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# 3 Institutional translation profiles

## A comparative analysis of descriptors and requirements

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### Introduction

The profiles and specific skills required to work for the translation services of international organizations (IOs) have only been the subject of a few descriptive studies, mostly by in-house practitioners. As with other aspects of institutional translation, the earliest substantial contributions on translator profiles focused on translation for European Union (EU) institutions, and particularly the EU's largest translation service, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation (DGT). Three DGT translators, Emma Wagner, Svend Bech, and Jesús M. Martínez, published a comprehensive account of the role, recruitment, and tasks of translators in the main EU institutions in 2002, subsequently updated in 2012 (Wagner, Bech, and Martínez 2012). Around this same period, a coordinated effort was made to describe the requirements, practices, and training needs of translators in multiple institutions with a focus on legal translation, including at several intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), namely the United Nations (UN), the International Criminal Court (ICC), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and INTERPOL (Borja Albi and Prieto Ramos 2013).

Since then, the field of institutional translation has benefited from increasing research and cooperation between translation services and academia. In the expanding landscape of institutional translation studies, analyses of specific genres and institutions predominate, while interinstitutional studies remain scarce. This is apparent in the case of research on institutional translators' profiles. Work by the UN's Anne Lafeber (2012, 2017) broke new ground by comparing the skills required for institutional translation at more than 20 IOs, as reported by their translation staff. The LETRINT project on institutional translation<sup>1</sup> has also recently produced a study of the duties and challenges of translation service managers based on interviews and analyses of job descriptors (Prieto Ramos 2017a), as well as a comparative study of institutional translators' backgrounds and domain specializations through a survey of 12 IOs (Prieto Ramos 2020a).

In the context of LETRINT, this chapter extends the above research by comparing the job profiles of translators and revisers in a corpus of

vacancy notices from several organizations published between 2005 and 2020. The study is also informed by 33 interviews with translation service managers of multiple IOs.<sup>2</sup> The central aim of the chapter is to identify the main commonalities and differences between institutional descriptors and requirements, as well as any changes during the period examined. Given the focus of the project on institutional legal translation and quality assurance, special attention is devoted to specialized translation competence and the potential impact of technological developments on professional requirements. Further details on the material and the approach are provided in the following section, before presenting the results and discussing their implications.

### **Material and methodology**

Our corpus of vacancy notices was built with a view to obtaining a comprehensive overview of professional requirements in institutional translation, including a wide range of supranational organizations and IGOs and a representative diversity of domain specializations. To this end and for subsequent triangulation purposes within the LETRINT project, the functions considered for the compilation of notices comprise all the translation and revision positions announced by the following institutions:

- In the case of the EU: the main law- and policy-making institutions, including the European Commission, the European Parliament, and the Council of the EU, with shared interinstitutional recruitment processes for translators through the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO); the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) and its lawyer-linguist recruitment notices (also organized through the EPSO); and the Translation Centre for the Bodies of the EU (CdT).
- The UN, more precisely, the translator and reviser jobs announced by the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM); those of the UN's main judicial organ, the International Court of Justice (ICJ); and the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Two medium-sized multilateral organizations encompassing a diversity of domains: the WTO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), including positions for its central Language Division (WIPO-LD) and for its Patent Cooperation Treaty Translation Division (WIPO-PCT).

Overall, the selection of these organizations enabled comparisons between the job profiles of the largest EU and UN language services, three court translation services, and at least two specialized IGOs. The documents were compiled by querying institutional repositories, except for the ICJ, the ICC, and WIPO, for which the full retrieval of notices was only possible through direct contact with the institutions. The samples were considered

both sufficiently representative of institutional translation and manageable for corpus analysis.

To preserve this balance while enabling the analysis of recent profile changes, the initial scope of ten years was expanded to 16, from 2005 to 2020. Two eight-year periods were identified with a view to examining the potential impact of machine translation (MT) and other technological advances on job descriptors and requirements: 2005–2012 and 2013–2020. It is considered that it was only in the second period that both statistical machine translation (SMT) (in the mid-2010s) and, later, neural machine translation (NMT) (in the late 2010s) became widespread across institutional language services through new customized tools (e.g. WIPO Translate, the UN's eLuna, or the EU's eTranslation) and triggered changes in working procedures and productivity expectations (see e.g. Fernández-Parra (2020) and Chapters 2 and 15 in this volume).

All the vacancy notices were categorized as translator or reviser jobs based on the content of the functions described in each instance, regardless of the specific titles used. Apart from the CJEU's lawyer-linguist positions (essentially devoted to translation, as opposed to lawyer-linguists in other institutions), the "translator" category included other less common denominations, such as "linguistic administrator in the field of translation" (nine notices for 22 translator competitions in the EU, including the CdT)<sup>3</sup> and "associate translator" (six notices from the ICC and two from the UN).<sup>4</sup>

In the case of positions integrating translation and revision, the distinctive duty that determined inclusion within the latter category was the regular revision of other translators' work, as opposed to self-revision. In the EU institutions, all translators are also expected to revise, while multilateral organizations follow a more hierarchical approach whereby translators are normally promoted to revision positions based on in-house experience. This was particularly relevant for the analysis of any differences in the way revision tasks and seniority expectations are reflected in the notices for IGOs. Reviser positions were thus analyzed as a subset of notices. The title of "reviser" was consistently used across institutions, except for the ICJ, WIPO, and three notices from the WTO, which employed the denomination "translator/reviser".

