**INTERVIEW ROBIN**

*Kim:* Well, thank you first of all very much for participating in my thesis interview. Because I know that your time is valuable and it really, Yeah, I really appreciate it.

*Robin:* You're welcome*,* no worries.

*Kim*: Just a disclaimer, of course since I have the questions in front of me, I will be looking down during the interview. But of course, I will also be listening. Do you maybe have some questions before we start?

*Robin:* Not immediately, I think I asked right beforehand, so no I think I'm ready to go.

*Kim:* Alright, then I would first like to know how you got into working at the European Parliament?

*Robin:* Okay, so I have a bachelor's degree in applied linguistics. I studied Dutch, German and Spanish, and after that, I started a master's in International Relations and Diplomacy Studies. But during my master's I always thought that maybe translation was not something for me, that it would be too, yeah literally boring as most people would think. But to really make sure of that, I applied for a Bluebook traineeship at the European Commission, and I was accepted. That was back in 2017, where then I did my 5-month traineeship in translation in the Director General for Translation at the European Commission in Luxembourg already. And then after that I stayed in Luxembourg, I finished my master's because it was during my master's that I did my internship. And then I finished my master's and in October 2018 I went back to Luxembourg to work as a translator in the private sector, because I really enjoyed my traineeship, and I started considering translation and localization, transcreation etcetera, as an actual possibility for my career. So, then I worked for two years in the private sector, as a translator into Dutch. And then, well I ended up on the list, on the reserve list for the European Parliament and I was hired four years ago, in 2020. And I've been enjoying my work here since.

*Kim:* That's good to hear. And could you maybe describe a little bit which kind of technology the European Parliament uses in their translation process?

*Robin:* Well as you might have already heard, there are two, like big directorates in our Directorate General, right. So, in Directorate B, the colleagues they told you about that, they use, like, more tools still. Like CAT4trad, maybe they have mentioned. But apart from that, of course in D as well we use the usual Studio, like SDL Trados Studio, to translate. We use Euramis, which is kind of a repository of all translations within the main European institutions. We use IATE very frequently, which is the EU terminology database. And then MT, even Directorate D, we regularly actually use MT as well, machine translation, which is often based on the European Commission's eTranslation tool. So, what we do is we have our source file, we upload it into, on the website of eTranslation, and then we get the TMX file back which we then can upload into our translation memory and then it automatically creates our machine translation, which we then afterwards adapt according to our needs. What else, these are the main tools, I think for translation. Every once in a while, we use term bases as well. Although in our particular, day-to-day tasks it's less relevant. But maybe, like, in very long documents in Directorate B for example, it can be useful to always remember what type of term you need to use. Yeah, that's what just comes to mind right now.

*Kim:* Alright. And how do you personally, like what is your personal workflow, when it comes to using machine translation or yeah just translating in general?

*Robin:* So, in our directorate we create our projects ourselves, which is different from Directorate B, where it's created centrally and where translators basically just can start translating after the project has been also prepared by the assistants in Directorate B. In our case, we prepare the projects, I mean we create the projects even, we prepare them and by preparing them, I mean that we, when creating the projects we insert the necessary translation memories to begin with. So, we have a Directorate D specific translation memory for three or four different languages, like from English into Dutch, French into Dutch and German into Dutch, which we then attach to our project. For now, it's still a very big translation memory, let's say. Since this Directorate was created only four years ago, so we still have to maybe create separate smaller translation memories, specific for our directorate. But for now, we have these bigger TM's. So, we add those. We have fullcat as well. So, when we create a project, we have this shared fullcat translation memory, which means that in real time, you can see how other colleagues translate a certain segment that might be related to yours or even if it were the same segment. And then once the project is created, we prepare it, meaning that we localize all the links usually. We lock the links, because then they do not enter our translation memory. At least, that is what I do, because I don't like it when then automatically the translation memory gives you a link that might not be the correct one and then you have to check very thoroughly to make sure it's good. And then after that, we can start translating, unless I decided to add eTranslation through TMX, which I add to another translation memory, which is then not... So, then we have the Directorate D specific translation memory, we have fullcat usually, if we create our project through Studio Twist, and then, if need be, I add an eTranslation file of my source document into a third translation memory. And then those are the TM's. Then we translate and localize the links, we lock them, and we can start translating.

*Kim:* Alright, interesting. And how much would you say that, if you apply machine translation, that you use the proposal?

*Robin:* Could you repeat that one more time?

*Kim:* How much would you say that you use the machine translation proposal?

