**INTERVIEW THOMAS**

*Kim*: Well, first of all, thank you very much for participating. I know that your time is very valuable. So, it's really, it means a lot that you are willing to participate.

*Thomas*: You’re very welcome.

*Kim*: Do you maybe have any questions beforehand, before we start?

*Thomas*: No, not at all. I think you've provided me with enough info beforehand, so I’m fine.

*Kim*: Alright, alright. And yeah, just a disclaimer of course since I have the questions before me, I will look down sometimes, but I will still be listening, of course. Yeah, just to begin. I was wondering how did you get into the European Parliament?

*Tomas*: How I got into the European Parliament? Well, I took part in an EPSO competition. I think that was 2017. I simply saw there was competition organized by several institutions, the European Parliament being one of them. So, I took part at that time, this was through the EPSO website where they advertise where they publish basically all the competitions of that kind. So yeah, I took part in that competition, and then I made it to the reserve list. And after some time, I had the opportunity to come in for a job interview for this particular position. So, I've been here since July 2020.

*Kim*: Alright, that’s very interesting. Could you also describe a little bit how the European Parliament uses technology to translate?

*Thomas*: Well, I think we rely very heavily on technology, as you know we use CAT-tools on a daily basis. So, we use Trados Studio 2019 I think is the current software version. We make use of term bases, a lot of terminology and machine translation, as well of course also. I would say on a daily basis, but that would not really refer to me personally. I think in Directorate B, so the Directorate for Translation, they use it more commonly as I think more of their, the documents that they translate are more standardized, which makes it easier I find for, for machine translation to generate coherent translations. And I think that really helps them to do their work more quickly. Whereas in Directorate D, the Directorate for Citizen’s language, we have more, let's say, creative input, sometimes in our translations, which so far, machine translation doesn't really help that much. Sometimes it does help to inspire and to get started. But not, definitely not always. What else I can say about technology is that I know that whenever we consider using new technologies, that there are specific units for this to really research the technology that is available on the market, or if there's something very specific, some kind of functionality that we really feel we need, we can also have new technology or new programs developed specifically for us. So, this is a quite lengthy process. It takes a lot of time. But as far as I know, the policy is first to look at what is on the market and, you know, how much does it cost, how well does it meet our needs. And if there's something already on the market, the first reflex is of course to buy what’s already on the market. Yeah, sometimes it does happen that things are developed specifically for us, based on an extensive study that has been done within the house.

*Kim*: That’s the same case for the machine translation, right, the engine?

*Thomas*: Yes, I believe so. Yeah.

*Kim:* And within your own workflow, how do you incorporate machine translation?

*Thomas*: Machine translation, well normally when we start on the translation project, we can rely on our proofreader who prepares a project themselves in Studio and will also either link machine translation to the project or not. Now, at the moment we don't have a proofreader, so for specific texts I use our own proprietary tool, which is eTranslation and you basically import the source document into it, and it emails you a translation which you can then link to your Studio project. And then it's quite user friendly when you're working in Studio, you start a new segment, and you can immediately access the machine translation. Personally, I only use eTranslation for slightly longer texts, where I know that it's unlikely that I will be changing a lot in terms of the order of information, for example, when that is something that needs to be done, I try to avoid using Studio altogether, such as the daily Newsflashes. They're quite short, the news items are short and when you then have to switch around information, I mean the order of information is not really practical to work with Studio, so no machine translation in that sense. But for longer scripts for podcasts, for example, I would, I would do it, or longer translations, then I would definitely use eTranslation. Just to get started. It makes things easier to, to have a first suggestion to work with and sometimes it's, sometimes it's rubbish and I don't use it at all. But oftentimes, it really helps to create an idea. But it's always important especially in our work, when we want to have a very natural sounding Dutch translation that is not too formal and doesn't seem like a too literal translation from English, it's important to really not stick too closely to the machine translation as well, to also use your own imagination and to try to come up with something from scratch. But machine translation can very often really help to get started and to get the ball rolling more quickly.

*Kim:* Alright, yeah, I can imagine. And in your questionnaire, you also mentioned that you use other types of tools, like Plint, and are there, apart from Studio, other tools where you apply machine translation?

*Thomas:* No, not really. The machine translation is really limited to Studio alone. I have wondered, since Plint, you know, is usually, is used for subtitling, but I did feel like I should mention it because there has been talk of using automated subtitling as well. So, basically combining machine translation with subtitling software. But personally, I have no idea how far this kind of technology has come. I mean, I think we're all familiar with automatically generated subtitles on YouTube, for example, which often, especially to subtitlers seem awful. Although I have spoken to end users, I mean, people who simply watch YouTube and are not really into the subtitling business themselves, and they greatly appreciate it. But, so far, I don't think there are any concrete plans to incorporate that in our workflows to start using that in Plint. But I mean, never say never, this technology evolves very quickly, and it might well be that we start using it within a few years. We've been getting more and more subtitling jobs in the past few years, so the bigger workload probably means we'll look into more technology that can make life easier for us.