Another significant variation considered was the multiple ways of organizing recruitment processes for several translation services or language departments within the same institution or organizational umbrella. While IGOs' vacancy notices are generally produced for the purposes of recruiting translators or revisers for a single target language, in the EU institutions two-thirds of notices issued through EPSO described the job profile and requirements for several simultaneous competitions in various languages. In the case of the EU "interinstitutional" competitions, the final lists of successful candidates form a shared pool used to meet staffing needs as they arise in the different EU institutions. As for the UN notices, the recruitment processes are generally organized by DGACM for all duty stations,

but are restricted to one official language of translation per notice.<sup>5</sup> To offer a precise picture of the selection processes and languages covered in each institutional setting, the number of competitions is provided in Table 3.1. By the same token, the notices issued by the two main translation services of WIPO were divided into two subsets, WIPO-LD and WIPO-PCT, in order to identify their different profiles and requirements.<sup>6</sup>

In total, 224 notices for 290 competitions qualified for inclusion in the corpus, including a sizeable number of notices for each setting, organization type, and language profile, with the highest figures in the EU and the UN translation services (see the breakdown in Table 3.1). The totals for court translation services (CJEU, ICC, and ICJ) are comparable, between 17 and 18 notices, while WIPO-PCT (34 notices, compared to 21 for WIPO-LD and 22 for WTO) stood out among the other medium-sized IGOs, essentially due to the PCT's higher number of languages.<sup>7</sup> The distribution of translator and reviser positions within IGOs is quite even, at 93 and 87 notices, respectively. The total figures per period were also considered satisfactory for the purposes of the study, even if they were globally lower for the first period. Apart from the fluctuations in staffing needs, it is possible that, for some organizations, not all the older notices might be accessible. In the case of the UN, for example, texts issued before 2010 were retrieved from the

*Table 3.1* Vacancy notices analyzed (number of competitions between brackets if more than one per notice)

	2005–2012	2013–2020	Total
<b>EU</b>	<b>21 (50)</b>	<b>23 (60)</b>	<b>44 (110)</b>
Translator (interinstitutional)	8 (25)	7 (28)	15 (53)
Lawyer-Linguist (CJEU)	12 (24)	6 (22)	18 (46)
Translator (CdT)	1	10	11
<b>UN</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>68</b>
Translator	17	15	32
Reviser	3	33	36
<b>ICJ</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>18</b>
Translator	6	1	7
Reviser	8	3	11
<b>ICC</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>17</b>
Translator	9	5	14
Reviser	1	2	3
<b>WIPO</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>55</b>
Translator (LD)	4	9	13
Reviser (LD)	2	6	8
Translator (PCT)	9	6	15
Reviser (PCT)	8	11	19
<b>WTO</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>22</b>
Translator	9	3	12
Reviser	3	7	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100 (129)</b>	<b>124 (161)</b>	<b>224 (290)</b>

Official Document System (ODS) rather than the UN Careers Portal, while the CdT confirmed that the older notices were no longer accessible, but that these would add no variations to the compiled notices. This explains the exceptionally marked difference between periods for this body.

The notices compiled were issued in at least one of the languages of the LETRINT project (English, French, and Spanish). Most of them were available in English, regardless of the language combination required in each competition. The English version was thus considered for our comparative analysis, except for several notices which were only published in French (20 notices from the ICJ, the ICC, WIPO, and the WTO) or Spanish (12 notices from the WTO) in the case of translator or reviser positions in these languages. Overall, no significant differences in structure, content, or discourse conventions were detected based on the drafting language of the job announcements.

The notices were mined to extract and classify discourse segments into three major categories: duties, competences, and academic and professional background. Regardless of the specific structure and conventions followed in each setting, these three categories proved applicable to all the notices based on an initial mapping, as they distinguish between the job contents, the competencies required for the job and the qualifying background. For instance, most EPSO notices include two main relevant sections, duties and eligibility (profile sought, including qualifications, languages, and other requirements), while UN job openings are typically structured according to responsibilities, competencies, education, work experience and languages. Testing specifications were compiled but not analyzed in this study.

The segments were subject to further analysis in order to group all related items together and gradually identify overarching denominations for the sake of comparability. For example, “works collaboratively with colleagues”, “showing team spirit”, and “ability to work harmoniously in a small team” were categorized as “teamwork skills”. More than 4,500 items were extracted and processed following this corpus-driven approach, which led to the consolidated results outlined in the next section. Quantitative methods were used to determine the main trends within and across settings, while institutional and diachronic variations were subject to additional qualitative analysis and complemented with keyword analysis (including collocations with “quality”, “machine translation”, “post-editing”, “culture”, and key domain denominations).

