The recognition of foreign professionality

An examination of the organizational translation practices of foreign professional knowledge and skills in Germany

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1   Introduction

In many cases, the decision to leave the country of origin is not only associated with the consequences of leaving one's own material possessions and social networks behind, but it is also linked to the loss of previously acquired professional knowledge and skills, since the qualifications from the country of origin are often incompatible with those in the destination country (Friedberg, 2020; Reitz, 2007; Konietzka & Kreyenfeld, 2001; Kogan, 2016). Thus, assuming an equivalent job in the host country can be much more difficult for migrants.

In the "race for talent" (Shachar, 2006), the moral call to integrate migrants into the host country not only includes the economic necessity of recruiting skilled workers from abroad, but also promoting their adequate employment. Recently, many nation states have been dealing with the prevailing tension between the interests of national actors (e.g., maintaining national education standards) and the demands for the integration of migrants (Pfeffer & Skrivanek 2018). However, considering the approximately 200 countries worldwide and the 3,008 identified occupations for Europe alone (European Commission 2022), the question of how qualifications can be translated across borders has yet to be answered.

Germany thereby poses an interesting case, since its vocational training systems are highly standardized and stratified (Allmendinger, 1989). Meanwhile, the combination of training in a company and education in a vocational school can only be found in several other countries (Fürstenau et al., 2014), making translatability especially difficult. Hence, the research question in this study is as follows: How are foreign skills and knowledge translated in Germany? This question is addressed by interviews with employees of consulting offices, individuals responsible for the assessment of foreign knowledge and skills (e.g., the members of Chambers of Crafts), and various training organizations.

Building on the sociology of translation, the present study considers translation as a performative act, which is carried out through a network in which knowledge regarding a certain entity is continuously transformed (Latour, 1986). As the third section in this study argues, the materialization of the results (Czarniawski, 2010) must be used in another organization. Artifacts can thereby be described as objects that are produced, handled, and modified through human interventions (Lueger & Froschauer, 2018, p. 11). They also determine how their information is processed and conveyed, and through the application of artifact practices in an organization, how they can be transformed. Moreover, transformations in a translation chain can be described with the following concepts: interessement devices, spokespersons, and shifting. In this case, shifting refers to contextual or material changes of an entity (Pelizza, 2021). Following Pelizza's (2021) work, this study adapts these concepts to understand the transformations of foreign skills and knowledge, the details of which are discussed in the fourth section.

The remainder of this study is organized as follows. The next section summarizes the recognition procedure in Germany, followed by two sections specifying the previous theoretical considerations on translation. This is followed by a description of the methodology of this study and the data. Subsequently, the next sections focus on the work and interplay of various organizations by examining the practices of consulting offices, Chambers of Crafts, and vocational training organizations. Upon comparing the concept of shifting in foreign skills and knowledge, the

procedure in the Chambers of Crafts presents itself as formal. Formal transformation is accompanied by more informal procedures carried out in consulting offices and training organizations. Furthermore, artifacts, such as application forms, manifest the necessary information and determine the form of translation in the Chambers of Crafts. Overall, the translation of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany is not a sole reductionist process, since this analysis shows that additional training can lead to subsequent modifications of the materialized results regarding the formal recognition of foreign skills and knowledge.

2   The Recognition Procedure in Germany

The starting point of this study is the enactment of the Federal Recognition Act of 2012 in Germany. The intention of this Act was to promote the integration of migrants into the labour market, in accordance with their qualifications. In this regard, efforts have been made to facilitate the use of foreign professional knowledge and skills by directly involving the German certification bodies for professional qualifications and formal recognition. These procedures aimed at making competencies comparable (through the formal examination and certification of foreign qualifications) to German occupations, regardless of whether they are regulated professions (in which formal recognition of qualifications is necessary) or non-regulated professions (in which formal recognition is not necessary) (BMBF, 2012; Knuth, 2013).

