

# **Do Education and the Labor Market Speak the Same Language? Challenges of the ESCO European Classification of Occupations in Mapping Today's Professional Translators**

[Title for running head:] **Challenges of ESCO Classification for Translation Profession**

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## **Abstract**

This paper addresses the need for terminology convergence and the systematic use of up-to-date descriptors and concepts in the European higher education and labor market environments. Rapid developments in the language industry are remodelling the translation profession in particular and generating new processes, new training needs and, therefore, a new skills demand. Changing market expectations, cross-occupational mobility and multifaceted professional profiles in the translation industry claim to exploit the full potential of standard and multilingual taxonomies like ESCO--the European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations. This research draws on the European Master's in Translation (EMT) competence framework for 2018-2024 to perform a descriptive analysis of the English and Spanish entries for the occupation of "translator" in ESCO's latest 2020 version. Findings suggest that ESCO's content could be aligned with the professionally oriented EMT framework to overcome shortcomings in representing translators' identity and present the reality of the translation market, while matching its content more accurately to the most relevant skills and competences generally developed in current translator training programmes.

**Keywords**

ESCO classification; employability; translator training; translator competence; EMT  
competence framework

Classification ESCO ; employabilité ; formation des traducteurs ; compétence de traduction ;  
cadre de compétences EMT

## 1. Introduction

In today's digital age, we are witnessing the development of new professions and the demand for new skills that education systems are gradually accommodating. It is clear that the translator profession has also been transforming in line with market developments, the technological revolution and the proliferation of global communication and interaction. This evolution has brought with it the emergence of new processes, services, tools and emerging occupations (Association of Translation Companies 2019; Erik Angelone, Maureen Ehrensberger-Dow, and Gary Massey 2020; Marián Morón 2020; Minako O'Hagan 2020) that motivate the permanent redefinition of the profession (Daniel Gouadec 2007; Isabella Massardo and Jaap van der Meer 2017).

Likewise, the relative youth of the Translation Studies (TS) discipline and its interdisciplinarity have an impact on the profession, where translators' increasing occupational and geographical mobility perpetuates their diffuse professional identity, which has traditionally been associated with little social recognition (Gouadec 2007; David Katan 2009; Helle V. Dam and Karen K. Zethsen 2008; Minna Ruokonen 2016). At the same time, the profession's interdisciplinary nature hinders naming and standardising concepts by borrowing concepts and terms from different disciplines, thus highlighting the need to reinforce metalanguage in TS (Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer 2007; Roberto Mayoral 2010).

While it is necessary to adapt all processes to this new era, nomenclature plays a key role, particularly in the field of translation. Therefore, it is essential to agree on descriptors and definitions that provide information on the knowledge and competences normally

associated with the translator occupation, the generic and specific skills linked to this qualification, and the more specific related occupations, among others. In this regard, we highlight the European Commission's ESCO taxonomy “European Classification of Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations” which helps to connect employment and education as part of the Europe 2020 Strategy (ESCO portal, n.d.). It provides language that aims to be common for employers and jobseekers, while serving educators in identifying the skills demanded in the market in order to adapt curricula for more effective employability (ibid.).

Given the transferability of this terminological classification to other European digital tools for employment and its consequent impact on the flow of graduate supply and demand in Europe (ibid.), our aim is to perform a descriptive-interpretative analysis of the “translator” occupation in ESCO, a scarcely exploited tool analyzed in the TS field to date, despite its transcendence in the labor market (Comunidad de Madrid 2020; Layla O’Kane, Rohit Narasimhan, Julia Nania, and Bledi Taska 2020). To this end, the EMT Competence Framework 2018-2024 (Daniel Toudic and Alexandra Krause 2017) will serve as the main reference to guide this study. It will help to identify limitations in the use of terminology and the definition of key concepts, thanks to the timeliness and accuracy of its competence and professional potential descriptions of contemporary translation graduates.

This formal approach is fundamental in order to account for how translators are categorized at the European level and to what other occupations, tasks, tools and competences they are linked. We attempt to optimize the potential of this unique tool for translator

employability and training by helping to minimize the shortcomings that may depict a “distorted” picture of this occupation.

## **2. Employability and competences in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**

Within the framework of the process to build the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), initiated with the Bologna Declaration in 1999, significant reforms have been undertaken in the university system through lines of action, mainly with implications in the educational and professional spheres (Jeroen Huisman et al. 2012). Among the main tools are the common ECTS credit system, the promotion of mobility between European university systems and lifelong learning, all contextualized in a student-centered process based on the educational model of training through competences and learning outcomes (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice 2020).

In fact, this new paradigm has demanded the reformulation of curricula according to the students’ goals (Julia González and Robert Wagenaar 2003, 36), centering on the development of capacities, skills, attitudes and values, that is, the competency-based approach. This challenge entails the commitment to better adapt education to socio-economic demands at least from a theoretical point of view.

Echoing the definitions adopted in the European Qualifications Framework for the key concepts that are fundamental to this study, we start from the definition of *learning outcomes* as “statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process, which are defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence” and its

breakdown into the concepts of knowledge, skills and competence (European Parliament Council 2008, 4):

a. Knowledge: “the outcome of the assimilation of information through learning. Knowledge is the body of facts, principles, theories and practices that is related to a field of work or study.”

b. Skill: “the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems.”

c. Competence: “the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development.”

