GILTy or not GILTy:
Tailoring the translation profession to the gospel of standardization

Fernando Ferreira-Alves
University of Minho

Abstract
This paper focuses on the role of translator training from a professional point of view by looking at some of the ways through which internationalization strategies and standardization policies are embedded in translation discourse and reflected in professional practice via a politically-correct, standards-based, quality-oriented approach tuned in to the requirements of the language industry.

All of us who are involved in the translation and localization world know perfectly well that we are in a deregulated industry, in which we institute our own standards, if they are not already imposed for us by our direct or end customers. We also know that every business has its own procedures, sometimes similar, and on other occasions absolutely the opposite. But all these procedures seek the same purpose: to achieve the translation or localization of a product with the highest possible quality.

Juan José Arevalillo Doval, managing partner of Hermes Traducciones y Servicios Lingüísticos and President of the Technical Committee for the Standard EN-15038, in “The EN-15038 European Quality Standard for Translation Services: What’s Behind It?”

This paper starts by establishing some sort of dialogue with another text on globalization by Pierre Cadieux, President of i18N Incorporation, and Bert Esselink, entitled “GILT: Globalization, Internationalization, Localization, Translation”, in which both authors confess their sense of guilt in relation to their inadequacy to correctly define the other terms that compose the acronym, thus recognising, as did Donald DePalma and Hans Fenstermacher, the impossibility to grasp the meaning of such disparate and volatile terms as globalization, internationalization and localization.

The relentless movement towards unifying language industry procedures around the so-called GILT effect (G11n, I18n, L10n and Translation) worldwide is a peculiar trend that started at the end of the 20th century, and still pervades our perception of translation as a multidisciplinary, industrialised, business-oriented phenomenon. The transition from the 20th century to the 21st century was marked by radical changes in the language industry under the banner of globalization, which follow a similar pattern: a sudden increase in the spread of information worldwide, the massification in the production of information and data management routines, powerful internationalization strategies, the establishment of consistent reciprocal relationships at an
international level as well as the emergence of globalized multilingual collaborative networks.

The revolution in the so-called “language economy” landscape can also be explained by other variables that played a decisive role in the assertion of translation practice as an autonomous, professionally-oriented subject within the social and human sciences, namely the development of digital translation worldwide, the globalization of content management/information retrieval systems, the development of complex networking routines designed to help multilingual collaborative activities as well as huge investment campaigns oriented towards the deployment of intensive globalization strategies.

Ultimately, however, this commoditisation of translation services, as stated by Reinhard Schäler (Schäler, 2005) has decisively affected the role, position and function of the contemporary translation professional, with unpredictable consequences that need to be assessed accordingly. Translational interaction as a purposeful, functionalist activity – communicative, interpersonnal and target-oriented – as expounded by Christiane Nord, is the result of a dispersive dynamic movement that has fragmented our object of study into multiple tiny particles that gravitate around a common core where language professionals live and work.

The gradual transformation of translation practice into something new, as well as its evolution towards new spheres and domains where specialization and diversification rule, reveals quite distinctly how the language paradigm has changed in the last few decades thanks to the development of international exchange policies. This is, in fact, the new information-based economy where knowledge is produced and processed on a continual basis, where standards are implemented, where new procedures and routines designed for information retrieval/knowledge management are adopted, where the individual is confronted with global contamination and miscegenation and where communication tends to blend elements of technical and intercultural communication. In brief, the way translation services are being transformed into consumer goods or into a commodity shows a unique, inseparable connection, that is intimately associated with the concept of metamorphosis and transformation in this sort of boundaryless McLuhanish global village which is connected via multilingual, multiservice networks in a permanent state of flux and dynamics.

The birth of this new type of economy based on the production of specific goods and services that are mainly associated with intellectual labour or activity,
focused on the creation and circulation of information, and linked to the so-called mercantilization of knowledge in the Information Society, can also be explained in the light of the most recent changes that have involved profound changes in the paradigm of production models and the organization of work. Also worth mentioning is the subsequent transition to new industrialised patterns which are increasingly more rigid and subject to tightly-corseted rules, where new production models are associated with much more flexible post-fordian schemes, characterised by the massification of production routines. Organized at a global scale via a network of connections that are established among different economic agents, this new working environment will eventually lead to the ability to articulate high productivity patterns with informatized, standardised production units, which are easy to programme, and able to respond on a fast and adequate basis to the ever-increasing changes that are observed in terms of demand (product flexibility) or technology (process flexibility).