## **Duties**

Within translation duties (or specifically “technical translation” in the case of WIPO-PCT), apart from the core translation work into the *translators’* primary languages, only a few subsets of descriptors also include L2 translation (38.46% for WIPO-LD<sup>8</sup>) or sight translation (14.29% for the ICC). Self-revision is specified in all WIPO-PCT notices, and 53.85% of WIPO-LD’s

notices, and only a few from the ICC and the WTO. Terminology-related duties are the second most frequent responsibilities (except for the CJEU), while revision is explicitly mentioned in all CdT notices and a majority of those from the other EU institutions (55.56–60%), the ICC (78.57%), and WIPO-LD (69.23%) (see Table 3.2). Overall, this reflects a consolidated pattern whereby, as opposed to EU institutions, IGOs' translators are not expected to revise systematically, but are gradually entrusted with self-revision assignments and eventually also occasional revision of peers' work.

Also, in connection with translation, terminology, and revision work, a few organizations mentioned concordance or consistency verification tasks in their notices, including 27.27% from the CdT subset ("language concordance work"), 16.67% from the CJEU ("checking [...] linguistic and legal consistency"), and 14.29% from the ICC ("check the consistency of longer texts involving more than one translator"). In contrast, MT post-editing was systematically included only in WIPO-PCT notices from 2015 onwards, reflecting the adoption of the organization's own MT system, WIPO Translate, for patent translation. Interestingly, references to computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools management, including translation memories, were systematic in WIPO-PCT and very frequent in WIPO-LD through the entire 2005–2020 period, and were occasional in the EU notices (except for the CJEU) only since 2016.

Editing stood out as a common duty in all WIPO-LD notices, as opposed to 42.86% of ICC descriptors, and between 16.67% (CJEU) and none in the other settings. Other language-related tasks specific to some organizations included: verbatim reporting (42.86% of ICJ notices, all of them for French language translators), *précis*-writing (37.50% of UN notices), and subtitling (27.27% of CdT vacancies). Legal analysis is featured exclusively in CJEU notices (53.57%). More exceptionally, two ICC notices and one ICJ notice for translators included interpreting duties. Finally, vague references to assistance with other tasks were found across the board, except for the EU interinstitutional notices.

In the case of IGO *revisers'* duties (see Table 3.3), the priority activity of revision is combined with translation, most often specifying "self-revision", and with approximately the same pattern for L2 translation as for translators in WIPO-LD. Terminology work is also a salient duty in most institutions, but with greater emphasis on validation and management (e.g. "participate in the compilation and validation of the terminology database" at the WTO) than in translators' job descriptors. Among other related linguistic tasks, editing is listed for revisers in the majority of WIPO-LD notices (similarly to their translators) and in all ICJ and ICC notices (as opposed to much lower proportions in translators' job descriptors in these international courts).

The concept of quality assurance appeared systematically (except in two notices in the first period) in connection with revision duties in WIPO-PCT notices ("input to the definition and implementation of quality assurance



Table 3.3 Most frequent reviser duties

	UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
				LD	PCT		
Revision	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Translation	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Tutoring	100.00%	54.55%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	90.00%	90.76%
Terminology management	100.00%	27.27%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	50.00%	79.54%
Management support duties	52.78%	–	100.00%	87.50%	94.44%	90.00%	70.78%
Strategic support	41.67%	–	100.00%	75.00%	94.44%	30.00%	56.85%
Deputy management	41.67%	–	66.67%	12.50%	–	20.00%	23.47%
Editing	–	100.00%	100.00%	87.50%	–	10.00%	49.58%
Recruitment and assessment	44.44%	–	66.67%	25.00%	33.33%	30.00%	33.24%
Assistance with other tasks	100.00%	72.73%	–	87.50%	100.00%	10.00%	61.70%

measures”), while over one-third of UN notices of the second period referred to revisers’ assistance in “monitoring the quality of in-house and contractual translation”. In the notices from the previous 2005–2012 period, only 24 occurrences of the keyword “quality” were found (mostly in generic references to the expected quality of translations), compared to 221 occurrences in the 2013–2020 period (including “quality assurance”, “quality control”, and “quality standards”). This reflects the trend towards more explicit approaches to quality in the field since the mid-2010s (see Svoboda, Biel, and Łoboda 2017; Prieto Ramos 2017b).<sup>10</sup>

Together with revision, three distinctive duty types emerge as being specific to revisers: tutoring (only less frequent than revision and translation, e.g. “train, mentor and provide feedback to translators” at WIPO); management support duties (including a diversity of strategic support and/or deputy management responsibilities, e.g. “officer-in-charge in the absence of the Chief of Service” at the UN); and, to a lesser extent, recruitment and assessment (e.g. “participate in the testing and recruitment of language staff” at the ICC). The ICJ, however, departed from this core trend by including only one of the three duty types, namely tutoring in 54.55% of notices. Other duties only found in specific institutions include: the use of CAT tools (100% for WIPO-PCT and 75% for WIPO-LD); post-editing (systematic in WIPO-PCT notices since 2015); linguistic advice (all ICJ notices); translation team coordination duties (100% in the WTO and 90% in the UN); focal point for translation suppliers (55.56% for WIPO-PCT); and interpreting (27.27% or three positions for the ICJ).