It is also worth noting the two types of competences that graduates must develop and which serve to describe learning outcomes: generic or transversal competences and specific competences. Generic competences are those skills necessary for employment and life in society, common to all subjects regardless of their degree (González and Wagenaar 2003, 28). The particularities of the current changing and heterogeneous labor scenario have led to employers recognizing the importance of transversal competences (European Economic and Social Committee 2019). On the other hand, specific competences are those particular to graduates of a given discipline which identify them as such socially and professionally, characterising the training profile (Sjur Bergan 2007). The latter are linked to the degree area of study and contribute to the consistency of the curriculum and to shaping the identity of the future professional.

In short, the implementation of the competency-based model aims to strengthen individuals' employability, with greater adaptability and flexibility to promote occupational and geographical mobility in a more transparent European labor market (European Commission 2011). Indeed, employability has been a priority since the beginning of the Bologna Process (Bologna Declaration 1999) and become a key factor in the Europe 2020 Strategy. The London Communiqué (2007) formally recognized employability and created the "Working Group on Employability 2007-2009," which establishes the definition used as a reference for this study: "the ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labor market" (Working Group on Employability 2009, 5).

There is no shortage of challenges facing Europe in this policy area. This is illustrated by high unemployment rates in some sectors and continuing vacancies in others, where efforts are being made to match skills with labor market demands. This fact is confirmed by the results of the McKinsey Global Institute survey (2017), where 60% of employers stated that new graduates were not adequately prepared for the world of work (ibid., 2). In this regard, occupational mobility is proposed as a strategy to balance supply and demand with skilled workers and to contribute to the excellence of higher education in the EHEA (Rome Ministerial Communiqué 2020, 6).

On the other hand, universities are no stranger to the responsibility of training "work-ready graduates" in the most market-relevant skills. Numerous studies address employability and the development of professional competences in the curriculum (Peter Knight and Mantz Yorke 2004; Cristina Pardo-García and Maja Barac 2020, among others). However, the

difficulties in aligning the academic and work contexts are recognized, largely due to the dynamic nature of both, where the skills demanded by the market will be altered, even more so, by the current pandemic situation: “by 2025, 44% of the skills that employees will need to perform their roles effectively will change” (World Economic Forum 2020, 8). In these forecasts, transformations and the disappearance of existing occupations as well as new professional profiles are expected (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and International Labour Office (ILO) 2018).

To overcome the challenges identified, this study highlights the added value of classifications to standardize terms and concepts related to occupations, qualifications and skills, showing the influence that poor and confusing terminology and descriptions can have on this scenario at the local and European level.

### **3. An approach to employability in Translation Studies**

It seems clear that Translation Studies (TS) occupy a prominent position in the proposals for EHEA achievement. The shift towards learner-centered education, linked to competency-based training, has not been new to Translation and Interpreting (TI) (Dorothy Kelly 2007). This is demonstrated by the recurrent proposals for defining translation competence and the most effective methods for its transmission and acquisition in the interest of improving student employability from the mid-1980s to present (Christiane Nord 1991; Amparo Hurtado Albir 1996; Kelly 2002, 2007; PACTE 2020). In the new educational paradigm, efforts to connect knowledge and skills to real practice have been

remarkable and TI programmes have been increasingly geared towards professionalization and employability.

Accordingly, there is growing interest in the professional dimension in TI curricula and teaching practice, reflecting the functionalist and situational trends aimed at stimulating graduate employability (Nord 1991; Jean Vienne 1994, 2000; Hans J. Vermeer 1996; Don Kiraly et al. 2016; among others). For decades, there have been frequent examples of pedagogical initiatives to reinforce the professional performance of translators in the TI literature (Fanny Chouc and Elisa Calvo 2011; Kiraly et al. 2016; Hanna Risku 2016; Begoña Rodríguez de Céspedes 2017), generally based on the principles of the situational (Vienne 1994) and professional approaches (Margarita Ulrych 1996; Gunilla Anderman and Margaret Rogers 2000; Gouadec 2007; among others).

This positioning in the TI field suggests other debates of interest. On the one hand, the dynamism of society and the labor market hinders the interpretation and forecast of labor demands in any sector, even more so when it comes to describing the particularities of the TI market unequivocally (María Dolores Olvera-Lobo et al. 2005), recognized as a “multi-faceted” profession (Toudic and Krause 2017, 4) and characterized by the discipline's own interdisciplinarity (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2016; Natividad Aguayo 2019). However, in contrast to excessive specialization and market orientation, there are frequent training initiatives designed towards flexibility and professional mobility (Kelly 2007; Angelone, Ehrensberger-Dow, and Massey 2020). In these, transferable skill development is considered essential for translators, who are required to continuously update their knowledge (Olvera-Lobo et al. 2005; Rodríguez de Céspedes 2017), in line with current proposals for dual

training in complementary areas of knowledge (Aguayo 2019). Actually, these proposals are guided by the specific features of the professional profile identified in the literature: a profession with continuously redefining boundaries (Gambier and van Doorslaer 2016; Helle V. Dam, Matilde N. Brøgger and Karen K. Zethsen 2019), responsible for performing more than one task (Katan 2009), often outside the activities traditionally classified as “translation” (Dam, Brøgger and Zethsen 2019) and linked to international communication and interlinguistic and intercultural mediation (EMT Expert Group 2009).