Faced with the social-professional dynamics and mutability of a profession that has barely been studied from a sociological perspective, and is so often undermined in terms of its context and socio-professional background, we should perhaps start by trying to search for the answer to the following questions, firstly: “What is it to translate today within a business-oriented context?”, and, secondly: “How far is this new focus on standards and metrics affecting the way translators see themselves when confronted with a market that is increasingly more specialised, volatile and unique?”

Our approach assumes that there are new constraints and requirements that affect translation practice in general based on new business-oriented patterns, which, on the one hand, may account for its devaluation in terms of socio-professional status, and, on the other, may explain why the role and place of the translator is actually being neglected in the most diverse forums worldwide, and metamorphosised into something new, a hybrid entity whose exact position is worth studying within new settings that are mainly governed by the designs and constraints of the global economy as well as by the massification and fragmentation of translation services.

According to Don Kiraly, we are now witnessing a sort of “whirlwind of change in the language market” (Kiraly, 2000:2), and his subsequent comparison of the current professional status quo to an undeniable social void, whose characterisation or de-characterisation will imply “deep fundamental and decisive changes within the scope and nature of translation skills” (Kiraly, 2000:19/20), gives us some legitimacy to focus our approach around the
concept of the specific restructuring of professionalization aimed at the essential collaborative and cooperative aspects of the translator’s work within mediated contexts that are simultaneously marked by signs of social interaction within a business/managerial framework where both human and non-human elements coexist in the same conceptual actor-network scenario, and where different agents operate, namely the producer, the provider, the intermediary and the client/customer or final/end-user.

In the last few decades, the provision of specialised language services worldwide has benefited immensely from the exponential rise in computer-oriented solutions aimed at simplifying the process of handling a wide range of translation projects or assignments at a local level, in such a way that computer science and the world of technology are actually pervading translation practice from top to bottom. Both informatics and the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) are gradually affecting all stages of translation logistics, from setup to breakdown, helping in the process of designing integrated, modular “turn-key” services, and developing tailor-made, customer-oriented products or solutions according to the needs and requirements of the market.

However, in conjunction with its growing technicization and specialization, as described by Miguel Núñez Ferrer, most of the different and complex ways of providing translation services have also evolved. This new trend towards doing business according to standardised, rigid production models explains why translation companies often try to replicate assembly-line manufacturing methodologies, as if translation was a mechanized task, where lean production is valued, time-to-market is privileged and working routines are automatized in order to improve the final-end product that is offered in terms of quality, coherence, consistency, speed and layout. Also, the structure according to which high-quality services are provided is gradually becoming more professional, routinized and stereotyped, which means that translation is achieving a new composite status within the scope of social and human sciences, thanks to the implementation of market laws, namely rules and regulations that are influenced by the offer/demand paradigm, industrial production schemes, fixed terms and conditions, time pressures, daily productivity levels, output and quality standards.

**Professional Translation: 4 underlying dynamics**

In order to contextualise our approach, we have decided to focus our attention on the analysis of the so-called “professional collective identity” that
is developed by translators in the course of their activity, as defined by Anthony Pym in “Training Translators and European Unification: A Model of the Market” (April 2000). This model starts from the notion that there is a "structurally fragmented market that is in some ways the logical consequence of globalisation" and the result of the division that has been established in the heart of what is usually called professional, intellectual labour.

We are also in agreement with the position adopted by Hermans and Lambert, and Anthony Pym (2006), according to whom it is necessary to redefine the role of what is commonly called "business translation" within the context of translation studies, and thereby to focus our attention on this entirely new phenomenon by starting to study the type of social organization where translation often occurs, as well the most frequent managerial routines that are adopted in the provision of high-quality translation services. We also wish to base our study on the position defended by Hermans and Lambert, according to which it is absolutely crucial to redefine the role of so-called "business translation" within the context of Translation Studies, and therefore to approach this entirely new phenomenon by analysing how the company is organised, and by considering the usual management procedures within business-oriented environments characterised by the provision of services.