## Competences

The items describing competences, including various skills and types of declarative and operative knowledge, were grouped under five main sub-competences, based on the model followed in the LETRINT project for the analysis of institutional translation and specialized translation competence more broadly (Prieto Ramos 2011): (i) translation (core methodological or strategic competence), (ii) linguistic, (iii) thematic, (iv) instrumental (including CAT and terminology management tools), and (v) interpersonal and professional management competences. The advantage of this approach is that it is informed not only by the common denominators of previous multi-componential models of translation competence, but also, crucially, by professional practice, including in institutional settings. The approach avoids taxonomic duplications, especially with regard to interpersonal and professional management skills that are closely intertwined, and maintains the key distinction between core translation methodological competence and thematic competence.<sup>11</sup>

As expected, language proficiency and translation competence are recruitment conditions for all the profiles (see Tables 3.4 and 3.5). Most institutions (average of 83.13% of all vacancy notices) demand a perfect

Table 3.4 Most frequent competences required (translators)

	EU		UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
	Interinst.	CJEU				LD	PCT		
Linguistic	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Translation	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Instrumental	100.00%	100.00%	81.25%	14.29%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	88.39%
Use of IT/office technology	100.00%	100.00%	27.27%	37.50%	100.00%	84.61%	60.00%	50.00%	63.74%
Use of CAT tools	–	–	100.00%	3.13%	–	100.00%	93.33%	100.00%	46.43%
Interpersonal and professional management	100.00%	100.00%	27.27%	50.00%	100.00%	84.62%	100.00%	100.00%	84.65%
Teamwork skills	100.00%	100.00%	27.27%	50.00%	100.00%	76.92%	46.67%	100.00%	77.87%
Adaptation to deadlines/work under pressure	100.00%	100.00%	–	12.50%	–	–	60.00%	91.67%	40.46%
Professionalism	–	–	27.27%	50.00%	35.71%	84.62%	46.67%	–	28.73%
Organizational skills	60.00%	44.44%	27.27%	–	100.00%	–	–	–	27.33%
Thematic	100.00%	100.00%	27.27%	–	100.00%	92.31%	100.00%	100.00%	78.37%
Adaptability to diversity of fields	100.00%	–	–	–	35.71%	38.46%	100.00%	75.00%	38.80%
Knowledge of organization's subjects	–	–	27.27%	–	100.00%	61.54%	40.00%	16.67%	27.27%
General culture	–	–	–	85.71%	14.29%	38.46%	60.00%	58.33%	28.53%
Legal specialization/knowledge	–	100.00%	–	–	35.71%	–	–	–	15.08%

Table 3.5 Most frequent competences required (revisers)

	UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
				LD	PCT		
<b>Linguistic</b>	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Translation	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
<b>Interpersonal and professional management</b>	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	87.50%	100.00%	100.00%	97.92%
Teamwork skills	97.22%	100.00%	100.00%	87.50%	57.89%	100.00%	90.44%
Professionalism	91.67%	—	66.67%	75.00%	57.89%	—	48.54%
Tutoring and feedback provision	—	—	100.00%	—	42.11%	100.00%	40.35%
Organizational skills	8.33%	—	66.67%	62.50%	—	10.00%	24.58%
<b>Thematic</b>	91.67%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	60.00%	91.94%
Adaptability to diversity of fields	91.67%	—	—	87.50%	100.00%	20.00%	49.86%
Knowledge of organization's subjects	—	—	100.00%	75.00%	57.89%	30.00%	43.81%
General culture	—	72.73%	—	25.00%	42.11%	10.00%	24.97%
Legal specialization/knowledge	—	36.36%	66.67%	—	—	—	17.17%
<b>Instrumental</b>	94.44%	36.36%	100.00%	87.50%	100.00%	100.00%	86.38%
Use of IT/office technology	86.11%	36.36%	100.00%	75.00%	57.89%	70.00%	70.89%
Use of CAT tools	25.00%	—	—	87.50%	63.16%	100.00%	45.94%

command of the primary (A or target) language and an excellent or thorough knowledge of two second (B or translation source) *languages*.<sup>12</sup> The only exceptions in which only one B language is mandatory include: the ICC and the ICJ, both with two working languages (English and French); WIPO (LD and PCT) competitions for Chinese, Japanese or Korean as A or B languages; all competitions for Chinese and two for translation into French at the UN;<sup>13</sup> and one EU interinstitutional competition for translators into Irish.

In most notices, knowledge of an additional language is considered an asset. In the case of the core *translation* strategic competence, some notices refer to related analytical skills or to attention to detail (especially in the EU and the ICC), while the UN specifies expectations of translation accuracy and consistency in all its reviser notices.

