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# INTERVIEW WITH CATHERINE VIEILLEDENT MONFORT, DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR TRANSLATION – EUROPEAN UNION

By Carmen Valero-Garcés

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*University of Alcalá*  
carmen.valero@uah.es



**Catherine Vieilledent Monfort\***, a former specialist of American literature, active in the university for ten years in France and in the United States, CVM entered the European civil service in 1994. She worked in various services and has been working in DG Translation since 2005, first as Head of unit, then as policy officer in multilingualism. She has been in charge of studies on translation and multilingualism since 2008.

[http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/translation/publications/studies/index_en.htm)

\*The opinions expressed are personal and do in no way reflect the position of the institution.

C.V.G. Public Service Translation (also known as Community Translation) is a type of language service needed to facilitate communication between different members of the same community, especially between public services and members of the local community who do not have a good command of mainstream languages. In this sense, it is the written version of Public Service Interpreting (Community Interpreting). When referring to community language services, Public Service Translation probably does not come to mind as readily as Public Service Interpreting. The latter has received relatively more scholarly and professional interest in the last couple of decades. However, Public Service Translation is slowly emerging as an important and distinct subfield in Translation Studies. As a further contribution to this trend, the 2015 volume of *FITISPos International Journal* will be dedicated to PST.

Some developments in different parts of the world have called our attention: in Europe, two associations directly related to PSIT have been launched, the European Network of Public Service Interpreting and Translation (ENPSIT) and the Association of PSIT Trainers, Researchers and Professionals (AFIPTISP) (in Spanish *Asociación de Formadores, Investigadores y Profesionales en Traducción e Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos*). A joint conference for universities was organized for the first time by the EU Directorate-General for Interpretation and Translation under the topic ‘Translating and Interpreting for our Citizens’ (March 2014). Other events include the forthcoming conference ‘Translating Cultures: Translation as a Tool for Inclusion / Exclusion in a Multicultural Society’ (University of Westminster, UK, June 2014), and ‘Translating Europe: linking up Translation Stakeholders’ (European Commission’s Directorate-General for Translation, September 2014), which aims to bring together the

different categories of translation stakeholders and build synergies among the different communities. In Australia, recent initiatives include the creation of the International Research Group on Community Translation, and the organization of the First International Conference on Community Translation (University of Western Sydney).

In view of the main aim of *FITISPos - International Journal* and this recent interest in Public Service Translation, the 2015 issue will be dedicated to it. Public service translation is an intersection point for a number of scholarly interests and social, cultural and political issues

Working in one of the EU Institutions, your opinion is important and we would appreciate if you could answer the following questions:

**C.V.G. How would you define/describe *Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT)*?**

*I understand Public Service I&T as reflecting the right of citizens to have an access to public services with assistance financed by public authorities (linguistic, legal, possibly psychological etc) whenever equality is at stake. From the EU point of view, European citizens must be treated equally when they exercise their right to free circulation in the EU, as provided by the European Charter of Fundamental rights.*

**C.V.G. As you know, *Community Interpreting and Translation (CIT)* is also used, mostly in countries like Canada, Australia and USA, and the focus of the annual EMT event (27-28 March 2012) was on institutional and public service translation and interpreting under the title *Translating and interpreting for our citizens*. How do you feel about these different names? Are we talking about the same?**

*The concept of "Community I&T" is not quite workable because we have a common European framework for the definition of public service and the definition of citizens' rights. I found an interesting summary on "public service" in EU law here: <http://www.touteleurope.eu/les-politiques-europeennes/concurrence/synthese/les-services-dinteret-economique-general.html>*

*There is also an interesting Report on health inequalities in the European Union (SWD(2013) 328 final). The moment you refer to "rights" (even if they are never absolute and must be balanced with other considerations, that is the job of the judge), you refer of course to enforceable rights and obligations for public authorities, with budgetary impact. Because the European Union has full-fledged powers to enforce citizens' rights (from the local level to the EU Court of justice in the last resort, including infringement procedures), a statement of rights can never be fuzzy but must be embedded in a legal framework.*

**C.V.G. How would you evaluate this experience of EU-DGT and EU SCIC working together? Could you give us some feed back as it was one of the few occasions that this has happened?**

*Though sister services, EU-DGT and EU SCIC do not have the same professional culture at EU level: DGT supports the specific task of the European Commission in the interinstitutional distribution of powers; each institution has its own translation service.*

