader, that is, is it some official in a government office or is it the man in the street or who is it. (Informant A)

To an extent these two sets of data, the juridico-political institutional texts and the lived experiences of the translators, can be seen to illuminate a shared view. In addition to the shared emphasis on readability, the lack of visibility of translators in some framework documents appears similar to the lack of visibility the translators convey in the data. However, there are also striking differences. For example, the translators' experience of being "a nuisance" or "a necessary evil" is in direct contrast with the central role implicitly accorded to translation in some core documents. The lack of visibility is not reflected in remunerations and terms of employment, as the translators are entitled to the same benefits as all other officials.

3. Visibility and recognition

Translators' invisibility has been widely discussed in Translation Studies during the 1990s and since (for an overview, see Koskinen 2000a). In many ways, translators in the Commission seem to be suffering from translators' traditional lack of visibility in spite of their large numbers, central role and high pay. To understand this apparent contradiction, the concept of recognition (as used by Nancy Fraser) may be useful. It is frustratingly easy to come up with yet new examples of practices where translators are rendered invisible, but to get beyond the reified image of an entirely invisible profession and to open up the notion of (in)visibility, we also need other analytical tools, a set of related concepts such as Fraser's 'recognition' and 'status'.

Nancy Fraser (2000: 112) argues that 'identity models' are often flawed since they result in reification, producing a simplified group identity which denies the multiplicity of identifications and the cross-pulls of people's various affiliations. Fraser proposes an alternative approach that focuses on the question of social status ('status model'). Instead of group-specific identity she wants to emphasise the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction. Misrec-

ognition, then, is to be understood in the sense of being prevented from participating as a peer in social life. Misrecognition can be juridified in formal law, or it can be institutionalised via policies, administrative codes or professional practice. The status model thus focuses on institutionalised patterns of cultural value, assessing whether they constitute various actors as peers.

When, in contrast, they constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible – in other words, as less than full partners in social interaction – then we can speak of misrecognition and status subordination. (Fraser 2000: 113)

If one considers the Commission policy statements, with no explicit reference to translators, and the professional practices where the translators are detached from both their in-house clients and outside readers, they seem to count as evidence of inferiority, invisibility and otherness. But Fraser's status model also assumes individual responsibility and willingness in that recognition is based on participation as a full partner. Misrecognition, in that case, would not apply to those instances where the translators *choose to* remain inactive.

In an organisation as big as the DGT, with 1,750 translators, individual activity is a challenge, but there is power in numbers. Until 2004 (the time of the group discussions), the DGT – the body best placed to act on behalf of its staff – had kept a very low profile, thus for its part tacitly accepting the instrumental position of its translators. But more recent developments, resulting in a cooperation agreement between the DGT and DG Communication in December 2006, indicate both a new recognition and, in return, a new kind of partnership. The background for this rapprochement is to be found in "Plan D", the new communication strategy outlined in 2005.

4. D is for dialogue, debate and localisation

The Commission documents repeatedly emphasise that Plan D "for democracy, dialogue and debate" is not a "rescue operation", but it is evident that popular reactions to its policies in referendums and elections have forced the EU to reconsider its public image and to seek ways of maintaining its legitimacy during its "period of reflection". Plan D is the Commission's "long-term plan to reinvigorate European democracy and help the emergence of a European public sphere, where citizens are

given the information and the tools to actively participate in the decision making process and gain ownership of the European project” (European Commission 2005b: 2-3).

Originally, Plan D did not emphasise the role of translation. In the Action plan to improve communicating Europe (European Commission 2005a) published in July 2005, translation remained misrecognised. The aim of the plan was to ensure “more effective communication about Europe” by introducing “a modern and more professional approach” within the Commission. The plan proposed a number of efforts ranging from adding competent staff in local representations to coordinating all Commission communication into a coherent action. Although the action plan emphasised the need to address local audiences in their own language, there was no reference to the DGT. The plan also lamented that “the Commission lacks communication specialists”, but it entirely overlooked all the professionals of multilingual communication working in-house in the DGT.

In fact, the most direct reference to translation I could find in any of the core documents was written as the very last point of a follow-up report on Plan D, titled multilingualism and cited in its entirety below:²

From the Commission’s part, Plan D actions are undertaken in all the official languages of the EU (online discussion forum; Spring Day Europe), while initiatives carried out at the national, regional and local levels by the Commission’s Representations in Member States are undertaken in the respective language of the country. In this context, it must be stressed that multilingualism is a vital tool for enhancing a true dialogue with citizens. For this reason, the Commission and its institutional partners are striving to provide information on the web aimed at the general public in as many languages as possible. (European Commission 2006: 10)

In principle, one could argue that in these documents the institutional misrecognition of translation continued. The decisive difference to previous years is that now the DGT took a proactive role, and started taking steps towards getting involved in Plan D.³ For example, in his

² The official policy of equal access to information, together with the standard discourse of language versions rather than translations, probably prevents any mention of the inevitable multiple translations required to fulfil this aim (see also Koskinen 2000b).