As for the other competences, the frequency averages obtained for revisers are higher than those for translators, particularly with regard to interpersonal and professional management (97.92% and 84.65%, respectively) and thematic competence (91.94% and 78.37%, respectively). *Instrumental* competence scores are more convergent between the two profile types (88.39% of translators' notices and 86.38% of revisers' notices), but with remarkable institutional variations. While all CdT and WTO notices,<sup>14</sup> as well as all WIPO notices from 2010 onwards, specifically require familiarity with CAT tools, the other EU notices systematically refer to the use of IT tools (all EPSO notices). This more generic skill is also found in the translator profiles sought for the ICC (all notices) and the UN (37.50%, mostly in the second period), including references to word processing. A similar focus applies to revisers in the same institutions, while CAT tools are only featured in a minority of UN reviser notices (25%, most of them in the second period) and ICC translator notices (21.43%). The ICJ, with references to word processing in four reviser notices in the first period and to broader technological awareness ("ouverture à la technologie", including "technologies nouvelles") in a translator vacancy notice in 2018, is the least technologically demanding of the institutions considered.

Within *interpersonal and professional management* competence, teamwork skills are the most salient across the board. The broad requirement of professionalism is particularly frequent in UN and ICC reviser notices (91.67% and 66.67%, respectively) and in WIPO-LD translator notices (84.62%), while organizational skills are most often mentioned in ICC notices (100% for translators and 66.67% for revisers) and, to a lesser extent, WIPO-LD reviser notices (62.50%) and EU competitions (60% of interinstitutional notices and 44.44% for the CJEU). The most marked differences between profiles are found in connection with revisers' competence for their distinctive tutoring duties (described above). All WTO and ICC notices for these profiles, and almost half of those from WIPO-PCT, explicitly require competence in tutoring or feedback provision. However, the ability to meet deadlines and work under pressure is more explicit for

translators; it is systematically included in EU notices (except for the CdT) and very often in the WTO (91.67%) and WIPO-PCT (60%). Curiously, the latter translation service was the only one to feature this component in the skillset for revisers (57.89% of notices).

*Thematic* competence is the least explicitly covered in translators' requirements, and represents the most significant gap for any sub-competence in a single organization, the UN. The most common pattern for translators is to require the ability to adapt to a diversity of subject fields, especially for EU interinstitutional positions (100%), WIPO-PCT (100%) and the WTO (75%); or to be familiar with "general culture",<sup>15</sup> particularly at the ICJ (85.71%). Similar trends are found for revisers at WIPO (100% for PCT and 87.50% for LD), the ICJ (72.73%), and the UN (which refers to thematic versatility in all notices for revisers, but in none for translators). Knowledge of the organization's subjects features in all ICC notices for all profiles, and in a high proportion of WIPO notices (approximately half for translators and two-thirds for revisers). A specialization in legal subjects, more specifically, is required for all CJEU lawyer-linguist positions, as opposed to one and two-thirds of ICC translator and reviser notices, respectively (even if knowledge of the organization's subjects is always required), and only one-third of those for ICJ revisers. Finally, technical domain specialization was sought for 7 out of 19 reviser positions at WIPO-PCT, as well as one at WIPO-LD and another one at the WTO.

These results on competences must be read in conjunction with the description of duties above and academic and experience requirements, which will be addressed in the next section. The areas specified in qualification requirements, for example, provide further insights into the domain specialities prioritized by the institutions.

## **Academic and professional background**

The category of academic and professional background focuses on the qualifying requirements in terms of education (including the degree type and the field of studies) and professional experience (including field and duration). As for the *academic* level, a primary university degree is the predominant condition for translators (88.32%). The ICC is the only institution that requires a Master's degree (MA) in all the competitions examined. In other institutions, the requirements are often higher for revisers, with an overall average of 42.52% of notices specifying an MA degree (see Table 3.6). This applies to the WTO (100% of reviser notices), and WIPO-LD (75%) and WIPO-PCT (57.89%) exclusively in the second period, while the UN does not demand postgraduate degrees for any profiles. In this organization, the requirement of having passed the UN competitive examinations for translators (91.67% of notices) effectively restricts the access to reviser positions to translation staff.

Table 3.6 Degree types required

	EU		UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
	Interinst.	CJEU				LD	PCT		
Primary degree	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	85.71%	-	100.00%	100.00%	91.67%	86.38%
Revisers	N/A	-	100.00%	100.00%	-	25.00%	42.11%	-	44.52%
Master's degree	-	-	-	14.29%	100.00%	-	-	8.33%	13.62%
Revisers	N/A	-	-	-	100.00%	75.00%	57.89%	100.00%	55.48%

As regards the *academic field* (see Tables 3.7 and 3.8), a degree in translation is the most commonly required, both for translators (average of 57.07% of notices) and revisers (79.19%), but never exclusively. The only institution examined where a specific field of study is mandatory for recruitment is the CJEU, as candidates for lawyer-linguist positions must hold a degree in the law of a Member State whose official language corresponds to the language of the competition. The other institutions either mention several academic fields or accept a degree in any field of study. This is particularly the case in all CdT and post-2009 EU interinstitutional competitions,<sup>16</sup> as well as UN notices. In this organization, translation degrees and any other degrees taught in the language of the competition<sup>17</sup> are indicated as pathways for recruitment in half of the notices for translators only. These recruits can subsequently apply for reviser positions without further academic credentials.