Accordingly, this overview reveals optimistic employment prospects for translators. The language services industry is booming. According to the results from the Language Services Market 2022 report conducted by the Common Sense Advisory (CSA), the language services and technology market has recorded an annual growth rate of 4.64% between 2012 and 2022, reaching up to US\$52.01 billion in 2022. Furthermore, this industry is expected to continue to grow following the current trend and it will increase to US\$65.54 billion by 2026, with an estimated growth rate of 5.97% over the next four years (Donald A. DePalma and Arle Lommel 2022). In this scenario, new profiles and market niches are proliferating, especially as a result of the development of information and communication technologies and global market needs. In order to respond to these demands satisfactorily, it is essential to strengthen new graduates’ skills and knowledge since a lack of skills is still being detected, particularly those related to translation technologies and knowledge of market expectations (European Union of Associations of Translation Companies, EUATC 2020, 56). In fact, according to the employers who participated in the latest European Language Industry Survey (ELIS) 2022, a skills gap has been identified mainly concerning “translation technology”

(67%), followed by “planning and quality process” (44%) and “insight in market expectations” (43%) (EUATC 2022, 39). Likewise, the professional competence of the eTransFair project provides good evidence of the wide range of knowledge, skills and abilities required to engage successfully in the translation profession in terms of project management, entrepreneurship, transferable skills relevant for the profession, marketing and customer care and quality management (eTransFair 2017, 2-3). Additionally, experts from the labor market remark the necessity of including not only translation-related elements in translator training but also professional aspects, interpersonal and technological skills since they will be highly valued in the market and may make a positive difference in recruitment (Juan José Arevalillo 2020, 24).

It is within this complex framework of employability and its implications for translator training that we highlight the need to analyse the connection between higher education and the labor market starting from the unambiguous naming and description of skills, competences and occupations in taxonomies such as ESCO. Through a common language, we can help to ensure that the interdisciplinarity ascribed to the discipline and profession does not have a detrimental effect on translators, but rather serves to accommodate them more effectively in the global market.

#### **4. European Master’s in Translation (EMT) competence framework**

As noted above, the transformation of processes, tasks and professional profiles has an impact on curricula, with employability being incorporated into many innovative teaching practices. According to Joost Buyschaert et al. (2018), initiatives such as the European Commission's

European Master's in Translation (EMT) have contributed to the interest in facilitating students' transition to the labor market. The objectives of the EMT project were, on the one hand, to provide a description of translators' tasks and competences that could be tuned to the needs of the translation industry and public bodies, such as European Union (EU) institutions. On the other hand, the project aimed to propose a European curriculum that would meet these demands and could improve the status and quality of the profession (Marta Chodkiewicz 2012, 38).

The creation of the EMT reference framework for the training of professional translators, known as the “Wheel of Competence” (EMT Expert Group 2009), is considered an inspiring proposal in the educational context that is based on translation as a complex process where six areas of competence are distinguished (language, thematic, intercultural, information mining, technological and translation service provision). The focus on employability is reinforced in the revised 2017 version, which reorganizes competences into five main areas: language and culture, translation, technology, personal and interpersonal competences and service provision. In this study, we emphasize the components of “translation service provision competence.” Under this category, transversal competences related to fostering employability are highlighted: “knowing how to follow market requirements and job profiles”; “knowing how to plan and manage one's time, stress, work, budget and ongoing training”; “how to work in a team,” etc. (EMT Expert Group 2009, 4-5).

Due to its relevance in translator training, this framework is used as a reference that seeks to improve the employability of master's graduates in translation in Europe. Moreover, it is of great value for this research since it takes into account research findings from the

scientific community on translation and translation competence as well as the changes that have affected the language services industry since 2009 (Toudic and Krause 2017, 3).

Below is a summary of the EMT competence framework for the period 2018 to 2024 with the five main competence categories considered complementary in translation service provision (ibid., 5-11):

(1) Language and culture (*transcultural and sociolinguistic awareness and communicative skills*): this group integrates all linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and transcultural knowledge and skills, whether general or language-specific. This competence is the driving force of this framework, capable of stimulating the performance of the others.

(2) Translation (*strategic, methodological and thematic competence*): this competence lies at the heart of the framework. It covers not only the phase of transferring meaning between languages, but also strategic, methodological and thematic competence at all stages of the process. This includes the ability to interact with machine translation (MT) as a fundamental part of professional translation competence.

(3) Technology (*tools and applications*): this level refers to the knowledge and skills useful for implementing present and future translation technologies in the translation process. It integrates the basic knowledge of MT technologies and the ability to put them into practice according to project requirements.

(4) Personal and interpersonal: this area introduces generic or transversal competences, which is of particular relevance to increase graduate adaptation and employability possibilities. These include the ability to plan and manage time and workload, meeting deadlines and

specifications, teamwork and the importance of self-assessment and continuous updating of skills.

(5) Service provision: this covers those skills related to the implementation of translation and language services in a professional context: from initial negotiation with the client to project management and quality assurance. Foremost among them are students' ability to identify language industry demands, the latest market requirements and emerging occupations.

By determining these competences, the EMT framework reflects an effort to map the basic competence requirements for future language industry professionals. It is not a closed model covering all the competences and knowledge desirable for a translator, rather it defines common learning outcomes for EMT master's programmes, which can be extended to other TI curricula.

