**The hard thing about soft skills: Educating for today's language industry**

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A dynamic, diversifying language industry is quite evidently placing a rising premium on so-called “soft” transferable or transversal skills (Angelone, 2023; Bernardini Ferraresi, & Petrovic, 2022; Risku et al., 2022). Under umbrella terms like “service provision,” “interpersonal and personal,” “consulting” or “risk assessment” competence (EMT Board and Competence Task-Force, 2022; Nitzke & Hansen-Schirra, 2021), soft skills have come to occupy a visible position in competence modelling and curricular outlines – alongside those traditionally perceived as hard. But both inside and outside translation studies and translator education, “soft skills” seem to represent a “phrase in search of meaning” (Matteson, Anderson, & Boyden, 2016). Largely ill-defined and vaguely described, they remain notoriously hard to operationalise, track and evaluate (Cimatti, 2016). This talk explores some confusions, contradictions and caveats in how soft skill sets have been viewed until now. It seeks to explain the fuzziness in distinguishing the soft from the hard as the inevitable outcome of trying to model expert performance in the intrinsically embodied social enaction of language mediation. It then tentatively outlines a basic, practicable framework for identifying, mentoring and assessing how students develop the soft – or better, transferable – skills that add tangible, much-needed human value to the processes and practices of today’s language industry.

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