According to the research being done in the field of the professionalization of translation practice, namely in the sub-domain of business translation, it seems possible for us to harmonise two apparently distinctive areas which are, however, complementary and unified by a common destiny: profession and training. Indeed, based on the literature available on the subject of translator training, the conjugation between the world of work and the academic world geared towards teaching and training translators does actually seem to be one of the ways in which it will be possible to increase credibility and emphasise the qualitative self-assertion of the kind of professionals working in the sector.

Our aim will be to draw some conclusions that are useful for research purposes, beginning with the ability to assess the type of profiles and needs of the sector as well as the characterisation of a certain type of profile that is characteristic of the typical Translation Service Provider. Faced with such an apparent impasse, we consider it possible to detect four major contact points and four underlying dynamics that actually do seem to characterise both spheres of knowledge and their respective areas of practical implementation in such a specific professional activity.
Firstly, there is the dynamics of globalisation, characterised by items such as teleworking, networking, teletranslation and localisation, but also mobility, distance work and a focus on new concepts and technological formats, something that will ultimately involve the emergence of a new sociological profile as well as the whole redefinition of the concept of professionalization.

Secondly, we detect the dynamics of translation as both a process and, at the same time, a product, with its own specific procedures, routines and methodology specifically geared towards newly-defined and tailor-made projects. Within this translational dynamic we also find a whole set of strategies and theoretical-practical aspects that could enable specialised training for the translator as well as promoting his/her ability to adapt to the most varied contexts, backgrounds, professional situations, language pairs and specialised subjects.

Thirdly, we will consider the whole dynamics of teaching and training, in which we will include the ability to learn new skills, to acquire knowledge, and develop professional aptitude, as well as the formulation of methodological and conceptual issues in tune with real-life communication situations. Considering the current circumstances, in which translation actually occurs, this type of dynamic may eventually imply the redefinition of the training paradigm and ultimately change the whole teaching and learning process, through the adoption of new proposals, perspectives, points of view and new pedagogical methodologies resulting from a market-oriented and highly formatted kind of vision.

Finally, we propose the analysis of business-oriented dynamics, a highly recurrent theme in terms of the data gathered in the course of our research, and, more concretely, the attention given recently to the increasingly important role of business culture and business-oriented language derived from management theories which is, in fact, a frequent issue when we are faced with the enormous number of norms and procedures that are applied by professionals from the localisation industry, for instance. This business-oriented trend is characterised by the perception of translation as a pure act of management, as suggested by Steyaert and Janssens (Steyaert and Janssens, 1997:143), and also by the surrendering to the requirements of standardization in the language industry through the adoption, introduction and interiorisation of new norms, standards, formats, regulations and precepts which are specifically oriented towards managing and assessing the processes involved. These include breaking down, classifying and cataloguing all the stages involved in the translation process, project management, and quality management and control, using the most
adequate and diverse control mechanisms and control metrics which are specifically targeted in order to render the whole process of providing a formatted product more flexibly, more precisely and more accurately. Finally, as suggested by Hermans and Lambert, this approach hides the need to rebuild and reformulate the whole concept of ethics and the dynamics of providing a specific translation service within a business-oriented perspective (Hermans and Lambert, 1998:127), the absolutely crucial importance of integrating the translators themselves into the objectives, goals and strategies of the translation agencies, influenced by a healthy atmosphere of dialogue, cooperation and, “last but not least”, the integration of a certain type of strategic business-oriented philosophy into the translator training curriculum.

Speaking about standards as applied to translation services: the new EN 15038

Writing about the power and the effects of standardization in an article entitled "Standards in the Language Industry”, Sue Ellen Wright defines the best standards as “(...) the ones you use all the time, but that you never even notice are there.” (Wright, 2004). A standard is therefore a document that has been defined, written and approved by a ratifying body, establishing a set number of rules, regulations, guidelines and criteria that are supposed to be applied to a specific type of activity, thus governing a certain type of professional practice, according to best practice procedures. Standards are, therefore, usually aimed at regulating industrial experiences by promoting professionalism according to quality-oriented criteria, implementing accreditation and/or certification schemes, developing useful metrics for the assessment of professional practice, creating consistent norms designed to improve professional procedures and routines and, “last but not least”, by clarifying issues connected with professionalization.