*Robin:* Okay. The thing is, in most cases, in most segments, it's usable in a way. But still, in most segments I would still adapt certain things. Even if it's not necessarily wrong, it's not always the best way in the particular text to translate it or, it's often structure nowadays, because terminology wise, it really, the machine translation really knows, the EU jargon as well. So, on that front it's quite advanced. But when it comes to style and reader friendliness, for example, it could sometimes be adapted. So, in many cases I would say, 80 or 90% of cases, we would still adapt a tiny bit. Even if it's only a few words or it's the structure of the sentence, but yeah, our human eye is still very much needed

*Kim:* And do you often also just scrap the whole proposal?

*Robin:* Well, I have seen a big improvement on that front, to be honest. When I was working in the private sector, in those 2 years that I was talking about, I really saw big mistakes, you know, where I really thought like, okay, I cannot trust this tool, because there are too big mistakes in there. Like, when Turkey is literally translated as *'kalkoen’*, it's where it doesn't give you confidence in the tool. So, there, yeah, it happened that I just scratched the whole machine translation proposal, and I entered my own translation. But in this case, it’s a very specific type of translation also, EU translations, and the eTranslation tool and other, I mean, the machine translation that is used within the institutions is quite advanced, I think especially when it comes to EU terminology and jargon and structure even, for Directorate B then mostly. So, in D, we adapt the style. But if it's for more formal ways of writing, it's, it works quite well, so honestly, I do not delete the whole proposal anymore, I just adapt. Because I trust it way more than I used to.

*Kim:* That's also something that I was going to ask you about, if your view of machine translation has changed throughout the years that you have applied it?

*Robin*: Yes, really. Before I started at the Parliament, I was more sceptical about it. Not necessarily because of this fear that machines will take our jobs or anything, but just because it really didn't feel right, like I didn't feel confident about it. Not because I couldn't use it, even though on that front I have learned, of course. Because post-editing is not the same as translating obviously, but it was really mostly about the confidence that I had in the tool, so that has really improved. So, the one that we use here, I'm quite happy about. I don't know how it's evolving, I mean I know to a certain extent how it's evolving outside of the European institutions, but you know, I cannot say anything about that.

*Kim:* Fair enough. Does it also matter from which language you translate from? I know that most texts are probably from English to Dutch, but maybe if you translate from a different language?

*Robin:* That's a good question. Because indeed everything I've been saying now, it has indeed been mostly related to the English into Dutch machine translation. I don't know, maybe French can sometimes be a bit trickier. So, then the machine translation also tries to understand the source text and it doesn't always manage to. Which actually, I wanted to say as well, even in English it still depends on how well written the source text is. Because, you know, sometimes it is not that well written, but luckily I know enough of what usually the author wants to say, that I can adapt it easily and I know what they want to say, even if the machine doesn't get it. But yeah, French could be a tiny bit trickier, even though in practice I think it's still okay. What I do think is into other languages I don't know if it's part of your thesis, but not, the tool is not as effective for every language as it is for Dutch, for example, so there is some progress to be made on that front. Because, you know, English and Dutch are quite related in sentence structure and all of that. But, you know, when you have languages that do not have articles or languages that have, I don't know, very many cases, it's not always very natural, I think when it's the machine translating.

*Kim:* Alright*,* and what would you say are the main advantages and disadvantages of machine translation?

*Robin:* I think, I found it interesting in the questionnaire that I had to fill in, right before this interview, that there was an option that machine translation makes me less creative and machine translation increases my creativity or something. And I found it very interesting, because in a way, I would combine those two for myself, it's very strange, but I mean productivity of course, it increases with machine translation, because you know, it's relatively fluent, many solutions from the machine are really usable. So, I really feel way more productive when I use it. In a way, what I meant to say is that it enhances my creativity in the sense that I do not have to think already of many, you know, a lot of terminology a lot of... it gives me ideas. If you know, as a translator what is right and what is wrong you know that okay, this is right and now I can focus maybe on a more or less stylistic point of view or on stylistic matters and not so much on spelling and grammar, so you have more time to think of these, think about these creativity matters. But on another hand, of course, you are still bound to the segment-by-segment type of structure which, for us in Directorate D, is for example not ideal when we translate news, the news in brief. They're like, three small items of, let's say 5 sentences, more or less, each. So, 15 in total, and we would..., you know ideally we would be able to reshuffle the sentences and even, you know, change affirmative sentences into questions and we would need much more freedom and then in that regard, the machine translation would not be of that much help because we would feel bound to the structure and to what the machine is still telling us to do, you know. Yeah, so basically the more, the more freedom I have in a text, the less likely actually I am to use machine translation, because machine translation is very good for formal texts, for objective things, but less at this point for really creative solutions. So, it helps my creativity, but it doesn't provide, in itself, a lot of creativity.