*SCIC supports several institutions in their specific role. Translation supports lasting documents with legal effect; interpretation in the EU environment supports oral exchanges between EU players which, on the surface of things, do not have direct legal effect.*

*On the other hand, in the wider perimeter of EU policies (outside Brussels), interpreters and translators often are one and the same persons; interpretation tends to be closer to individual needs (proximity); translation is becoming more pervasive as rights are gradually given shape at EU level and procedural rights are formalized more strictly.*

*Working together is a necessity, because T&I are complementary responses to basic needs which receive formal recognition at EU level (we used to have something of a gap between the level of the citizen and that of the Strasbourg Court of Fundamental rights, the Lisbon treaty bridges this gap). Also technological innovation means both dimensions converge: oral interpretations will increasingly have to be recorded (and have binding effect); distant communication will include staged exchanges involving writing; machine translation becomes embedded in real time exchanges, online information is a powerful means for communication in the ambit of the EU, etc.*

**C.V.G. In practice, most practitioners perform both activities- interpreting and translation- how do you feel about considering them as two separate activities in terms of training or certification, for example?**

*I am sure that professionals would consider they are not the same skills. In addition, interpretation can be consecutive or simultaneous, involving different skills. Yet, just as interpretation could benefit greatly from translation (terminology, legal references...), translation itself is becoming more instant (online for example) and embedded. In addition, both domains have to become more specialised: it could make sense to specialise in legal I&T for example, or judicial I&T, or in I&T in specific, rarer languages... Both domains become more context-bound and will move together.*

**C.V.G. Which role does *Public Service Translation (PST)* perform in the EU-DGT?**

*DGT likes to recall that its core work ultimately is a service to the European citizen, who benefits from legislation and policy documents in his/her language and from multilingual information on the internet on the main EU policies. This service is sometimes called European multilingualism or institutional language regime but the reality is very much this one.*

**C.V.G. Are there any future plans to increase this activity?**

*No, because the EU budget is strictly limited and reductions in staff are being conducted in all Commission services over five years. On the other hand, since 2006 DG Translation has restructured its services to include web translation and quality control for original documents ("Editing"). It has also created a new Language department for the Croatian language. And production increases from year to year (2,3 M pages in 2014), thanks to productivity gains and improved working methods alone.*

**C.V.G. Which areas of activity in PST (healthcare, legal, administrative, educative, social services- do you think are more needed/relevant/ or interesting for the EU-DGT?**

*Legal translation of course is the area which is most relevant for DG Translation in as much as it contributes directly to the multilingual output of EU legislation. In addition, DG Translation supports all new EU policies including those which create European standards and change the legal situation on the ground, since EU legislation has direct effect. With the Lisbon treaty, fundamental rights have been strongly enhanced, and this affects the work and responsibility of DG Translation and the EU in general. But there are many other areas where DGT is involved in new legislative advances (digital Europe, financial services, secondment of workers and social issues, environment, energy etc....).*

*Whereas the post enlargement decade was dominated by the need to construct linguistic capacity in the new languages (human and technological resources, terminology etc), DG Translation may be now looking again for needs for thematic capacity: EU law touches upon all areas, virtually, new vocabularies are being made up (finance for example), legal translators are scarce...*

**C.V.G. You may know that there is a committee working on ISO standards for *Community Interpreting/PSI*, - where translation is not included - and another one working on a proposal on *Interpreting. General guidelines*. A new work item proposal called "Guidelines for language services in judicial settings" is also on the way, connecting with the Directive 2010/64, where information about and/or references to translation services will be consider whenever appropriate, as the language services in judicial settings must generally be provided by one person. In the case of translation the ISO EN-15038:2006 is a specific European standard for translation services which 'covers the core translation process and all other related aspects involved in providing the service, including quality assurance and traceability. Do you think that, as in the case of interpreting and CI, a proposal for ISO standards in PSI (or *Translation in Public Services* that deal with professional standards, training, certification and quality assurance should be developed?**

*Quality standards are very important for PSIT. I personally believe that a European standard is to be recommended, in as much as quality impacting citizens, public authorities, public services business etc... must be connected with legal enforcement and enforcement capacity, training institutions, etc. The EU has full-fledged powers and strong commitment to fundamental rights, so the proposal is a very good idea to support equal treatment of citizens across the EU.*

**C.V.G. Connections and overlapping between legal translation (LT) and PST (police stations, asylum and refugees offices, borders, immigrant offices, courts... How do you feel about including LT in PST? Or the other way round? Or should they be kept apart?**