In his article on standardization and accreditation, “Accreditation and Standards in the Translation Industry”, Roger Chriss states that “The translation industry is in desperate need of some fundamental definitions”, eager to get a specific set of terms and procedures that will ultimately govern best practices in professional translation:

*The translation industry needs to find some simple, clear-cut, straight-forward definitions of what a translator is, what a translator does, how a translator should translate, what constitutes a good translation, what a translation agency is and does, and how translation agencies and translators, or translation*
employers and translators, should interact with each other, to name a few possibilities.

It is a well-known fact that the complementary notions of quality and excellence, as applied to industrial domains in the last two decades of the 20th century, have played a decisive role in the formation of a new professional awareness of the need to improve services and products. At that time, this obsession with quality-oriented procedures has quite literally resulted in a real standardization fever that eventually led, according to Juan José Arevalillo Doval (2005), to the production of a multitude of different quality standards in a number of areas, issued and approved under the so-called umbrella of the ISO standards.

Speaking at the first EUATC conference, in a paper appropriately called “Meeting the requirements of the new CEN standard: future challenges for cooperation”, Marcel Thelen discussed the European standard for translation services by identifying a foundation for mutual understanding, i.e. a common ground of perspectives that were mainly designed to make a specific set of practices uniform from a professional point of view in the context of language industry procedures. The potential implementation of the said standard was also affected by the question of professional accreditation as well as the development of useful metrics that would eventually permit the assessment, evaluation and regulation of the performance and productivity patterns of the professionals in the field, guided by the gospel of quality, in order to clarify some of the most pressing issues associated with the professionalization of translation services.

In another paper presented at the same event, Miguel Núñez-Ferrer managed to summarise some of the major reasons and objectives behind the implementation of the said standard, namely to raise awareness of the type of services provided (i.e. transparency), establish a distinctive definition of the scope, breadth and width of a specific translation business assignment (i.e. specificity), move towards the implementation of clear parameters aimed at regulating professional practice (i.e. standardization), the establishment of clear rules and procedures designed to improve the relationship between the client and the translation service provider, as well as the relationship between translation agencies and the translator himself/herself (i.e. clarity), promote a better understanding of the tasks involved in the definition and provision of high-quality translation services (i.e. clarity), and finally to promote a cooperative type of organizational culture between the companies acting in conformity with their standardized requirements (i.e. uniformity). In brief, the
European standard was designed to implement a whole series of necessary requirements and procedures, by focusing the attention on the product itself, as well as on the quality of the type of service to be provided by each TSP.¹

Considering the important role played by the above-mentioned document as the cornerstone of our approach, it is our belief that the implementation of the “EN-15038 European Quality Standard for Translation Services” will have a profound impact upon the way people see translation as a professional service, not only by affecting the profession itself and translation practice as well, but also the way professionals will start to behave and relate to their peers and customers alike.

The standard has several important aspects that are worth stressing for everybody involved in this supply chain, be it the practitioner, the consumer, the trainer or the researcher, both upstream and downstream as the case may be. First of all, the whole concept of the translator itself ends up by being completely redefined, if not erased, by means of the inclusion of a new terminological concept, for example, the TSP or *Translation Service Provider*, i.e. "person or organisation supplying translation services" (EN 15038:2006, paragraph 2.18, page 6) and, above all, by the distinction that is drawn between *translation service provider* (TSP) and *translator* (“person who translates” i.e. “renders information in the source language into the target language in written form.” (EN 15038:2006, paragraph 2.17, page 6).