*Kim:* Alright. That's an interesting way to look at it. And I actually wanted to ask about the types of texts as well, if there is a certain type of text where you would earlier opt for machine translation?

*Robin:* Yes, well I can only speak for Directorate D, of course. I think in B for many texts it would be very useful. In D we have letters that are usually, you know letters to questions from citizens and in those letters, our colleagues, so the authors, use a lot of quotes and references to existing legislation and even if our goal is to make it clear, we would still benefit from machine translation, because the machine kind of knows the *acquis communautaire,* aswe call it. So, it can find basically the actual translation and, yeah, in that case it really helps again for the productivity, and to be faster and more efficient. Because also, we can alter, in our cases, not if we quote it, if we quote the regulation, for example, literally, of course we have to use exactly what is in the regulation. But in Directorate D, sometimes we take away the quotes if it's too complex for a citizen to understand, because the legislation is quite complex, then we can remove the quote and we make more digestible. So, for that, machine translation is quite useful. Yeah, for CI's as well. I don't know if I have to explain what CI's are. They're like little texts about, like one-pagers, we had even to three-pagers as well, but most of them are one-pagers, that are meant for the 'What Europe does for me’ website and on that website, citizens from all over the EU can find information about all sorts of topics about what the EU does for them in their country, their region, for their profession. And so, they're very short texts, and I think machine translation is helpful there, because some of these segmenting and sentences I would rephrase in questions, for example, but the segmentation, the structure of the texts are usually fine. In that case, they help my creativity. So, in the case of CI's, I feel like it helps my creativity. But then when it comes to scripts for podcasts and, well obviously with subtitling we don't have machine translation necessary for subtitling, but for scripts for podcasts I tend not to use it although I do have used it already. So, there maybe I would say it depends on the text, on the time that I have. If it needs to be delivered quickly, I mean, obviously as said, machine translation does help your productivity. I don't know if the result will be as great as I might have wanted, but it would definitely be fit-for-purpose. If I can and if I have the time I think I'd rather not use machine translation for podcasts and very citizen-oriented texts, where I have a lot of freedom almost to write, almost like, I wouldn't say copywriting, but you have a lot of freedom then as a translator where you take basically the source and you really make it your own and you write something based on the content. And you use the content, of course, but you write something that is natural in your language, and you can restructure everything and make it really flow nicely and that takes a lot of time. So, if I can I do it like that and if I don't have the time, even for those texts machine translation could help.

*Kim:* Alright. And then, in general, would you say that you like using machine translation?

*Robin:* Yeah. I think that fits within what I was saying. Yeah, yeah. As I said, like, my opinion of it has really evolved over time. So, now I'm quite happy about it, at least within the context I'm working. So, yeah. I would say there are not many disadvantages at this point, from where I'm sitting.

*Kim:* That's good.And even though you generally like using the machine translation, is there maybe something that you would like it to have, or to change something about it?

*Robin:* About machine translation?

*Kim:* Or even specific, just machine translation here, maybe?

*Robin:* I'm usually somebody who acknowledges that it’s always a work in progress. And, I see for example, that now with, I think it's called neural machine translation, like, it really starts to understand also, stylistic things, actually. Like, it knows what sounds better or how a sentence that is structured a certain way in English should be structured in Dutch. It really starts to grasp these things and that's really what will make machine translation great, when it doesn't only translate almost literally, but really makes it flow in Dutch. And in some cases, I really see it's already happening. So, if I would see anything better, it is that it improved in that direction, you know, that it goes in that direction. And then of course, I'm not afraid for our jobs, because at least where I'm working now, we... there are so many things that linguists can do, and we're not limited, I think, to post-editing machine translation. Like, there are many things we can be creative writing, we can subtitle. You know, when we create podcasts, we still have that creativity freedom. So yeah, but if it's just about MT and how it's improving, yeah, what I would want to see to make the work even better or easier and faster is to have stylistically appropriate machine translation.

*Kim:* Alright. And then I have some more questions about clear language guidelines. I think in the questionnaire you said that you always apply them?