Since the implementation of the Federal Recognition Act of 2012, further education programs/offices for the formal recognition of qualifications have been established (BMBF, 2019). Therefore, the labour market integration of migrants in Germany is a complex structure of organizations that actively participate in this integration process. During such integration, they each work on the translation of foreign qualifications (Sackmann, 2023); however, little is known about the interplay of these organizations and how foreign professional knowledge and skills are processed.

3   Theoretical Considerations on Translation

3.1   The Role of Artifacts in Inter-Organizational Cooperation

Drawing on the constructivist approach of actor-network theory, the idea of translation and related transformation processes have been pursued in Scandinavian institutionalism. Specifically, their perspective underlined the necessity to materialize informal information in order to travel between organizations (Czarniawska, 2010). In this regard, materialized ideas can be carried into other organizations (Czarniawska & Joerges, 1996, p. 47; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2005, 8). Their studies also followed Latour's (2017) understanding of translation, in which ideas cannot be carried forward in their abstract form, but must be de-contextualized, since only a section of the world is considered for translations. Knowledge regarding this section is (re-)produced in networks and exists in the form of so-called "inscriptions" (Latour, 2017). Inscriptions are materializations of knowledge that influence translations as non-human actors such as signs, archives, or documents (ibid., 375 f.). This can be illustrated by the following example. Researchers use existing data to generate new insights. Meanwhile, the original data remains untouched in the research process, but is modified in different ways by researchers according to their scientific interest. In other words, the data is continuously transformed. Moreover, researchers often work with previous results and in this way, the original data becomes increasingly translated. The documentation of the results (materialized in scientific knowledge) is further processed and thereby transformed in organizations and scientific papers that connect researchers.

Translation is thereby a process of transforming knowledge. This process is characterized by an organization-specific form of receiving information, processing this knowledge, and repackaging it for other purposes. In the case of foreign professional knowledge and skills, it can be assumed that each organization translates them according to their organizational structure. In this regard, artifacts contribute to inter-organizational cooperation. While the preceding depictions mainly discuss the role of artifacts for organizations and their inter-organizational

practices, the following section further defines artifacts and describes their modification through translation. From a more performative perspective, it encompasses the important role that various actors (human and non-human) and technical devices play (as inscriptive forces) in the translation process.

3.2 The Translation of Qualifications through Artifacts

Building on actor-network theory, Pelizza (2021) used the concepts of spokespersons, interessement devices, and shifting to open "[...] black boxes and reveal how the material qualities of artifacts act to involve diverse actors [...]" (Pelizza, 2021, p. 488). In doing so, she further specified Latour's concept of inscriptions. In her study, she used these concepts as "thinking tools" (Leander, 2008) to describe the translation processes in the identification of refugees at European borders. Identification is thereby a performative process in which various actors, such as officers at the border or technical devices, participate.

Concomitant to the process of translating foreign professional knowledge and skills, information about an individual is also translated and transformed (Pelizza, 2020). The translation in both cases is a reduction of an individual's characteristics or (in the case of this study) an individual's capacity to work in a specific profession. Hence, translation is part of a process in which the organizations involved select the required information in order to translate the employability of migrants. In this process, artifacts play a crucial role, since they define who is being addressed (Latour, 2017). The following section adapts this approach to better understand the different stages of the translation of foreign professional skills and knowledge. It also describes the three aforementioned concepts in more detail.

The terms interessement devices and spokespersons have both been used in Callon (1984), who applied these terms to describe the use of translation to solve a problem. In his analysis, translation is a network-forming process characterized by four stages: problematization, interessement, enrollment, and mobilization. Throughout this process, the actors involved manifest their positions by involving some actors,

while leaving others out. This can occur through conversations and artifacts. He also referred to this as interessement, since the interest in participating is either generated or not generated, and by doing so, actors become either involved or excluded. According to Callon (1984, p. 133), "Interessement devices push actors to adopt the expected roles and behaviours; they are devices which can be placed between actors and all other entities who want to define their identities otherwise."