The European standard also specifies the basic requirements that are necessary to achieve the status of a *Translation Service Provider*. This is done by setting out a new nomenclature that will help clarify the status and profile of this new language professional, by accurately describing a wide array of disparate items and procedures that gravitate around the concept and are involved in the provision of quality services, such as human and technical resources, quality management policies, quality-oriented practices, project management, the contractual framework, the client/TSP relationship, the

¹ The new European standard EN 15038 governing translation services is broadly described as follows in its introductory section:

*The purpose of this European standard is to establish and define the requirements for the provision of quality services by translation service providers.*

*It encompasses the core translation process and all other related aspects involved in providing the service, including quality assurance and traceability.*

*This standard offers both translation service providers and their clients a description and definition of the entire service. At the same time it is designed to provide translation service providers with a set of procedures and requirements to meet market needs.*

*Conformity assessment and certification based on this standard are envisaged.*

TSP/TSP relationship (individual or organization), as well as a whole new range
of concepts associated with the notion of a translation service, namely value-
added services, locale, controlled languages, project management, quality
management, pre-editing, post-editing; checking, reviser/proofreading;
reviewer/review, project registration details, project registration, project
assignment or style guides.

As far as skills and competencies are concerned, the EN 15038 Standard
for Translation Services is also involved in the establishment of a prescriptive
frame of reference comprising a series of basic requirements or categories that
are considered to be important to the formation of the future Translation Service
Provider’s profile. Among the qualities that are supposed to be found in this
new professional outline one can easily find a wide range of features such as
human resource management skills, professional skills, translation skills,
linguistic and textual skills (both SL and TL), research skills, information
retrieval/knowledge processing skills, cultural skills, interpersonal skills,
technical/technological skills, revision and editing skills, material resource
management and professional development.

Standardization, Training and the Profession: some doubts and
directions…

There are many questions and there are many doubts that surround the
implementation of the new translation standard. And there are the threats and
challenges arising from its future implementation, both upstream and
downstream, as we have already stated. Before concluding our paper we would
like to take the opportunity to reflect on the impact of standardization
procedures upon the training of professional translators, by posing some topics
and contributions for reflection in order to recontextualize translation practice
within specific business-oriented settings marked by social interaction.

In the face of this new configuration of the translator’s profile and
function, it seems important that the kind of training provided should be as
polyvalent and versatile as possible, as well as sufficiently multifaceted,
integrated and multimodal. It should also be geared towards the so-called new
satellite-professions or extensions of the task of the translator and conveniently
open and available so as to solve the equation problem posed by the
specialist/generalist dichotomy. Quoting Cauer, and subverting his rather
famous dictum, the type of training offered should be as general as possible and
as specialised as necessary. If our goal is to train the kind of individual that
Nord calls the “functional translator” (Nord, 2005:210 and 211), i.e. a
professional translator who is aware that translation today is used in the most varied communication situations, thus requiring a special flair for articulating professional knowledge with the most suitable social norms and technical-functional skills, it is possible that just one type of training that is both balanced and diversified, as well as compatible with the new personal and professional demands on the translator, can meet the diverse requirements of the new market, where the individual translator is confronted with the specific dynamics of project management, human resources management, materials management and, above all, an entirely new dynamic geared towards sociability and the application of a specific savoir-faire. In this sense, a multi and interdisciplinary approach seems to be a wise option in order to provide the trainee with a series of strategies and solutions that will eventually allow him to easily integrate and adapt himself to the new working contexts, with which s/he will be constantly faced, characterised by a vast array of language combinations, thematic and conceptual specialisation as well as technological diversification and complexity. Basically, a more human interactive and pro-active kind of training focused on the individual as a person, whilst at the same time professionally oriented and focused on such crucial values as quality of service, ethics and deontology. This approach will eventually help us regain a new technical culture of the craft, while at the same time implying the knowledge of what to do and how to be that is deeply rooted in specialised contexts marked by social interaction. This would be a type of training that would be able to respond to the exigencies and constraints of a professional activity and at the same time to combine the four challenges which underlie a true ethics of professionalization as proposed by Jaques Delors, i.e. learning to be (individual), learning to know (knowledge), learning to do (technique) and learning to live together / interact (social).

This seems to be one of the possible keys which will allow us to cope with the winds of change that are affecting the type of profession we want, in particular at a time when the vast majority of the most recent publications on the theme (Thomson-Wohlgemuth, 2004, Pym, 2005 and 2006) seems to be redirecting our attention to the essential role played by the human element that has somehow seemed to have become lost in the translation process, i.e. by privileging people and behaviours, especially in the face of the omnipresent and normative character of industrial patterns which are exclusively focused on the value of functional and technical qualities.
References