*The question may be outdated (see Directive 2010/64). EU law has an impact on real life persons while more binding obligations for human rights imply formal, traceable proceedings more and more. There might be differences, especially on the ground, but I do not think LT and PST can be completely separate: the ideal citizen must be*

*autonomous and able to understand his/her rights and obligations; this means that written documents must become more legible and oral support more context-bound, trying to reconcile the perspective of the legal/law enforcing professional in whatever environment and that of the citizen/user/beneficiary/suspect...*

**C.V.G. Working in the EU-DGT, could you please express your opinion about topics such as the role of the translator as a social agent; ways to achieve parity between different languages and social groups; the importance / role of cultural and institutional mediation through translated texts; the consideration of translation as transcreation and not only a mere transfers of words; the need of translation as an instrument for social justice, inclusion and human rights?**

*See « L'Union européenne comme médiatrice interculturelle : le multilinguisme», in Défis et enjeux de la médiation interculturelle : Perspectives plurilingues et transdisciplinaires, Rentel, Nadine / Schwerter, Stephanie (éds), Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Bern, Bruxelles, New York, Oxford, Wien, 2012.  
<http://www.peterlang.com/index.cfm?event=cmp.ccc.seitenstruktur.detailseiten&seitentyp=produkt&pk=63147&cid=529>*

**C.V.G. Ad hoc translators (or lack of (professional) translators) in less spoken languages is quite common. What do you consider would be the most appropriate measures to regularize the situation of the translator in public services?**

*Many measures are being considered and discussed by DGT stakeholders (see Qualetra project): having a register of court T&I is now an obligation for the Member States in the EU (see Directive 2010/64); TransLit is a project for such EU wide register (initiative spearheaded by EULITA). Reflections should tie in with urgent matters on the EU agenda, such as social integration, including second generation immigrants who could use their linguistic skills and receive basic training (in legal matters, ethics, judicial matters) as an alternative to ad hoc linguists. The Member States may of course not be enthusiastic but they are faced with pressing needs for social cohesion.*

**C.V.G. How far we are from reaching professionalization in PST in a common European context? Which steps have been taken? Which steps should be taken?**

*See above. Beyond its direct and specific remit, DGT supports the enhancement of the translator profile with the EMT network; new developments in this context have to do with "legal" (ie judicial and legal) translation, certification, better understanding of copyright issues and thematic specialisation.*

**C.V.G. Do you think the future of PST is conditioned by the inclusion of this area in recent technological advances? How can CAT tools and MT affect (or are affecting) in PST development? Is investment and research considered when working with less spoken languages and non-EU languages? What about new technologies and cost-effectiveness of training courses, especially for languages of limited diffusion?**

*CAT tools are likely to have an impact on PST, in as much as there will be a differentiation of services in terms of quality: MT can provide multilingual information, binding documents will have to be produced at high quality; EU law being multilingual is produced by professional translators who also used CAT tools to ensure the service is sustainable.*

*The same can be said about PST: innovation, machine translation, online services, crowdsourcing are all relevant for sustainable public service. Language technology is part of Digital Europe, a top priority for the EU Commission. Though the EU budget really is small, the message is clear: e-Government, online language learning, basic information on citizens' rights, on policy making, participatory e-democracy, multilingual information mining, etc are our new frontier. See language technology tools made available by the Commission in EU official and other languages <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/language-technologies>.*

**C.V.G. Training programmes of different duration and kinds about topics related to PST are increasing. Do you think the same tendency is given in the job market? Why do graduate students find job opportunities in other areas while volunteering in social services or related areas? What do you think it should be done?**

*As I understand it, PST has to do with basic skills such as intercultural skills. It should be better embedded in the training of all translators and interpreters, and in the training of all public actors interacting with citizens from other countries (not language learning). This would raise awareness and disseminate capacities that are very much needed. Examples of failed communication, experience on the ground, the trauma of confronting foreign languages and ways to manage it... this could be part of a basic training for European citizens and of a true European education.*

**C.V.G. What is your opinion about funding and management of PST providers? Should it be in hands of the public institution or private companies?**

*I believe the private sector might be called to contribute but funding and management of PST providers must be clearly under the (direct or indirect) control of public authorities, since this has to do with fundamental rights, social cohesion and equal access.*

**C.V.G. Do you have any other recommendations / comment for people interested in training, research or working in PST?**

*More thinking is needed on my part.*

*Thank you*