³ Here I actually contradict myself. I have elsewhere (Koskinen 2008: 69-72) argued

speech addressed to the heads of local representations of the European Commission, Karl-Johan Lönnroth (the Finnish director-general of the DGT) emphatically puts translation at the centre of policy making and underlines the ways it can contribute to the implementation of Plan D:

With the policy of multilingualism, the translation service enters the center stage of policy making and must be taken into account in the preparatory process from the outset. [. . .] I consider DGT as a service provider with twofold objectives related to efficiency on the one hand, and transparency and legitimacy on the other, with a special contribution it can make to the Plan D of the Commission. (Lönnroth 2006)

On that same occasion, Lönnroth also delineated the tasks and roles of the translators to be seconded to the representations. As he pointed out, this was not an entirely new innovation, but a DGT practice of “antennas” that had existed even prior to Plan D, but would now be reinforced and reorganised:

As you know, DGT has for some years now maintained a modest presence in some of the EU-15 representations. In the spring of 2004 I established an agreement between DGT and DG/COMM which defined the roles and responsibilities of the translating staff, the Representations and DG/COMM in this respect. This was long before the Plan D and the debate on localisation became a priority in the Commission. It is firmly my belief that staff working in the Representations contribute [sic] to the objectives and priorities of the whole Commission, not only to the narrowly defined administrative requirements of one service. [. . .] I hope that I have been able to give you a different perspective from a different service from yours, and yet, enable you to appreciate the extent to which we can work together and find synergies between our tasks and objectives. At the end of the day, we all work for the benefit of the same organisation and for the benefit of Europe as a whole. (Lönnroth 2006)

In December 2006 the DGT and DG Communication agreed on the new roles and responsibilities of the DGT staff in local representations. In January 2007 the three translators posted to Helsinki had already started their work. In other words, the recruitment procedure was simultaneous

that the DGT took a rather passive role. That was indeed the case during the data collection and analysis for the book, but during the final stages of manuscript writing (in early 2007), a significant change of attitude became more and more evident. One of the aims of this article is precisely to take stock of these recent developments, which I was unable to incorporate in the book.

with the negotiations, and the prospective task was redefined during the process. As a result, its translation aspect was reduced and the outreach role became more prominent. The job description is comprehensive: in addition to linguistic assistance and translation it includes localisation of information and reaching out to the citizens, content and management of the web pages, promoting multilingualism, liaison with universities and other education institutions, contacts with ministries and other authorities and stakeholders in matters relating to multilingualism and so on. These three “postes” (in the unspecified French form they were first announced), were officially labelled ‘language officers’, but as the ones recruited for the job told me in the interview, they had found no adequate translation for it either in Finnish or in Swedish: “we call ourselves translators”.⁴

5. Changing role, changing status?

5.1. New tasks

This changed institutional status and place for the three translators offers a fruitful setting for a comparative analysis with material from the previous focus group discussions. The group interview of the three translators posted in Helsinki took place in March 2008, at the time when the interviewees had already held their three-year posts for more than one year, getting accustomed to their new role. They were all recruited from among regular staff translators, and they thus have first-hand experience of both settings and are in a position to make comparisons.

During their first year I had already had an opportunity to follow their work: as they have been the object of my observations, I in turn have been among the objects of their liaison exercises directed at translator training institutions. I had also been in contact with some of their predecessors (prior to Plan D), and my interest was originally aroused by the noticeable difference in their activities, both in visibility and in variability. Not only have they actively participated in translator training, they have also organised workshops, given papers and presented posters at academic conferences. Previously, these activities had been far more sporadic, and typically high-level plenaries rather than dialog-

⁴ In extracts from the group interview of 2008, the three participants have been purposely left unidentified.

ic workshops. These are not among traditional core functions for translators, and definitely not for those working in the translation units of the DGT. In the interview the response to whether they felt their work was essentially similar to what they had been doing before was an emphatic and unanimous: “Not at all!” What, then, seems to have changed?

