

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Durham University
Unit of Assessment: 28 (Languages and Linguistics)
Title of case study: CS3 Shaping European Policy on the Training of Translators
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>The European Masters in Translation (EMT) is a partnership between the European Commission and higher education (HE) institutions in 27 member states that offer master’s level translation studies programmes. The EMT sets a benchmark of quality and assesses MA programmes. Based on his research into low-quality translation in public discourse, revision techniques and the assessment of translation quality, Federico Federici co-authored policy documents to which all EMT partners must refer. His distinctive contribution is to ensure that, for the first time, the training of translators in EMT-accredited organisations should foster continuous learning skills and enhancement of skills so as to prepare students for lifelong careers as translators.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Federico Federici has been a member of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures at Durham University since 2006, as Lecturer and then Senior Lecturer. His research addresses the problem that cross-cultural translations can often give rise to misrepresentations in the translated text. Low-quality translation in public discourse – in newspapers, policy statements, and cultural and commercial materials – is particularly susceptible to ideological distortion, when the transfer of the original text into a different language fails to acknowledge or analyse subtle cultural differences [output 1]. These problems have become all the more acute given the expansion of unregulated training courses in translation. In an environment in which translation is often outsourced to practitioners with insufficient and static understanding of the political, social, professional and industrial texts on which they work – or indeed to automated translation systems – skilled translation requires more than solely linguistic competence; it requires continuing cultural awareness, and a pragmatic and theoretical understanding of how to conduct research based on valid and reliable sources. By proposing strategies to strengthen this awareness among student translators, Federici identifies concrete solutions to the challenges posed by culturally under-informed translations.</p> <p>Federici’s research emphasises the agency of translators in the transfer of knowledge, and their potentially fraught role in technical, practical and cultural transmission. In his examination of Italian newspapers’ account of a US military report dealing with the friendly-fire killing of an Italian security agent in Iraq [output 1], he demonstrates that linguistic choices made by translators introduced ideological inflections, with the effect of legitimising Italian complaints that the report expressed particular American perspectives and interests. In a study of the English voice-overs and subtitles for the 2005 Italian satirical docu-film <i>Viva Zapatero!</i> [output 2], Federici shows that the force of the satire was lost and that the meanings were subject to what he terms ‘oblique censorship’ because the translation failed to match the complexity of the original work. Federici argues that the potential for achieving high-quality translations is impeded by the lack of appropriate training to promote self-assessment among translators throughout their careers [output 3].</p> <p>In addressing this problem, Federici demonstrates the benefit of programmes of translation studies designed to promote self-reflective critical practice. As both translators and their texts are culturally embedded, it is imperative that the training of translators instils habitual sensitivity towards cultural and ideological differences. His central proposal is that continuous learning and ‘self-correction’ should be at the heart of the training of translators, thereby preparing students for a life-long career as translators. A key aspect of this process of self-assessment is continuing attention to changing culturally-specific nuances. Federici argues that student translators, having submitted their work for assessment and after receiving guidance, should have the opportunity to resubmit the work. This opportunity to resubmit encourages positive ‘self-correction’. This cycle of practice and self-assessment promotes cross-cultural responsibility as well as linguistic judgement.</p> <p>Federici’s focus on translators’ skills as a preventive measure against instances of weak and ideological translations led to his collaboration with the European Masters in Translation body in</p>

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organising and writing original policy documents. These require that teachers are trained to instil in students the practices of dynamic, continuous and independent learning and self-correction. Students thereby develop the necessary skills to be active researchers in their particular areas of specialism as these change or emerge during their career.

3. References to the researchKey outputs

1. F. M. Federici, 2010a. 'Legitimised Texts: Translations in Italian Media during the Calipari Case', in S. Bassnett and C. Schäffner (eds.) *Political Discourse, Media and Translation*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Press, pp. 117-142. ISBN: 978-1-4438-1677-9.
2. Federici, F.M., 2011a. 'Silenced Images: the Case of *Viva Zapatero!*', in B. Maher and R. Wilson (eds) *Words, Images and Performances in Translation*. London: Continuum, pp. 139-57. ISBN: 9781441172310
3. F. M. Federici, 2010b. 'Assessing Translation Skills: Reflective Practice on Linguistic and Cultural Awareness', in V. Pellatt, K. Griffiths, and S-C. Wu (eds) *Teaching and Testing Interpreting and Translating*. Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, pp. 171-92. ISBN: 9783039118922.

Evidence of quality

All outputs were subject to peer review by editors and press readers. Outputs 1 and 3 are submitted in REF 2.