Career guidance initiatives such as this are all the more necessary in the new working context for translators which, over the last three decades, has shaken the foundations of what we understood to be their professional activity and identity (Kaisa Koskinen and Minna Ruokonen 2017, 8). All this adds to the imprecision of the term “translation,” associated with multiple labels, which actually hinders the creation of reliable statistics on market research in this industry (EMT Expert Group 2009, 2). Consequently, there is a call for a redefinition of the very concept of translation (Yves Gambier and Ramuné Kasperę 2021), to which greater consistency of updated concepts and terms defining translator competences, occupations and knowledge related to this professional profile may potentially contribute.

## **5. Towards a common language: ESCO classification**

The European Skills, Competences and Occupations (ESCO) taxonomy is a classification system developed as a multilingual dictionary that identifies, describes and classifies professional occupations and skills relevant to the labor market and training in Europe (ESCO portal, n.d.). It aims to provide consistency in key terminology to avoid ambiguities and to unify institutional, academic and labor market discourse: “[...] the Commission has put a terminology in place that supports a focus on learning outcomes and the strengthening of dialogue between stakeholders in education and training and the labor market” (European Union 2018, 24). In addition, it systematically shows the relationships between the different concepts.

Launched in 2017, this is an open format terminology classification developed by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and supported by the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop). ESCO contains descriptions of 2942 occupations and 13485 skills associated with these occupations and is translated into 27 languages (all the official EU languages plus Icelandic, Norwegian and Arabic). It is structured in three pillars: occupation, skill/competence, qualification (see Table 1):

OCCUPATIONS	SKILLS/ COMPETENCES	QUALIFICATIONS
<p>An occupation can be defined as “a grouping of jobs involving similar tasks, which require a similar skills set” (ESCO portal, n.d.). It includes multiple jobs or job titles that have common characteristics. (Miroslav Beblavý, Mehtap Akgüc, Brian Fabo, and Karolien Lenaerts 2016, 8). ESCO lists the knowledge, skills and competences that experts considered relevant terminology for this occupation on a European scale.</p>	<p>“Skills are understood in a broad sense covering what a person knows, understands and can do. Skills refer to different types of learning outcomes, including knowledge and competences as well as ability to apply knowledge and to use knowhow in order to complete tasks and solve problems.” (Council of the European Union and European Parliament 2018, 44).</p>	<p>“[...] Means the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent authority or body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards.” (Council of the European Union and European Parliament 2018, 46).</p>

**Table 1.** Description of the three pillars included in the ESCO classification

ESCO is linked to international reference classifications such as NACE (EU nomenclature for economic activities), EQF (European Qualifications Framework) and ISCO (International

Standard Classification of Occupations). In addition, it provides direct support to Europass services and is used as a common classification on the EURES job portal.<sup>1</sup> In the continuous updating and improvement process, the European Commission consults expert groups and specialized sectors for better suitability of the tool. In the specific field of translation, the Language Industry Expert Group (LIND) has been advising the ESCO Secretariat since 2015 on proposals to add, for example, up to 11 new occupations (LIND Expert Group Meeting 2017) including “localiser, lawyer-linguist, language engineer, and subtitler” (LIND Expert Group Meeting 2015, 2). Aware of the dynamism of the sector, they have encouraged ESCO to continue working to complete the classification by incorporating the new realities in the profession, also taking into account the limitations of the data dumped from the previous NACE taxonomy (ibid.).

Classifications such as ESCO in Europe or O\*NET in the United States are definitely considered key in the current and necessary debate on new and emerging occupations (Beblavý, Akgüc, Fabo, and Lenaerts 2016, 14). Thus, skills classifications have become more important as the limitations of traditional occupational classifications in reflecting labor market transformation and the interdependencies between occupations have become evident (Jörg Markowitsch and Claudia Plaimauer 2009, 817).

### *5.1 Methodology for the analysis of the “translator” occupation*

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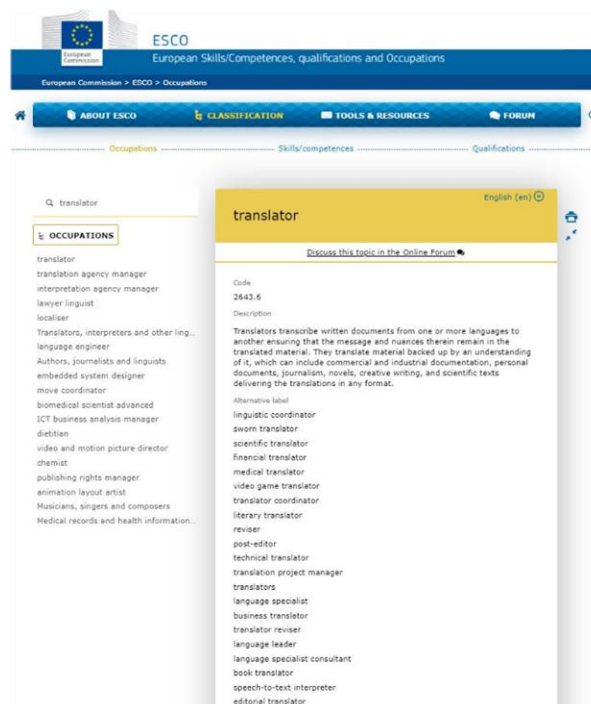
<sup>1</sup> ESCO aims to support automated skills-based matching and make EURES services even more pertinent to the current demands of the labor market (ESCO portal, n.d.).

The main purpose of this research is to carry out an exploratory and descriptive study in order to analyse the content of the ESCO platform for the “translator” occupation (English and Spanish versions). The selection of this tool is justified by its relevance in the European context to identify and describe our profession and the knowledge and competences associated with the translator profile. Guided by the competences and their elements included in the employability-oriented EMT competence model 2018-2024 (Toudic and Krause 2017), this paper aims to identify the constraints and opportunities in ESCO and their prospective impact on the supply and demand of translators throughout Europe.