Spokespersons are human or non-human actors who speak for others. They can do this verbally (e.g., like a mayor who speaks for his/her community) "or because they replace the preceding link in the chain of action and translate it into a different materiality" (Pelizza, 2021, p. 495). In the identification process at border crossings, fingerprints act as spokespersons. Dahlvik (2017) described the materialization of spokespersons in administrations when discussing asylum procedures. In this regard, the materialization of informal knowledge is essential for the legitimacy of certain decisions, while the transformation process is characterized by the transition from informality to formality. It also distinguishes between two decision-making processes: factualization and writing. Factualization describes the process of transforming information into facts, while writing involves the transformation from spoken words into written ones (Dahlvik, 2017). The validity of decisions can be established through written words, while files or notifications are spokespersons of the forgone translation.

Pelizza (2021) used the theoretical concept of shifting, which was made explicit by Akrich and Latour (1992) and Latour (1992), in her analysis to define how spokespersons who do not verbally speak for someone else can materially work. Hence, shifting draws attention to material or contextual changes (e.g., foreign skills and knowledge), enabling a further understanding of underlying procedural structures.

Following her descriptions, four shifting modes can be identified. First, shifting up refers to the transformation of a spokesperson into a written word/sign. In this regard, the process that Dahlvik calls factualization is a process of shifting up. Second, shifting down describes the opposite movement. The classic example by Latour (1992, pp. 225–227) is the sound a car makes if a seatbelt is not fastened. In this case, the sound

replaces the sentence "fasten your seat belt." Both describe changes in the materiality of the entity. The final two modes are shifting in and shifting out. In a text, the narrator can shift in and out of a scene by referring to different times or spaces. Therefore, shifting out describes de-contextualization, whereas shifting in describes recontextualization (Akrich & Latour, 1992).

3.3 The Concept of Shifting in the Translation Chain to Account for Participating Actors and their Translation Practices

Initially, cross-border employment of foreign professionals appears to be a question regarding the linguistic translation of professional qualifications. Specifically, certificates must be translated into another language so that they can be understood in the host country. However, upon closer inspection, it is not simply the certificates that are linguistically translated, but (as this study argues) it is also the professional knowledge and skills that the certificates convey (Kell, 1982). In this case, the certificates act as spokespersons for the foreign professional skills and knowledge of the applicant. In addition, the Notification of Recognition acts as a spokesperson for the ability of the applicant to work in a specific profession in Germany. Thus, the following sections take a closer look at the organizations involved in labour market integration and their translation practices. As for the three aforementioned concepts, spokespersons represent the results of translations in organizations and the promotion of inter-organizational cooperation, while interessement devices coordinate the translation processes. Finally, shifting indicates material or contextual changes in foreign professional skills and knowledge. Revealing these moments can allow us to discuss the underlying practices in more detail.

4   Methodology

In order to discuss the translation of foreign professionals in this study, expert interviews (Meuser & Nagel, 2002) were conducted with actors

from various associations, welfare organizations, Chambers of Crafts, Chambers of Industry and Commerce, research institutes, vocational training organizations, language schools, and companies. The selection of the interviewees was based on an ideal process for the translation of vocational qualifications, which was divided into different phases, ranging from the acquisition of information and counselling to labour market integration. A total of 32 interviews with 35 individuals were conducted in 2020 and 2021 via the Ovid website. In addition, various artifacts, such as applications, guidelines, and websites, were examined. All of the materials collected in the general information, application review, and professional training phases were analysed to determine how foreign professional skills and knowledge are processed in counselling, examinations, and the establishment of suitable training organizations in Germany. The study sample is presented in the following table.

Table 1: Study sample

Phase	Interviews
Acquisition of information and counseling	One interview with an expert from the information portal of the German government, for the recognition of foreign professional qualifications. Four expert interviews with migration counselors who specialize in the recognition of foreign qualifications.
Application review	One interview with an expert from the information portal for foreign professional qualifications who specializes in supporting recognition bodies. Five expert interviews with members of various Chambers of Crafts.
Professional training	Four expert interviews with members of professional training facilities. Two expert interviews with counselors for professional training.