Overall, the second most frequently mentioned field after translation is languages or linguistic studies, closely followed by law.<sup>18</sup> Legal studies stand out as one of the preferred fields of specialization in all WTO, ICC, and ICJ competitions. In the latter setting, law is mentioned as an asset. The same was found in all UN notices for French-speaking translators until 2013.<sup>19</sup> At the WTO, apart from translation, languages or law, 83.33% and 90% of notices for translators and revisers, respectively, also include economics as a priority area. Finally, WIPO-PCT systematically lists technical fields among qualifying degrees.

*Experience in a specific field* is not (or is rarely) required for EU (all institutions) or UN translation positions. In the other organizations, all profiles must have experience in translation and specifically technical translation in the case of WIPO-PCT. A background in legal translation is mentioned as an asset in approximately half of CJEU and ICJ notices (44.44% and 57.14%, respectively), together with related activities such as previous practice in law (38.89% and 14.29%, respectively) and experience in legal drafting (44.44% for the CJEU only). Experience in institutional translation settings is specifically required in a significant proportion of notices from WIPO-LD (76.92% for translators and 87.50% for revisers) and the ICJ (over half of the notices for all profiles).

As expected, the average *duration* of the translation experience required for revisers (see Table 3.9) is much higher than for translators (three times longer). It is also more homogeneous between institutions, within a narrow range of 7.08 (UN) to 9.42 years (WTO), compared with marked differences for translators, between no minimum experience at the EU institutions and the UN as a rule (or an average of 1.14 years for the CdT) and top averages above five years (5.62 for WIPO-LD and 5.60 for WIPO-PCT). The ICC is the second most demanding institution in terms of previous experience for translators (3.50 years), followed by the WTO (3.11) and the ICJ (2.29).

Table 3.7 Academic background specified (if any) for translators

	EU		UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
	<i>Interinst.</i>	CJEU				<i>LD</i>	PCT		
Translation	–	–	53.13%	100.00%	100.00%	92.31%	93.33%	75.00%	57.09%
Languages	40.00%	–	3.13%	14.29%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	16.67%	41.56%
Law	–	100.00%	3.13%	–	100.00%	30.77%	–	83.33%	35.25%
Technical or scientific field	40.00%	–	–	–	–	–	100.00%	16.67%	17.41%
Economics	40.00%	–	3.12%	–	–	–	–	83.33%	14.05%
No area specified	60.00%	–	37.50%	–	–	–	–	–	21.94%

Table 3.8 Academic background specified (if any) for revisers

	UN	ICJ	ICC	WIPO		WTO	Average
				LD	PCT		
Translation	-	90.91%	100.00%	100.00%	84.21%	100.00%	79.19%
Languages	-	36.36%	-	87.50%	31.58%	100.00%	42.57%
Law	-	36.36%	100.00%	-	-	100.00%	39.39%
Technical or scientific field	-	-	-	-	100.00%	30.00%	16.67%
Economics	-	-	-	-	-	90.00%	15.00%
No area specified	100.0%	-	-	-	-	-	16.67%

Table 3.9 Average experience in translation required per profile and setting (years)<sup>20</sup>

		<i>Translator</i>	<i>Reviser</i>
EU	<b>Interinst.</b>	0	N/A
	CJEU	0	N/A
	CdT	1.14	N/A
UN		0.19 <sup>21</sup>	7.08
ICJ		2.29	8.55
ICC		4.50	8.00
WIPO	LD	5.62	8.50
	PCT	5.60	9.26
WTO		3.11	9.42
<b>Average</b>		<b>2.49</b>	<b>8.47</b>

### Discussion and concluding remarks

The comparative analysis of job contents and requirements for translators and revisers across institutions reveals three broad clusters of profile features in line with the organizations' varied natures and policy areas. First, apart from the fundamental difference of not recruiting revisers separately as in the IGOs, translator selection processes for the EU translation services (EPSO interinstitutional notices and, to a lesser extent, the CdT) share several features with the UN's approach: large-scale competitions to feed reserve lists with a diversity of profiles through testing; no requirements of previous training or experience in translation; and no specific demands of thematic or instrumental competence (except for the CdT's sustained integration of CAT tools in its notices). This approach seems to suit the heterogeneity of topics covered by the many EU and UN bodies, but entails a heightened reliance on screening and testing in order to identify suitable profiles.

Second, the court translation services examined, despite their common focus on legal translation, differ considerably in their job descriptors and requirements. The CJEU hires law graduates with the relevant linguistic competence to translate as lawyer-linguists, but with no previous experience in this field. In contrast, the ICJ leans towards more linguistic profiles by asking for some experience in translation and, while legal studies are not mandatory, experience in legal translation is noted as an asset in more than half of job openings for translators. The ICC notices depict a more mixed and tailored approach to recruiting competent specialized translators, with mandatory postgraduate qualifications in translation (or related linguistic fields) or law, knowledge of the organization's subjects and more extensive experience in translation (averaging 4.50 years). This pathway is comparable to the requirements of certain accreditation authorities for certified translation at the national level,<sup>22</sup> and to the specifications recommended in ISO 20771:2020 for legal translation.