The procedure for data collection is based on the consultation and exploration of the latest available online version of the classification (ESCO v1.0.8), last updated on 27 August 2020. Among the three existing pillars (see Table 1), the study will focus on “occupations” where terms and concepts related to the “translator” occupation are presented and categorized. The fact that a professional profile is given together with a general description for each occupation is relevant for this research. There is also a detailed list of knowledge, skills and competences—essential and optional—expressed in the terminology and according to definitions that experts have considered most appropriate and meaningful for each occupation at the European level.

The search begins with the introduction of the keyword “translator” (in English and then in Spanish) which is classified separately from the “interpreter” entry. The research focuses on the analysis of the descriptors or terms for each section within the “translator” occupation, as well as the descriptions that can be accessed by clicking on each descriptor link. Analysing the results list, we observe that, among the first ones, this occupation and

other more specific related occupations are retrieved. Additionally, there are groups of occupations where hierarchical relationships are established and the translator profile falls within this hierarchy (see Figure 1). These relationships are coded following the same numbering in the ISCO-08 classification, which generates a shared structure of occupations among the main classifications developed in Europe.



**Figure 1.** ESCO’s search interface showing the query results for the “translator” occupation

## 6. Analysis of results in ESCO

In accordance with the methodology previously described, this section provides the analysis for the “translator” occupation in the ESCO multilingual classification.

The presentation and analysis of the results in this study will be organized in different sections, according to the structure of the classification itself, that is: code and description of

the occupation (6.1.), alternative labels (6.2.), position of “translator” within the hierarchical structure of professionals and occupations (6.3.), narrower occupations (6.4), essential skills, competences and knowledge (6.5.), optional skills, competences and knowledge (6.6.).

*6.1 Description of the “translator” profession*

Firstly, when entering the keyword “translator,” the system retrieves the following code and description (see Table 2), both taken literally from group 264 “Authors, journalists and linguists” originally created in 2007 and included in the ISCO-08 classification (International Labour Organization 2007, 22):

<i>Code</i>
<b>2643.6</b>
<i>Description</i>
“Translators transcribe written documents from one or more languages to another ensuring that the message and nuances therein remain in the translated material. They translate material backed up by an understanding of it, which can include commercial and industrial documentation, personal documents, journalism, novels, creative writing, and scientific texts delivering the translations in any format.”

**Table 2.** Description of the “translator” occupation in ESCO

In this definition, there are some questionable points that have to do with the material being translated (*what*) and how the translation process is conceived (*how*). On the one hand, translators' work is not limited to "linear" written texts in today's language industry. Translation tasks increasingly deal with non-linear and non-sequential texts, typical in audiovisual material or that characteristic of multimedia products: software, apps, video games, websites, etc., frequently consisting of decontextualized strings. Moreover, the examples of documentation that are mentioned—"personal documents," "journalism" or "creative writing"—lead to ambiguity as to the particular documents referred to and why these have been selected and not others that appear to be more frequently required in today's professional activity (e.g., see legal and technical texts in the "Translator profile" on the European Commission's portal). On the other hand, regarding the process itself, the idea of transferring "nuances" remains vague, as it is not clear whether these refer to cultural, register or textual typology nuances, or even implicit meaning. It is noteworthy that the description is completed with a focus on the text as a product and its mode of delivery, "delivering the translations in any format," while extratextual issues remain in the background: communicative purpose and needs, effective reception in the target culture, process management, quality assurance mechanisms or the documentation phase, that is, all the elements that should be taken into account when regarding translation as a service provision.

In short, this description is fundamentally based on the translator as an agent who operates with language as a system, and the communicative and professional approaches are practically ignored. However, in other sources, there are numerous examples that transcend the boundaries of the linguistic and thematic components and also include key aspects of the

translation task under a functional approach, which we understand to be closer to reality. The description of the European Commission's translator profile for the specific translation competences included refers to “understanding texts in the source language and to render them correctly in the target language, using a style and register appropriate to the purpose of the text.” In this sense, the EMT competence framework for 2018-2024 states “Translate general and domain-specific material in one or several fields from one or several source languages into their target language(s), producing a “‘fit for purpose’ translation” (Toudic and Krause 2017, 8). Furthermore, this framework reaffirms the conception of translation competence as a process that cannot be limited to the language transfer phase (ibid., 7):

It [translation competence] should be understood in the broadest sense, encompassing not only the actual meaning transfer phase between two languages (including the use of relay languages), *but also all the strategic, methodological and thematic competences that come into play* before, during and following the transfer phase per se – from document analysis to final quality control procedures.<sup>2</sup>

## 6.2 Alternative labels

In this section of the taxonomy, however, it is noted that an effort has been made to provide an updated list of labels for the translator profile, particularly in the English version. Most of these designations can be found in current programmes of study as the future professionals that are being trained at the universities, and some similar ones are used in job vacancies on

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<sup>2</sup> Author's emphasis.

online job portals such as EURES (“intercultural communication consultant,” “linguistic services manager,” “language quality specialist,” “technical copyeditor/translator,” “web editor,” etc.).