5.2. Feedback and support

In 2004, the participants also filled in a questionnaire. In it, lack of feedback and appreciation, as well as a feeling of isolation were listed by many among factors affecting work motivation. To my question of whether feedback has increased during the years, the sarcastic reply in the focus group was: “what feedback?” followed by shared laughter. The general experience was of the translators toiling away without much contact beyond the DGT, and detached from the processes their translations were part of (see also quotation in Chapter 2 above). It even felt as if they were the only ones actually reading the translations:

One is always a bit surprised if sometimes someone from the department contacts you about a translation, for example if there is a mistake or something else or for some other reason, then one gets sort of startled: yes indeed, this really gets read! (Informant J)

Now, when I asked about feedback in the latter interview in 2008, the response was totally different. There were so many different ways of getting regular feedback that the interviewees did not seem to know where to start. Among those mentioned were the Finnish language coordinator with whom they had contact regularly/ weekly especially in the beginning, and who still gives them regular feedback which is highly appreciated. Then there is the entire staff of the representation (the translators work in the same premises as the other officials). They also have weekly video meetings with their designated coordinator in D1 (a special unit in the DGT set up to support the local antennas) and with other translators working in similar representations in the Baltic area and the Nordic countries. In dire opposition to the previous results, these translators also regularly get direct and immediate feedback from the users of their texts, for example by e-mail. A major part of their work is to produce localised versions of the press releases, and so, reading the morning paper or watching the evening news gives them direct info on how their work has been perceived:

When you open *Hesari* [a nickname for the leading Finnish newspaper] in the morning, you can immediately see whether the press release has been effective. And the feeling is indeed good when you have spent some time during the day drafting a press release, and in the evening news the item is brought up. There is no way of knowing whether the reporters have got their info from the release or from somewhere else but in any case you feel like "Wow!" There is definitely quite a difference when compared to the past!

As the above quotation shows, the feeling of immediacy and of being in the centre of events is quite tangible for the translators. The amount of feedback from within the institution may also be related to the fact that their tasks are partially new for the DGT, and have thus sparked high-level interest within the Commission (the translators' view of their "pre-Plan D" predecessors was that "they were just sent here and then told to get on with it"). In any case, the translators surely felt they are getting a lot of support, and they have also received training for their new tasks. However, it is also worth noticing that the translators have not simply sat and waited for the feedback to come but have also actively sought it: for example, they initiated a survey among Finnish journalists to find out whether the press releases were considered useful.

5.3. Motivation

The feeling of being part of the bigger picture, and the constant reward of getting immediate feedback both in the form of media coverage, institutional support and face-to-face contacts with various stakeholders, all add to increased job satisfaction. The key word, repeated over and over again during the group interview, was 'freedom'. They felt they have a lot of freedom to use their own initiative at work. Extensive overtime, for example, was mentioned without a hint of complaining: "we can decide for ourselves what we do", says one of them, and another one continues: "It is one's own choice. The tasks are simply so much fun. I am having a great time here."

This enthusiasm was a dominant feature throughout the interview. One gets the impression that this is a team that really enjoys what they are doing. The contrast to the far more subdued and often sarcastic atmosphere of the previous interviews was remarkable. The difference between the posts was also brought up by the translators:

– One is so much closer to the end client here.

– I myself used to think [in the previous post] much more often that I just work here, that the Commission is just my employer. One could maybe not be totally against the EU, or I suppose one could but it would become tiresome, one has to have some faith in what one is doing, but still, it was just another job for me. But now...

– [humorously] Is it like ‘*la commission, c’est moi*’ now then?

– Well, indeed yeah. For example, when you are handing out leaflets in the Esplanade Park on Europe Day, which is a fairly simple task as such, somehow you feel proud. The EU is in fact a great thing!

The following extract is from one of the group discussions in 2004 where the participants discussed the differences between translators and other officials. One major difference they identified was precisely the degree of affective commitment to the Commission (this is also an example of the us-them discourse differentiating between translator and A-level officials):

I noticed it last summer when I took part in one of these *stages* where there were many... most of them were A-level officials, there were only a few translators, and then some of these A-officials were like, they said that this is such a wonderful thing this... *I love the Commission* [dramatically]... that it has so many possibilities to take initiative and to get things done. A translator does not have this feeling. (Informant L)

In the light of the two interviews and observations it would seem that the lesser affective involvement is not only a question of tasks and professional identities but also of institutional and physical *space*. As informant L continues: “one does not get to think about it **here**”. That is, the place and space where the translators were located (for more on space and place, see, e.g., Massey 2008) at that time did not encourage them to see themselves and their work in relation to the bigger picture, but if you move the translators *physically* into closer contact with other officials and the target audiences, and if you move them *institutionally* into a more flexible and independent space, you can radically increase their commitment, motivation and job satisfaction. In the book *Translating Institutions* (Koskinen 2008), where the results of the previous data analysis were published, I included a chapter on the physical and

institutional setting because I intuitively felt that the spaces (both concrete and abstract) occupied by the translators are relevant for understanding their status.⁵ In this “test case”, organised as if for my research purposes by the DGT, changing the space(s) indeed produced significant changes in the translators’ experienced status.