4. Details of the impact

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT) is the largest single public employer of translators in Europe. It therefore has special responsibilities both to provide leadership for professional translators, and to help them meet the challenges posed by the increasingly multilingual environment in the European Union. The DGT has established the European Masters in Translation (EMT), the main goal of which is 'to improve the quality of translator training and to get highly skilled people to work as translators in the EU'. In order to achieve this objective, the EMT has defined and implemented a 'quality label for university translation programmes that meet agreed professional standards and market demands'. The EMT reports that 'more and more universities use it as a model for designing their programmes' [source 1].

Before the EMT was launched in 2006, no recognised means existed by which to evaluate and compare Masters translation programmes across the European Union. The EMT aims to enhance translation programmes in general by establishing an accredited benchmark that will ensure that translators develop the competencies needed 'to keep up with the requirements of a knowledge society' [source 2]. From 2006 to 2008, an EMT Expert Group drafted benchmarking documents in preparation for the creation of a European network of Masters translation programmes. The documents define the admission requirements for universities seeking membership of the EMT network, and a 'translator competence profile', which details the competences translators need to work successfully in today's market' [source 1].

These preparations led in 2009 to the first call for applications for membership of the EMT Network of Excellence. The EMT has since granted official accreditation to 54 programmes out of 355 applications to join the network. It has thereby established common requirements for curricula in translation studies. The two key achievements of the EMT have been: (i) to re-define translator skills and the learning objectives of MA programmes in translation, and (ii) to guarantee quality assurance in translator training programmes.

Federici became involved in the EMT following two conferences in 2007, attended by delegates from its Expert Group and by DGT representatives, and at which he presented his research on the dangers of culturally uninformed translation and the need for translators to develop continuous learning practices (papers which respectively became outputs 1 and 3). As a result of these

presentations, in 2009 the DGT invited Federici to join the EMT Evaluation Group, charged with assessing applications and accrediting programmes across the EU. As a member of the Evaluation Group, Federici contributed to the development of EMT policy in relation to translator training, as articulated in key policy documents published in 2012 [source 2] and 2013 [source 3].

In June 2011 Federici was one of three new members co-opted to the EMT Board, which comprises ten academic experts from Belgium, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and the UK [source 4] and in the following year, the Board was given the task of drafting a new EMT strategy document. With two existing Board members, Federici led Working Group 1 on 'Training and trainers' which defined the competencies that translator trainers should possess or acquire throughout their career [source 5]. The findings of this Working Group informed the 2012 EMT Strategy, co-written by Federici and the other members of the Board. Its first objective makes evident Federici's direct contribution: to 'foster and encourage dynamic learning and teaching of advanced translation skills with a view to preparing students for continuous learning and a life-long career as translators' [source 2].

As the document underpinning the EMT Charter, the EMT Strategy has policy-making implications. The EMT Network members sign up to the values of the Charter, which has legal status as it grants the use of the EMT 'quality label' and guarantees that the Masters programme fulfil the standard expected by the DGT. The DGT and the EMT Board have signed agreements with the Globalization and Localization Association (GALA) on 24 May 2012 [source 6], and with the European Language Industry Association (ELIA) on 16 November 2012 [source 7]. The influence of Federici's research has therefore been significant and far-reaching: changes to the definition of skills, membership requirements, and curricula design benefit the 54 EU member programmes, which enrol between 1,500 and 1,800 MA students every year.

The Director General of the DGT remarks upon Federici's 'great expertise [...] in the field of higher education translator training', and notes the important role played by his research on assessment and revision of translations in discussions at Board meetings [source 8].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- [1]. http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/index_en.htm
- [2]. EMT Strategy 2012, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/key_documents/emt_strategy2012_en.pdf
- [3]. EMT Translator Trainer Staff Profile, http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/key_documents/translator_trainer_profile_en.pdf
- [4]. EMT Board Co-option', DGT(2011)645752-RM/CB/gt, 6 June 2011. EMT Board members: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/network/documents/emt_board_en.pdf.
- [5]. Report on 6th European Master's in Translation (EMT) conference, Brussels, 16 November 2012: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/programmes/emt/conferences/emt_conference2012_report_en.pdf
- [6]. DGT and Globalization and Localization Association 'Memorandum of Understanding on Traineeships', 24 May 2012.
- [7]. DGT and the European Language Industry Association Companies 'Memorandum of Understanding on Traineeships', 16 November 2012.
- [8]. Director General of DGT, 'Letter of support for the work of Dr Federico Federici', DFT.R.4/MEI/rt-(2013)590625, 10 April 2013.