*Kim:* I can imagine. So, what do you usually think about the quality of the machine translation? Because you talked about a little bit, but can you explain a bit more?

*Thomas:* Well, it varies, it really depends on the source next, which is probably an answer you've gotten before as well. And this usually holds up. I mean, if you have a source text that is very formalized, very, very heavily reliant on terminology that always has to be translated in the same way or to specific phrases that come back again, and again, this really makes life a lot easier. It really speeds things up. And possibly you would have to have an even keener eye on your post editing because you really have to pay attention to the small mistakes, which machine translation can still have even in that kind of texts. But usually, I think in procedural texts that have a very specific structure and have these typical phrases that always come back, there machine translation is brilliant, because it really speeds up work. In other types of texts, where you deviate more from this, you know this standardized form, and especially the texts that we quite often work with, where we get some creative, creative input.

*[the recording stopped here, but we immediately realized and started a new recording]*

*Thomas:* Okay, so, short recap. I was just saying that for the very standardized texts, with same formulations that come back again, and again, it's really great. It really speeds things up. But the texts that we use where you need some more creative input, or where you have the license to maybe omit a few things or add some extra information, because you feel like your target audience, like it would help your target audience, then machine translation has a more limited use. It can still help you to get the ball rolling, to get, you know, the first inspiration to start translating, but you really have to be more critical when you're post-editing then. You have a bigger input yourself, at that point. So, it can still has its uses, but it's more limited.

*Kim:* Yeah, I can imagine. And since the machine translation output is not always perfect, especially in the more creative text in directorate D, how much would you say that you actually use the machine translation proposal, if you apply machine translation?

*Thomas:* Well, I mean to use it 100% without any changes that would be rather rare. I would say maybe 5% of the time, so that's very limited. But there's a good chance that like one in four of the suggestions will have at least some use to me. So, that I would definitely you know, just use it as a basis and make some, maybe even small changes, add some, some punctuation or change a word around because we find it's more accessible to a wide audience. So yeah, to actually apply the offered suggestion. Sometimes I really need to make big changes. But maybe, the essence of the suggestion is still there and that can... it does save me some time to type, I don't know 10 words, I will use it but I think it's only like one in four that I make some small changes and I'm happy with the machine translation’s suggestion. And it does happen, from time to time, that I could just apply the suggestion. These will usually be the shorter segments and the segments that are a bit more like the ones you might get at directorate B, where things are more standardized.

*Kim:* Right. And do you have a preferred type of text, where you would apply machine translation?

*Thomas:* Yes. As I said, I only find it very useful if the text is slightly longer. But that's relative as well. I would use it for example, for press releases that we translate as well, which are, which are quite difficult texts to translate. So quite often, I would have to change a lot to the suggestions from the machine translation as well, but at least they help me out. They help me to get a first glimpse of the meaning of the text. Sometimes I would even, because it's such an intricate text, sometimes I would have difficulty understanding even the source segments, to find meaning behind it. And sometimes machine translation actually makes it more clear to me. I would go like ‘Ah, okay, yeah I hadn't even considered that this might be what was meant in the source text’. So that could really, that would be one type of text where I would definitely use it. Or, for example, let's say the model answers that we sometimes translate for, for AskEP, so answers to letters from citizens, because they also quite often refer to legislation that has been adopted in the past years or specific resolutions or specific guidelines or research that has been done. So, that's also where machine translation really comes in handy sometimes.

*Kim:* And from which languages do generally translate into Dutch?

*Thomas:* Well, I think it's fair to say that 95% of the texts that we translate are translated from English into Dutch. We do get some translations from French. Sometimes we can, we can basically choose. As you have probably noticed already, some of the ‘my house of European history’ stories, they will for example, have the original French and then you would have the English translation that has already been done in house and then we can basically choose, and the same applies to German for example. When it's a more exotic language, so to say, if it's the Slovenian for example, if that's the source language, then we will only see the English translation. But yeah, mostly it's English, 95% and the remaining 5% would be either French or German and once in a blue moon we have Spanish.

*Kim:* And even though the fast majority is from English, do you recognize some differences between the machine translation output between those languages?