5   The Interplay of Organisations

5.1   Consulting

This section focuses on guidance/consulting services that emerged under the Federal Recognition Act of 2012. Such services (Anerkennungsberatungen) offer assistance to migrants by identifying ways to use their foreign professional knowledge and skills in Germany. The following excerpt from an interview with a counsellor describes the approach and provides insights into the practice of translating foreign knowledge and skills during consultations:

> "In the initial consultation, the first thing is personal data, of course, then the entire tableau of school education and the country of origin. What did it look like there? Then, what followed afterwards? Was there perhaps some type of vocational training or preliminary training also coupled with school education? What does the work experience look like? Then, with all these steps, what do the documents look like? […] Maybe we already have an idea of where the journey should go. There is maybe a first judgment of what he/she can do. What are the possibilities? Then, after some research, letters of recommendation are finalized." (I3, a migrations counsellor who specializes in the recognition of qualifications.)

Here, the interviewee describes a typical counselling situation in which foreign skills and knowledge are removed from their original context and relevant information is selected for comparison with German qualifications. He thereby focuses on specific and relevant events in the biography of the migrant. This refers to a contextual shift (i. e., shifting in) of the information during the consultation. Consequently, foreign vocational knowledge and skills are no longer considered in isolation, but are related to possible occupations in Germany. In this process, the connection of foreign professional knowledge and skills to domestic occupations is established.

Overall, this is a selective process, since certain information (e.g., German language skills or German-specific cultural manners) is not included, even though it might play an important role in the employment of migrants (Imdorf, 2011). Through these steps, eligible life-events are identified and most importantly, they are selected through the reduction of relevant information to the ones that can be documented (Figure 1). Here, the counsellor relies on the information provided by the client in order to subsume the translatability of foreign skills and knowledge. His description also suggests a routinized approach to dealing with clients in which he does not use standardized forms to classify professional knowledge or skills. In this way, the transformation of professional knowledge and skills is linked to individual classifications by counsellors, which are not necessarily replicable.

Some counsellors described a second step of transforming the selected information by writing a recommendation letter following the consultation. The contents are as follows:

> "In this protocol, there are always the recognition possibilities. What can you do with the degree? What are the costs and who can take over these costs? There are also links in this protocol. You simply click on them and then you can print out the necessary forms." (I5, a migrations counsellor who specializes in the recognition of qualifications.)

In this case, the materiality of the information changes and shifting up occurs. While initially connecting foreign professional knowledge and skills to the requirements of German educational qualifications, the recommendation letter highlights possible next steps. Here, the information gathered during counselling is translated into follow-up actions. Thus, the consultants convey the results that could be misunderstood/misinterpreted in face-to-face consultations, which can easily occur in situations where the parties have different linguistic abilities. The materialized results can be further taken into other organizations. For example, migrants can use these results to apply for funding, find

relevant application forms, or have other counsellors link their activities to the findings in the recommendation letter (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Translation chain for counselling, including spokespersons and shifting (own representation, based on Pelizza, 2021)
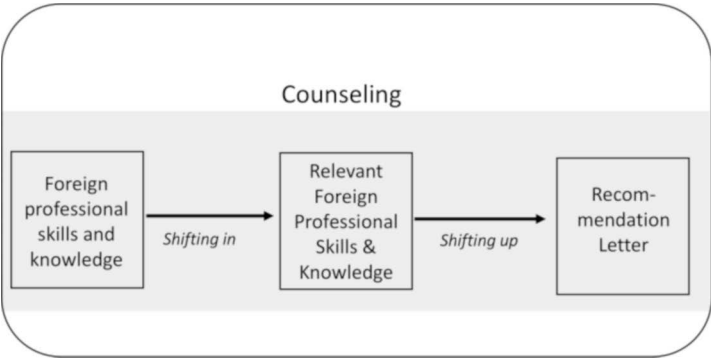
This figure illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of translations, are shown in the squares, while the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation process.