Nevertheless, when comparing this information with the corresponding Spanish version, significant quantitative differences are observed, resulting in an absence of up to fourteen labels that are present in the English version (identified with an “X” in the left-hand column “EN”) (see Figure 2):

Occupation: translator (EN)		Ocupación: traductor/a (ES)	
Alternative label		Etiqueta alternativa	
linguistic coordinator	X	traductor	
sworn translator	✓	traductora jurada	
scientific translator	X	traductora técnica	
financial translator	X	traductor de videojuegos	
medical translator	✓	gestora de proyectos de traducción	
video game translator	✓	traductora	
translator coordinator	X	traductor jurado	
literary translator	✓	traductor técnico	
reviser	X	traductor médico	
post-editor	X	traductora médica	
technical translator	✓	traductora literaria	
translation project manager	✓	traductora de videojuegos	
translators	✓	traductor literario	
language specialist	X	gestor de proyectos de traducción	
business translator	X		
translator reviser	X		
language leader	X		
language specialist consultant	X		
book translator	X		
speech-to-text interpreter	X		
editorial translator	X		

**Figure 2.** Alternative labels for the translator occupation in the English and Spanish versions of ESCO v1.0.8

Although the list of results consists of fourteen items in the Spanish version, only seven descriptors--with their corresponding female entries--are actually distinguished: translator, sworn translator, technical translator, video game translator, translation project manager, medical translator and literary translator. This means that the variety of actual job profiles is

reduced up to 33% in Spanish. As a consequence, while the diversity of profiles in English provides a comprehensive overview that is more consistent with the professional reality of present and emerging market niches, career prospects for translators are further limited in the Spanish search. This version should continue to include recently created occupations, following the examples of “video game translator” and “translation project manager,” in addition to the traditional profiles linked to thematic areas of specialization—“technical,” “medical” or “literary translator,” among others—with increasingly blurred professional boundaries.

In this respect, the proliferation of such diverse profiles (e.g., posteditor, translator reviser or proofreader, business translator, language specialist consultant) confirms the assumptions found in the literature. On the one hand, this shows the versatility and adaptability for which the translator must be trained (Rodríguez de Céspedes 2017). On the other hand, these occupation labels recall the key elements that stimulate the function of translator competence as a whole: “transcultural and sociolinguistic awareness and communicative skills” (Toudic and Krause 2017, 6). Certainly, these core elements recall the importance of human skills “as a differentiator in a technologized employment market where linguistic, critical, and ethical competences can combine to produce a transversal skill set to equip graduates for the future” (EMT 2022, 2).

### 6.3 Position in the hierarchical structure for “translator”

According to the search results for the keyword “translator” (preferred term), this job profile can be found as a specific occupation within the following hierarchy (see Table 3):

2 – Professionals
26 – Legal, social and cultural professionals
264 – Authors, journalists and linguistics
2643 – <i>Translators</i> , interpreters and other linguists

**Table 3.** Hierarchical classification for the indexing of “translator” in the occupations pillar of ESCO (ISCO-08 code: 2643)

Code 2643 is used for the occupation group composed of “Translators, interpreters and other linguists.” Under this general category, translator appears as a specific term together with other complementary job profiles: interpreter, lexicographer, philologist, sign language interpreter, subtitler and translator-reviser. Immediately preceding this level in the hierarchical structure, we observe that group 2643 has been classified within a broader category “Authors, journalists and linguistics” (code 264). Hence, translators would be on par with other occupations in the fields of work corresponding to “Authors and related writers” and “Journalists” such as “book editor,” “poet,” “interactive media writer,” “technical communicator” or “novelist.”

These professions, fundamentally linked to linguistic and literary production, can certainly be linked to the translator profile by assuming their role as linguistic communication and mediation experts, e.g., editors, documentalists, journalists or terminologists (Mayoral 2004, 166). However, categorising their identity under this reductionist umbrella may be risky, since the spectrum of this profession is widening and beginning to be linked to occupations which, despite requiring the use of languages and cultural knowledge, are developed in work scenarios very different from those traditionally assigned to translators. Thus, there is evidence of training institutions' response to this metamorphosis, where dual training programmes (e.g., double degrees) are becoming more popular to train TI students in different but, at the same time, complementary areas of knowledge (Tourism, Law, International Communication, International Relations, etc.) (Aguayo 2019, 31-32).

#### *6.4 Narrower occupations*

In the sub-section related to more specialized “narrower” occupations, ESCO retrieves the following descriptors: “localizer” and “subtitler.” As they are considered specific profiles (with their own tasks, knowledge and skills), they have been assigned an entry in the classification as an occupation, including a number of alternative labels, essential and optional knowledge, skills and competences. These profiles were added in the 2015 version alongside “lawyer-linguist” and “language engineer,” following the recommendations of the LIND Expert Group (LIND Expert Group Meeting 2015). The latter occupations, although not listed in this section of ESCO, share the skills set and knowledge included in the “translator” entry. In fact, these labels—along with others such as “proofreader/language editor” —have been used to designate jobs in EU institutions. As market demand evolves, more specialized

occupations are expected to be added to this list (e.g., the job profile of “audio describer” suggested and discussed in the 2016 LIND meeting).