*Thomas:* That's a good question. I find it hard to say because it's so rare that we translate from any other language than English. But since nothing really comes to mind, I would say that the quality is very... is more or less the same. I don't think there are any really big differences. So no, I wouldn't say there's a very noticeable difference. Probably there is. I assume that there will be if I would get more texts in French, I would probably see the differences. But I can't really say there is, although come to think of it. I do remember one example where I was translating from French, and I did have some suggestions that were a bit off the mark. And that's, I remember thinking that in French you have many more homonyms or, you know, words that you write in the same way but actually, or words that have more double meanings. And then you would have some weird translations there. So, I think that happens a little bit more when you have automatic translation from French than you do from English, but it's just one occasion that I remember.

*Kim:* Alright, interesting. And do you maybe have some things that you would like machine translation to have, that it doesn't have at the moment.

*Thomas:* Another good question. Well, it would be interesting if you would have more options to customize basically the type of text, if you could really indicate that this is a legislative text, so I want to keep the kind of jargon or I want to keep the register of this source text really in my target text. And I want to say this is really a legal text and I want to keep it that way. I want you to interpret every word you find in a legal way. Because sometimes you will like a jargon term that if you translate it literally, probably machine translation would use the most often used translation of that specific word, whereas in a jargonistic meaning, it will have something, it would mean something completely different. And the same would go for if you want a really creative translation, if you say, okay, this might be more, this could be a little bit more literary, like more, almost poetic text and you can translate more freely. That would be good. I know in eTranslation that you do have, that you can distinguish, but in my experience so far, it's not really... it's not really there yet.

*Kim:* Alright,I can imagine that it could be useful.

*Thomas:* Yeah, I think so, yeah.

*Kim:* In your questionnaire I also read that you used to work at a private company, and that also applied machine translation. And you mentioned that there were some differences in the way it was used, could you explain that?

*Thomas:* At least my experience, yeah. So, when I was working in the private sector I was with a company for about six years, and I seem to remember that the first two to three years we didn't really use machine translation at all. We still had like this, there was this cliche, and I often thought that this was kind of funny, because I'm not the kind of translator that shies away from technology or machine translation. I don't think it's going to take over our jobs and we're all going to be unemployed soon. I think we just have to learn how to use it. But a lot of clients often said that if they were unhappy with the translation they received, they would use this as an insult, and they would say that it looks like it was translated by Google Translate. Whereas I was thinking Google Translate at the moment is the most advanced machine translation available to man. So, it has actually progressed by leaps and bounds compared to 10 years ago, at that time 10 years ago, so by now 15 years ago. So, I noticed that at one point, we were getting a lot of you know, repetitive tasks, or repeat translations, things that will be updated every month or every year. And then in the private sector machine translation was really, really considered to be a tool that can save time and increase your output. And it was just basically the way to save money, which makes sense. I mean, if we were already relying very heavily on CAT-tools and translation memories and that could really help. You know, if you use a translation memory it also really increases your output, increases speed. The translation, machine translation increased that even further, in some texts and also it was only used when the client agreed to, for us to use it. We would say okay, we will apply machine translation which means that we can work faster, and we can give you a discount. We can tell you, okay, it's going to be cheaper if you allow us to use machine translation. In the knowledge that there will be post-editing done. There was always a human translator who'd have another look at it. Whereas here in the public sector, machine translation is not, obviously not used to save money or to make money. It's something that can be applied more broadly. You can always use it if you want to. You can apply it every time you translate, as long as you feel that it saves you time. And as long as you feel that the output, the quality of the output is okay to actually use it. So, there's quite a big difference to me. We used it a lot less frequently in the public sector, because it still had a bad reputation with the public. People would see and say, ooh, you know, machine translation, a computer can't compete with, you know, with a human yet. So why would you use it and then, you know, it's going to take quality down. But some clients, you know, they assumed if it gets us the translation more quickly and if there's still someone looking at it so we can rest assured it's correct and please do. And let's all save time and money. So, that's what I meant by my comment there.

*Kim:* Yeah. Yeah, that's interesting, because I hadn't really thought about that much that it would be quite different, the way in which you, machine translation is used. Then I have one last question about machine translation in general, actually. Do you like using machine translation?