Ideally, this process leads to an understanding of possible next steps such as contacting the appropriate authorities responsible for recognition applications. In Germany, approximately 800 organizations (with 53 Chambers of Crafts in the craft sector alone) are responsible for formal recognition procedures. Depending on the profession and the place of residence of the migrant, one of them is responsible for the individual procedure. In this regard, classification through consultation reduces the field of recognition to the authorities responsible for the relevant profession. Details regarding the translation processes in the Chambers of Crafts are discussed in the following section.

5.2 Chambers of Crafts

Compared to counselling, Chambers of Crafts in Germany are obliged (in accordance with the Vocational Qualifications Act) to assess foreign vocational knowledge and skills. It is a bureaucratic procedure that must be formally requested and leads to a legally valid document. This procedure is marked by three shifts (as the following part argues), whereas the materiality is changed through the re-decontextualization of professional skills and knowledge.

First, examinations must be requested (with related costs) by submitting an Application for Recognition. Migrants can obtain the necessary information and application form for the recognition of their foreign professional skills and knowledge through the website of their respective Chamber of Crafts or by directly contacting the governing body. Compared to the procedure in consultations, the information regarding foreign professional knowledge and skills is further specified. Hence, the process of completing an application form ahead of the procedure transforms the migrant's professional skills and knowledge anew, since such information must be provided with the application form.

Second, previous translations (e.g., the recommendation of the reference profession) can be challenged by simply rejecting the application. In this process, application forms represent the formal requirements pronounced in the jurisdictional regulations. They also mediate between the applicants and the formal recognition bodies. Since they define the necessary information and the form of their documentation, they are an integral part in determining the translatability of foreign professional skills and knowledge. If the migrants are unable to complete the form (due to, for example, the language barrier), then they cannot continue the process and are deemed ineligible for the labour market. Generally, the application is structured into four main parts: 1) A statement regarding the application procedure and the reference occupation; 2) General information of the applicant (e.g., name, origin, contacts, etc.); 3) Information regarding the capabilities of the applicant (e.g., training certificates (Ausbildungsnachweise), certificates of competencies (Befähigungsnachweise), practical work experiences, etc.); and 4) In-

formation for processing the application form (e.g., former application forms (if any), the intention to work in Germany, the consent to data privacy, signatures, information on further necessary documents, etc.). For instance, regional Chambers of Crafts are only responsible if the applicant plans to work in their district. Thus, the planned place of work must be specified in the Application for Recognition, which enables the respective Chamber of Crafts to continue working on the translation.

Third, this is a formalized selective process in which the materiality of professional skills and knowledge can be changed, i.e., shifting up occurs (Figure 2). Specifically, documents and information are edited, supplemented, and written down to be further processed. Regarding the processing of Applications for Recognition, note the following excerpt from an employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications:

"This is where I say, 'Yes, the degree must be available in the original and in the translation from a sworn translator.' Then, everything that can validate former training is included. At the moment, these are often annual certificates. So, you can see what subjects were taught in a certain year. We can also get an idea and say, 'Okay, he is fresh out of school, he is already had work experience, or he has had work experience outside of school,' so that we can give feedback. At the same time, we can determine whether the qualification has already been assessed somewhere in the Federal Republic. I do not know if you know this, but the content is posted on the so-called BQ-Portal. In particular, the leading Chambers enter the assessed vocational qualifications in a standardized way. What is the content? What have the experts determined? What is comparable with our training here? This way, we can determine whether there is something available or, we have to say, 'OK, we do not have anything yet. Please request the training contents such as the lesson plan, syllabus, schedule, or something.' I have to say that Bosnia is doing very well at the moment. We actually receive confirmed lesson plans from the schools! Although they are only excerpts, experts can instantly judge whether the contents fit. Sometimes they read the subjects and skim the contents and say, 'It does not fit and bam bam bam is missing.'" (I8, an

employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications.)