Finally, the other medium-sized IGO translation services considered, the WTO, WIPO-LD and WIPO-PCT, displayed a similar trend of requiring previous experience in translation and in establishing priority areas of academic specialization together with translation (law and economics at the WTO, technical fields for patent translation at WIPO-PCT, and legal or other backgrounds related to WIPO-LD's subjects); and they stand out for their emphasis on CAT tools. As a general rule, these organizations also raise the required academic credentials to the postgraduate level for revisers, in line with the ICC, and ask for the longest experience of all IGOs for these positions.

The descriptors and requirements for revisers are otherwise more similar among IGOs than those for translators, even if through diverse pathways. Apart from their core revision duties, revisers are most often expected to tutor junior or external staff and occasionally support management duties, recruitment, and assessment. The required expertise in translation and organization-specific themes is accordingly more advanced.

As for diachronic patterns in our corpus of notices, despite the automation trends between 2005 and 2020, the analysis did not elicit major changes. It rather suggests that each institution works with job descriptors and prototypical skillsets that are adapted only where necessary to reflect specific needs or innovations. The most significant changes detected were the increasing references to quality across institutions (including the concept of quality assurance in WIPO-PCT reviser notices since the first period), as well as the integration of post-editing in all WIPO-PCT notices from 2015 onwards. This suggests that the introduction of MT in institutional workflows, in particular, did not call for immediate change to instrumental competence requirements. The WTO and the CdT had issued "CAT-friendly" notices since an earlier stage, while other organizations showed varying paces and degrees of specificity in the integration of computer-related duties and competences as they gradually adopted new tools, with the ICJ being the least technologically demanding. In turn, as confirmed during the interviews conducted for the LETRINT project, these gradual adaptations are consistent with the widespread view that organization-specific tools can be learnt on the job.

The extent to which new interactions with machine translation trigger substantial changes in job descriptors and recruitment processes is yet to be seen. In a nutshell, the question remains whether the core competences needed to ensure high-quality translation are fundamentally impacted by new forms of machine input in translation and revision processes. While the productivity expectations and quality issues derived from these interactions may certainly evolve, the advanced translation competence and substantive knowledge required to ensure translation adequacy in each communicative setting remains crucial, if not more critical than ever.

The European Parliament has conducted an in-depth reflection on these issues and published its new "intercultural and language professional"

profile for translators in 2021, just after the period covered by our corpus.<sup>23</sup> This profile highlights cultural and intercultural aspects of translation competence that characterize the human translator, but had previously been taken for granted in vacancy notices. The new descriptor refers to cultural adaptation, transcreation and localization tasks in a diversity of formats. It emphasizes the promotion of clear language to facilitate communication with citizens on multiple “often complex” subjects (“political, legal, economic, financial, scientific, or technical issues”). This new profile not only attests to the EU institutions’ more explicit commitment to fostering accessibility and legitimacy for EU policies (Prieto Ramos 2020b, 473), but also aligns with the increasing diversification of communication formats in the translation market more broadly, as also reflected in emerging training initiatives.<sup>24</sup>

However, the qualifying conditions for the new “intercultural and language professional” profile remain basic and unspecific, as only a three-year university degree in any field and no professional experience are required. As with the other profiles and recruitment approaches reviewed in this study, only the recruiting institutions can thoroughly monitor whether these approaches bear the expected fruit. The less stringent the qualifying conditions are in competition calls, the more this monitoring will depend on the criteria applied in massive screening and testing processes. What are the advantages and risks of each approach? Do the more tailored approaches yield more satisfactory results in light of new recruits’ performance? As would be expected for other professional profiles, is it not desirable to demand an educational and/or professional track record in the field of specialization, along the lines of ISO 17100:2015 for translation services?

Recent research about new recruits’ skill deficits indicates difficulties in grasping and adequately reformulating nuances and content on specialized topics, as well as researching these topics and detecting inaccuracies (Lafeber 2012, 118–119; 2017, 64–70; and Chapter 2 in this volume). These gaps are directly related to core translation and thematic sub-competences that may not be fully demonstrated in the context of an examination or interview. This also applies to other skills developed through training or experience, as well as deontological aspects associated with professional awareness (Prieto Ramos 2010).

In the past two decades, the academic and professional landscapes in the field of translation have evolved significantly, including new studies of translation competence and new international standards for translation services. Vacancy notices, however, have not changed significantly in the period analyzed except for the gradual accommodation of translation technology. This attention to tools is justified, but it is certainly not the central issue in addressing how to effectively recruit translation professionals and continue ensuring quality communication in the new digital environments of institutional translation services.