*Thomas:* I do, yeah. In general, I do.Of course, sometimes it's just, it can be cumbersome. And when I think back to my time in the private sector, sometimes especially in the beginning, it was still difficult to find out which texts are really suited to use machine translation on. And then sometimes you would basically lose time, even though you would charge your client less because you told them, you know, we're going to be saving time by using machine translation. And then sometimes basically, we didn't make any profit on the translation, or on the contrary, we actually lost money because we thought this was going to be a good text to use machine translation on, and then the output was so bad or there were so many of these homonyms for example. I think we, I seem to remember, we found out quite quickly that for website translations, for example, it is terrible. Because web designers will give you a whole Excel list of terms, I think you recently translated one. And you can very often, you notice that there's just like terms, one word or two, three words, and it will be it will be translated in completely the wrong way. Where, you know, in an IT-setting, if you have the word 'gateway’, you can translate it inti Dutch, obviously, but in IT-terminology, a Dutch speaking IT-guy will not want a translation of the word 'gateway'. They will want the English word, because there they really know, you know, what it's about. So, sometimes, it was very cumbersome, and it basically cost us more time. Nowadays, though, in general, I really do like using it. But again, it all comes down to knowing what kind of source text is suitable for machine translation. Sometimes it's just better not to use it. By now, most of us have some experience in that and we kind of know and the good thing is you can always add it in Studio. You can always add machine translation and if, you know if you start translating, you can see, I mean I've done 10 segments now and every suggestion from machine translation was rubbish, you can basically just remove it and you can take it out of the project and just start translating on your own. But usually now whenever there's machine translation suggestions available, I'd say most of the time, at least 70 to 80% of the time, I'm very happy that I have it available and that I can use it.

*Kim:* Alright, that's good. Then I have some questions about the clear language guidelines. In the questionnaire, you also mentioned that you basically apply the guidelines, always. Could you explain a little bit about what the guidelines are for you and how you apply them?

*Thomas:* Well, these guidelines, they basically come down to knowing your audience, I mean, knowing who you're translating for, and really tailoring your translation to them. To make sure that whatever you write down is transparent, that it's not full of jargon, that whenever there's jargon that you cannot avoid, you at least try to explain it. To make clear through the context, what it is you're actually talking about or to use a commonly used term and then add or use the jargon and add a more commonly used term, so that's clear, this is what you basically mean. And also bearing in mind that long, complex sentences and grammar structures are to be avoided. These are some very common, very common guidelines. I think it's also common sense to apply them. And basically, what we've been taught is to, you know, if you're trying to... if you're making a translation about a topic that not everyone will be familiar with, try to imagine that you're trying to explain this to a friend at the pub. You're just talking about something that you read, and that you found interesting, and you notice that your friend who you're talking to, is not really that familiar with the topic, how would explain it to them? And that's basically the kind of conversation that you have to keep in mind when translating. So, this is what we apply in everyday life. Just to make sure that the people reading our texts get the information that they need, that they can, they can find it and they can apply it, that they can do something with it.

*Kim:* Alright, and is there also a way that machine translation affects these guidelines?

*Thomas:* Machine translation specifically? I don't, I don't think so because it's, you always have to bear this in mind whether you're using machine translation or not. And that also goes for using translation memories, because we haven't always been as mindful of clear language as we are now. So, it's quite often actually you still get these suggestions from translation memories, so the translations that we have made in the past or also our colleagues have made in the past on the same topic, and we basically notice that nowadays, this doesn't sound clear at all. The translation might be correct, or the quality in itself might be good, but it doesn't really serve the purpose of really informing a wide audience. So, then we still have to rewrite this, and we have to revisit this specific segment. And the same goes for machine translation. So, you might get a suggestion that is perfectly correct, but still we, you know, we change things around and hopefully, if we apply these guidelines often enough and long enough, then machine translation will basically pick it up as well and will start doing the same things as we do or applying the same guidelines. But, of course in a perfect world, the source texts are already written in clear language, and so then the machine translation will also be in clear language. But that's, I'm afraid we're not there yet.

*Kim:* Then I only have one more question, and that is if you have any more questions or things you would like to add?

*Thomas:* No, I don't think so. The one I really wanted to add myself was the comment that I had made in the questionnaire basically, on how machine translation is used? No, I think machine translation is a very, very interesting development. I know that there are many misconceptions about it. Or I at least think that they are a lot of misconceptions about it. And now of course, with you know, artificial intelligence being all the rage and being a huge hype. I also expect this to develop even further, and it will improve machine translation, I'm quite sure of it. And maybe, you know, as we were mentioning clear language before, artificial intelligence can really help to apply clear language principles in machine translation. That would be brilliant. If it can do that and it will be up to us as translators to really follow up on these developments and to try to stay abreast of it all. And really learn how to use it and to get the maximum result out of it. So no, I'm very, very curious to see how it's going to develop even further. But I hope I've given you enough for your thesis.

*Kim:* I think so, yeah.

*Thomas:* It's a very interesting topic.

*Kim:* Well, thank you again for participating.

*Thomas:* You're very welcome.