Since the traditional translation workflow has already started changing and this is bringing important transitions in the evolution of tasks, profiles and processes, this makes it difficult to update the changing nomenclature used in the language industry and match it with the terminology established in classifications like ESCO at the same pace. Nevertheless, it may be convenient to suggest the addition of specific categories or subcategories, with specific skills, to this taxonomy in terms of nomenclature to provide a more realistic approach of the wide range of new processes and emerging profiles found in the current language industry that have come to stay. For instance, the adaptation of texts or pre-editing task for MT processing or vendor management as part of project management as examples of new tasks in the modern translation pipeline. Additionally, emerging profiles can be included under the section “narrower occupations” for the “translator” entry, such as vendor or resource managers, quality managers or other familiar titles although, according to TAUS predictions, “they might disappear or change dramatically” (TAUS 2019). At the same time, others will emerge as a result of the needs that are not being met by current positions: “what we will need are data analysts and engineers” (ibid.).

### *6.5 Essential skills, competences and knowledge*

After listing the different job titles and occupations related to “translator,” the analysis proceeds with the associated essential skills, competences and knowledge. In broad terms, this list is characterized by the predominance of those related to the linguistic dimension and the production, revision and correction of texts. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of

sociolinguistic and intercultural knowledge which, together with linguistic knowledge, forms the basis of translation competence (Toudic and Krause 2017, 6). Actually, the cultural aspect is only emphasized as an “optional” ability for the translator in “adapt text culturally,” whereas it is considered “essential” for the “localizer” occupation (presumably due to a greater visibility of the cultural dimension in localization, more intensified by the type of product, content adaptation to a *locale*, etc.). According to the proposed definition “Adjust text so it is culturally and linguistically acceptable to the reader, while preserving the original message and nuance of the text,” it may be plausible to classify this ability as an essential competence for any language services professional, assuming that cultural competence is crucial for the full development of the translation activity (Katan 1999; Kelly 2002; EMT Expert Group 2009; PACTE 2020). In this regard, the ISO 17100:2015 standard for translation services, used as a main reference in the language industry (ISO 2015), establishes the cultural competence in its own right as the ability to make use of information about the locale, behavioral standards, and value systems that characterize the source and target cultures. In addition, it should be noted that whereas the EMT 2022 framework establishes the “translation competence” encompassing strategic, methodological and thematic competence throughout the translation process, the ISO 17100 standard identifies specific independent competences that focus on the skills found in the EMT translation competence, such as “competence in research, information acquisition and processing” (efficient use of research tools and of the information sources available) and “domain competence” (ability to understand and produce content using the appropriate style and terminology). Similarly, the eTransFair project proposes two specific competences with an emphasis also on terminology titled “Information mining and terminological competence” and “domain-specific

competence” (eTransFair 2017, 2). This serves as a clear statement of the significance given to these skills in the language industry, what should be taken into account when revising the ESCO classification to go one step beyond simply “consulting information sources” or “comprehending the material to be translated” as part of the essential skills and competences.

In this section, hints of some professional aspects are included, such as complying with quality standards, following the code of ethics for translation services, maintaining confidentiality and keeping professional knowledge up to date. However, there is no record of some fundamental aspects, such as time management skills or exploitation of specialized resources and documentation strategies, beyond the primitive use of dictionaries (“instrumental/professional sub-competence” in Kelly 2002; PACTE 2003, 2020). In addition, as this classification refers to translator training and skill acquisition, there should be a reference to the relevant abilities involved in the cognitive process of problem-solving and decision-making, following the example of the skills’ descriptors as featured in the “translation competence” of the eTransFair project (2017: 1). Moreover, it is remarkable that up to three entries are devoted to the competences of proofreading/revising/correcting texts whereas postediting, “edit and correct machine translation output” (ISO 18587:2017), is delegated to the background (see 6.6. *Optional skills, competences and knowledge*). Accordingly, machine translation (MT) goes almost unnoticed in this occupation, even though the task of MT output postediting is expected to continue to grow in the industry with a significant impact for professional translators (Massardo and van der Meer 2017; EUATC 2020). Likewise, according to the EMT 2022 framework, “MT represents a growing part of translation workflows, and [...] MT literacy and awareness of MT’s possibilities and

limitations is an integral part of professional translation competence” (2022, 8). The use of translation memories and computer-assisted translation is explicitly listed under “optional skills,” but we found only one reference to MT in the entry “improving translated texts,” which we identify with the task of “postediting”: “Reviewing, reading and improving translations done by humans or machines. Trying to improve the accuracy and quality of translations” (ESCO v1.0.8 2020). In fact, as stated by the ELIS 2022 survey, although postediting ranks second since standard human translation is still considered the dominant type of service, it is identified as “the activity with the highest growth potential” (EUATC 2022, 14).

#### *6.6 Optional skills, competences and knowledge*

Regarding optional skills, competences and knowledge, we highlight the following issues for discussion. Some skills inherent to the translator's work are included and qualified as “optional,” encompassing actions that are certainly not occasional in the process such as “analyse text before translation,” “translate language concepts” or “follow work schedule.”

Results suggest that it is advisable to add relevant transversal competences, which equip the translator with the necessary skills to ensure finding employment compared to other professionals (Kelly 2007, 136). The need for their inclusion in this taxonomy is justified by the fact that generic competences foster the adaptability and employability of graduates, included in the “personal and interpersonal competence” of the EMT framework (Toudic and Krause 2017, 10). Among them, it is worth mentioning compliance with deadlines and instructions, working in international and multicultural on-site or virtual teams, planning and management of pressure and workload, decision-making capacity, analytical thinking, etc.

(ibid.). Given the market requirements and the challenges associated with the translation service provision, some valuable personal and interpersonal “soft skills” have been added to the updated EMT 2022 framework, such as managing cognitive load and critical professional situations and acknowledging the importance of lifelong learning (EMT 2022, 10).