*Robin:* Yes, well we, yes. I mean it's, we have many, many, many clear language guidelines and there is a lot to think about, but these clear language guidelines, or clear language in general is something that we always keep in mind, you know. Especially where we are, we write most of the time for the citizens. So, we are like, okay, how will this affect the citizen, like, will the citizen, 1: understand it, 2: will the citizen want to know more about it? Also, you know, does the citizen feel like it answers their question? Do they, yeah, the goal is as well to make them interested and not alienated from what the EU does in general, because that's what we hear all the time, right? That it's not, you know, that it's too far away and it's too complex and they use words that no one understands. So, the goal here is to use these guidelines for the purpose of bringing the EU closer to the citizens and Parliament in particular. Yes, and we have guidelines for different products as well, of course. So, in this case I was mostly talking about written texts, so if a guideline is one of those. But we have also specific clear language guidelines for podcasts and subtitles because every medium is different. In a podcast, when you read the script of a podcast, it might not be the most grammatically cool way of phrasing things, but it's what works best when you speak, when you record it. And when you listen to it, that it sounds natural and spoken. And yeah, and then in subtitles of course, you have to condense, whilst at the same time keeping the source content. And there too, it's more, there it's spoken language in written form. So, you have the written texts, you have the oral podcast and then you have subtitles that are a representation of spoken language into written form. So, we have very different products, formats and they all require different sets of guidelines. We try to keep that in mind, whilst translating. So, it's not like we have the guidelines next to us every time we work on something. But yeah, I'm sure it's the same for all of my colleagues, at least in Directorate D that it's something we try to keep in mind on everything we do.

*Kim:* Alright, so it's more just a broader sense of, yeah, just making things clear, basically than thinking, oh, I have this guideline that I apply?

*Robin:* I mean I have to say, of course I started four years ago and in the meantime, most of the points in the guidelines are just stuck in my head and I can apply them, but yes in the beginning okay, I read them more often and maybe I did have them next to me a few times just to make sure that I checked, you know, for example, for audio products, is it fluent, is it clear, is there not too much jargon in it, like would the listener understand it? You know, you might want to address the listener directly with ‘you’ instead of having these vague general sentences. So, yeah, I remember them, and I apply the rules, so I don't know if you want to hear more about the rules in particular.

*Kim:* Yeah, you can, if you want to.

*Robin:* Addressing is key, especially in Directorate D, that your reader or listener feels that you are involved, and you are involving them. Maybe variation between long and short sentences and not always very boring the same sentence length with variety in your texts, usually. But stick to the right terminology though, if possible. Unless it's too complex, then maybe you explain it. In audio products for example, we try to avoid abbreviations because 1: not everyone understands them and 2: if they are spoken, they don't always ring the same bell as when you read them on a piece of paper. So, that's what we're trying to avoid. What else can I say. For audio, I remember one of the guidelines was like, speak as if you were speaking to a friend, you know. Try to explain what the Parliament is doing when it's about the news in brief, as if you were speaking to a friend. So, there are these little things that might sound obvious, but when you do it in practice and you have your source text, we are usually, people are usually, have a hard time getting away from what it written in the source text. So, in that case it's important to always remind yourself that you can take some more freedom to really make it good, with the purpose of addressing your reader, or listener or viewer. Yeah, there is a definition, I don't know if someone else told you about it, like recently there has been the ISO standard on clear language and maybe someone has mentioned already? It was, like, published last year in June, so it's been a year that there has been an ISO, so that's the International Standardization Organization, right, so there is now a plain language standard for the first time. And the definition is that clear communication means that the reader finds what you want them to find or what it needs to find and that understands what it finds. So, it's not only about words, and even of the structure of the sentences, as it's about the design of your text, in this case. It’s about formatting: the structure, design, words, sentences, all of these things combined that make something clear and not only words which, in our case, is something you obviously focus on as linguists, but there is more to it.

*Kim:* Yeah, alright. Then I've got one more question about clear language guidelines. Does the use of machine translation change the way you can apply those guidelines?

*Robin:* I don't think it excludes it. I think they can be combined. As I was saying, like with my idea for future MT improvements, is that it would be more stylistically appropriate. So, as I said as well, MT will not be useful for every type of text, anyway. So, if it's not useful, if I don't think it's useful, because I would need to restructure the whole text or the design is more important or colours are more important, or whatever. I might not use it, so in that case, how it relates to clear language guidelines is not that relevant. But in cases where I do use machine translation, I think it can be combined, because it will be... I mean MT is already relatively good, even for the clear language guidelines, actually, and then you just adapt them even more to make it more in line with the guidelines. So, I don't think they are excluded, they can be combined if it's good for the purpose of your translation.

*Kim:* Okay, okay. And then I only have one more question and that is if you have any questions, or something else that you would like to add about the topic?

*Robin:* No, I'm very looking forward to the results. I think all of my colleagues are. But apart from that it was nice. It was a nice interview, thank you.

*Kim:* Thank you very much, again. And then it is finished.