5.4. Professional identity

In Chapter 2 above I discussed both the translators’ tendency to differentiate between themselves and other officials and also their views that their work is similar to translators anywhere else. In the second group interview in 2008 it became obvious that the tasks and responsibilities for the translators in the local representation are in many ways more varied than in the DGT translation unit, and the PR or “ambassador” functions go way beyond any prototype translator post. According to their own estimate, actual translation work takes up some ten per cent of their time. Considering the lack of recognition and the collective low self-esteem that came up in the focus groups, one might have assumed that the officials recruited for these “postes” without any explicit translation aspect attached to the title might want to use the opportunity to subdue their translator identity and focus more on the “language officer” aspects. It is somewhat surprising that they did not do that. As was mentioned before, according to them, ‘language officer’ does not translate into Finnish or Swedish so they call themselves translators – albeit with a wide job description – and that is how they identify themselves. To my question about the large extent of other activities and the potential repercussions to their translator identity, they answered as follows:

- I am a translator even when I am localising.
- I feel that my personal identity is that of a translator all the time.
- I always introduce myself as a translator.

As has been discussed in the subchapters above, in many ways the two groups, that of 2004 and that of 2008, have very different situations. On the issue of professional identity, however, they are unanimous. In spite

⁵ For an analysis of the space and position of translators in network economy, see also Abdallah and Koskinen 2007.

of all the differences and other professional identities available for use, both groups identify very strongly with the professional role of being a translator. This is an interesting finding, and one that I suspect could be found in many other settings as well: what is it that makes people personally so attached to a profession that is so often felt to be invisible, misrecognised and misunderstood? It is also highly interesting in the present situation where, as these localising translator-ambassadors demonstrate, the professional field of more or less remotely translational activities is rapidly expanding. In the face of various localising, revising, postediting and multilingual drafting practices, the number of professional titles has also increased, and it has sometimes been argued that the traditional 'translator' label is no longer sufficient and up-to-date. That may well be the case, and it may well carry a burden of past misunderstandings, but it also seems to have strong emotional power.

6. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of two groups of translators working for the same organisation but in different settings and with different briefs offers an opportunity to increase our understanding of how various institutional and social factors affect their experienced status. The analysis indicates that it is not only the formal framework (in this case, the Staff Regulations and the legal framework were not changed) nor the initial institutional visibility that matter. The analysis suggests that notions such as 'recognition' and 'space', both in the form of geographic and organisational location and as the institutional room for manoeuvre, can help us deepen our understanding of the various factors affecting the status and identity of the translators in different organisational settings.

For professional translators and translation students, the data analysed above can function as an encouraging example: translators are not predestined to be institutionally invisible and misrecognised. The collective action by the DGT, combined with the personal initiative of the translators themselves, have significantly affected the role of the translators located in the local representation in Helsinki. If these three translators are not an exception, the DGT will also have implemented an extensive image campaign: the new active and innovative presence of the DGT among other officials will hopefully help to heighten the

awareness that it is not only these few translators but the entire staff of the DGT who are at the “center stage of policy making and must be taken into account in the preparatory process from the outset” (Lönroth 2006).

The real challenge and opportunity for the DGT will be to manage the return of these “translation ambassadors” after their three-year period, when they are to return to their original units. In the interview, the issue of returning was also brought up. The translators’ present role is different from those in the normal units, and the prospect of returning to the narrower role and space is perhaps not entirely pleasing. The issue was dealt with jokingly: “I am already getting worried about how I will be able to return”, one of them said laughing, and another one continued, again laughing: “It is going to be quite a shock”.

However, the DGT will actually at that point have a great opportunity to initiate a wider reform of the entire translation service, if only it succeeds in tapping the enthusiasm and motivation of the fifty to sixty returning language officers. Giving them an explicit task of spreading the “localisation gospel” (their expression) in the translation units and supporting their task with institutional initiatives could well initiate a landslide change of ethos in the DGT, making it a more recognised player in EU policy and also improving the motivation of the entire staff and, I believe, the quality of EU communication.

Source documents

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