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## Notes

- 1 “Legal Translation in International Institutional Settings: Scope, Strategies and Quality Markers”, led by the first author and supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation through a Consolidator Grant (<https://transius.unige.ch/letrint/>).
- 2 The interviews addressed multiple aspects of translation service management and quality assurance, including translators’ recruitment and competence, in EU institutions (where the interviews included quality advisers) and IGOs selected for the LETRINT project. These interviews were conducted by the project leader in Brussels, Geneva, Luxembourg, New York, The Hague and Vienna between 2017 and 2019.
- 3 As opposed to the EPSO sample, where this denomination was discontinued after 2008, in the CdT it co-existed with the title of “translator” through the entire period. In this body, the starting grade for each position differs slightly (6 or 7 for linguistic administrators and 5 for translators).
- 4 A P-2 starting grade position as opposed to P-3 for “translators”.
- 5 As a unique feature of this organization, in 21 of the 32 job openings for translators, the relevant competitive examinations also applied to related language positions such as verbatim reporters and editors, and in these cases only the relevant specifications for translators were considered in our study.
- 6 For the sake of comparability between translation services, eight notices issued by WIPO’s International Registrations Administration Department and WIPO’s Sector of Trademarks, Industrial Designs and Geographical Indications were not included in the study.
- 7 In addition to the official languages of WIPO, i.e. the same six official languages of the UN, PCT operations are also conducted in German, Japanese, Korean and Portuguese, as opposed to the WTO’s trilingual regime in English, French and Spanish.
- 8 Including two-thirds of notices for Arabic, half of those for Chinese and only a few for Russian. The prevailing L2 for inverse translation is English.
- 9 The averages provided in the tables were calculated considering the frequency score for each setting, where “-” means zero. In the case of categories comprising several sub-categories, the score for a particular category in a given institutional subset of notices is not strictly the sum of such sub-categories, since more than one sub-category may feature in a single notice.
- 10 References to “quality control” also emerged in WIPO in the second period, with regard to quality expectations in all WIPO-LD translator notices (“applying established quality control standards”), and regarding occasional support to quality control tasks in all WIPO-PCT translator notices (“upon request, participate in quality control work”).
- 11 This distinction, which is essential for professional and academic monitoring of competence and performance in specialized translation, was blurred in the revision of the initial EMT competence wheel (EMT 2009). In the new “EMT Competence Framework”, in order to reconcile multiple views on the matter, methodological or strategic competence and thematic competence were merged within the core “translation” competence, but still recognized as distinct inter-

related competences. Thematic competence is expressed as: “Acquire, develop and use thematic and domain-specific knowledge relevant to translation needs” (EMT 2017, 8). In contrast, ISO standard 17100:2015 for translation services divides thematic competence into “culture competence” and “domain competence” (ISO 2015, 6), while in the case of ISO 20771:2020 for legal translation, thematic competence is split into “specialist legal field competence” and “legal culture competence” (ISO 2020, 8–10).

- 12 The frequency of A languages in our corpus reflects the diversity of official languages and translation needs of each institution. For instance, EU notices include a broader range of A languages, while these are limited to English and French in the case of the ICJ and the ICC. English is the least frequent A language at WIPO-LD and the WTO, for example, and only predominant in WIPO-PCT notices. The reverse applies to B languages. English is by far the most frequent B language across the board, except for WIPO-PCT.
- 13 15.62% of UN job announcements (one in Arabic from 2009, two in French from 2015 and one in Spanish from 2016) also allow for the possibility of having English as the only B language for candidates who have a particular background in relevant areas of specialization.
- 14 In the notices from these services, familiarity with CAT tools is specified for recruitment but, as opposed to WIPO, the management of such tools is rarely mentioned as a regular duty (see Table 3.2). With regard to the pioneering advances in customizing CAT tools in the WTO, see Pasteur (2013).
- 15 As confirmed by our keyword analyses, no other references were made to “culture” or cultural or intercultural competence in the notices, except for two-thirds of ICJ notices (all for French-speaking translators and revisers), which required “parfaite connaissance de la langue et de la culture françaises” (perfect knowledge of the French language and culture). Cultural competence is otherwise taken for granted in candidates who master the relevant languages.
- 16 Previously, notices invited candidates from a broad range of areas, such as modern languages, economics, finance, natural sciences, technology and social sciences.
- 17 This has been mandatory for all UN notices since 2007.
- 18 These results are consistent with the distribution of academic backgrounds revealed through a survey of institutional translators and revisers (Prieto Ramos 2020a, 289–291), which also revealed a high proportion of mixed backgrounds, except for the CJEU’s lawyer-linguists.
- 19 Two English- and Spanish-language translator notices from the same organization in the second period further refer to degrees in economics, international relations, sciences or engineering as an asset.
- 20 In 50 notices, the required duration of experience varied depending on the candidate’s qualifications. In such cases, an average was calculated for each notice (e.g. five years for MA holders and seven years for lower degrees resulted in an average of six years).
- 21 Only three UN notices from 2015 refer to a minimum of two years of mandatory translation experience.
- 22 See e.g. the conditions qualifying for Geneva’s official examination to become a certified translator: [https://silgeneve.ch/legis/data/rsg\\_I2\\_46.htm](https://silgeneve.ch/legis/data/rsg_I2_46.htm).
- 23 PE/AD/260/2021: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:C2021/170A/01&from=ES>. See also book chapters on the ongoing profile revisions at this and other institutions.
- 24 For example, since 2017, the University of Geneva’s MA in Translation and Specialized Multilingual Communication trains translators to also develop skills for corporate and multimedia communication, transcreation and technical drafting: <https://www.unige.ch/fti/en/enseignements/ma-traduction/>

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