With regard to optional skills, following the conception of translation as a “multi-faceted” process (Mayoral 2004; Toudic and Krause 2017), this set could be expanded with specific skills applied to modalities and sectors where the translator is expected to continue finding work in the near future: remote interpreting, subtitling and dubbing, software and website localization, linguistic consultant, language technology tools development, marketing and transcreation, etc. (EUATC 2020), this latter (transcreation or creative translation) being the translation service that completes the top 3 of LSC [Language Service Companies] growth targets, with 42% of growth potential” (EUATC 2022, 14). On the other hand, there are further significant skills actually needed in the professional domain, such as the ability to make content fully accessible, that should be considered in translator education, as claimed in the EMT 2022 framework “Catering to a diverse audience necessitates a focus on accessibility in both the production and reception of multilingual, multimedia materials” (EMT 2022, 2). Implicit references to accessibility are also found in the eTransFair project that aims to make translation programmes more inclusive although accessibility is not part of the competence profile of specialised translators (eTransFair 2017; Heinisch 2019).

The updating of transversal competences and knowledge would definitely contribute to offering a more precise mapping of the translator occupation in ESCO, especially those related to the use of new technologies, which is particularly relevant for the reinforcement of

their employability in the digital era (Rita Besznyák, Márta Fischer, and Csilla Szabó 2020). Actually, according to the employers' view about the need for skill improvement of the ELIS 2022 report “almost 70% of language company respondents flag translation technology as a gap” (EUATC 2022, 38).

In this respect, we find only a few mentions of transcreation and postediting at the same level of other knowledge such as “semantics” and “linguistics” whose optional nature in translator training seems questionable. Likewise, the categorization and grouping of highly demanded skills like those related to “transcreation” and “postediting” at the same level as other competences--related to literature and types of literary genres--should be re-examined, as the main source of income for today's translators generally appears to come from “non-literary translations” (Holger Fock, Martin de Haan, and Alena Lhotová 2008; Maeve Olohan 2021).

## **7. Conclusions and further discussion**

First, we identify significant limitations in the “translator” entry of the ESCO classification. The results suggest that the selection, the categorization of essential/optional descriptors, the translation of the English version into other languages, as well as the adaptation of some outdated definitions of the main translation competences and processes (e.g., “translate texts,” “preserve the meaning of the text,” “understand the material to be translated,” “develop a translation strategy”) should be revisited. This study reveals that, despite the European Commission's commitment to implement continuous improvements, more work needs to be done to update the tool in line with the terminology and notions assumed in contemporary

translation theory and practice. To this end, it is essential that the synergy between the labor market, the education sector and employment services be strengthened, while contributing to improving the status and quality of the translation profession, starting with the optimization of terminological classifications (Katan 2009; Anthony Pym, François Grin, Claudio Sfreddo, and Andy L. J. Chan 2012).

This effort is critical given the relevance of this taxonomy, whose potential is still underexplored (Cedefop 2019, 15), specifically in the training and selection of translators in the labor market. On the one hand, higher education institutions may find it difficult to link ESCO skills and knowledge to the learning outcomes of their degrees and to the most relevant employment opportunities for their students. At the same time, employability prospects may be reduced because employers identify discrepancies between the skills profile they require and the image they have of the translator guided by the data in ESCO. Consequently, this scenario may contribute to misrepresenting the conception of the translator occupation and their professional identity. All this, added to the market volatility of the skills in demand, which are difficult to predict, contributes to graduates' confusion about market expectations (Massardo and van der Meer 2017, 22) and to their frustration due to limited knowledge of their work and the lack of recognition of their skills in society (Dam and Zethsen 2010).

Nevertheless, there are some significant strengths that should be acknowledged. The conception of translation as an interdiscipline is also manifested in the translation profession itself--characterized by fuzzy boundaries and linked to the concept of "boundaryless careers" (Michael B. Arthur and Denise M. Rousseau 1996)--since we often find experts in language and culture with clear career prospects inside and outside TI (Aguayo 2019; Morón 2020). Far

from hindering their employability, we highlight translators' versatility as a competitive advantage over other professionals (Kelly 2007), given that 44% of graduates find a job immediately after university (EUACT 2020, 61).

Against this background, ESCO is considered an important facilitator to reinforce several aspects. On the one hand, this taxonomy could be aligned with other European institution instruments, namely the EMT translator competence framework, a reference project in the identification of general and specific competences essential to access the translation industry and the labor market in general (Toudic and Krause 2017, 4). Supported by the work of the LIND expert group, ESCO would be more understandable and usable by the various social actors: educators, employers, job portals, students and potential translation professionals. It would also increase the possibilities for labor mobility as a dynamic element of the EHEA. A clearer and more up-to-date approach to the competences and profile of the translator would also favor "job transversality" in the sense of "promoting worker mobility across industries: [e.g.] a translation project manager can hardly be placed elsewhere today" (Massardo and van der Meer 2017, 23).

Therefore, despite the diversity of internal and external factors that condition the constant updating of a complex tool of such dimensions, ESCO should optimize its role as a "bridge language" between the market and academia in order to become a dynamic classification that is truly usable and useful for the groups concerned. In short, ESCO represents a unique window on emerging market trends and training opportunities for the TI field. Suggested improvements would also make the new ways of working, processes, skills

and job profiles associated with translators more visible, which could lead to filling vacancies and skills gaps and thus increase employability prospects.

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