Here, the interviewee describes the typical course of events. Compared to the migration counsellor's description, this excerpt emphasizes the importance of materializing information for initiating the formal recognition process. In this case, the migrants do not take an active role. Moreover, the employee of the Chambers of Crafts describes how presented information is classified in the first step. At this point, there is no direct evaluation of the documents. Instead, the information at hand is removed from its original context and is compared with information already available. In other words, this file does not represent a final decision, but the information created there will be used (internally) to justify the decision. In this case, shifting out occurs (Figure 2). By doing so, not only a comparison is possible, but also missing information can be identified:

> "Processing actually occurs all of the time. I process about five applications per day. Do you mean a completely finished application? In some cases, information is missing and I have to clarify certain training content because they did not specify it. In another case, we simply ask for more documents. Then, of course, there are some that are complete and we send out a fee invoice." (I15, an employee of a Chamber of Crafts responsible for the recognition of qualifications.)

As this excerpt shows, supplementing application forms appears to be a regular procedure and it allows applicants to enhance their documents. Here, a possible loophole in the translation chain can be observed. Specifically, translations of professional knowledge and skills are open for subsequent changes, since existing information can be supplemented. This can be described as a process of shifting in, since the file is no longer de-embedded from time and space, but rather embedded to add more information. In other words, the applicant can actively change his/her application documents and influence the outcome of the procedure.

Figure 2: Translation chain for counselling and
Chambers of Crafts, including spokespersons and
shifting (own representation, based on Pelizza, 2021)
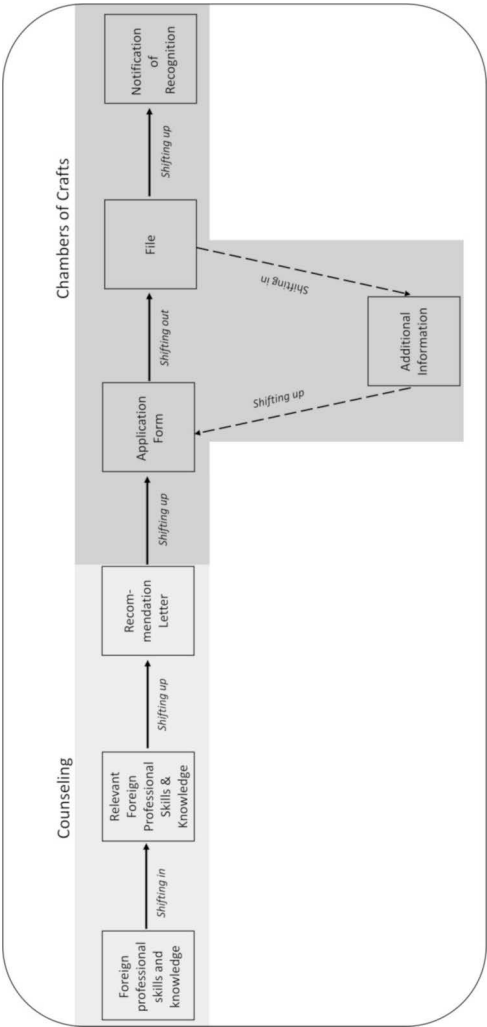
Subsequently, shifting up occurs, since additional information is included in the Application for Recognition. For example, naming a reference profession is mandatory for admission. However, as the aforementioned employee described, this information might be missing. Thus, to continue working on the recognition of foreign skills and knowledge, the applicant must be contacted and requested to name a German reference profession. While this is not specified in the law, it can be described as a re-specification of the formal rules of action that evolve through experiences (Renn, 2006).

Once all of the necessary information is available, shifting out occurs in which the information is taken out of its original context and the file is reviewed. Furthermore, training regulations standardize the requirements for foreign vocational knowledge and skills according to the German vocational training system.

This figure illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of the translation, are shown in the squares. Additionally, the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation processes, while the arrows with dotted lines represent movements that are not general translation processes, but have proven to be typical for the translation chain in this research project. The involvement of the various organizations is highlighted through different shades of grey.

In sum, translations in the Chambers of Crafts are defined by formal standards of documentation, not only for the applicant, but also for the employees of the Chambers. On one hand, the requirements for migrants become transparent, while on the other hand, the information or incorporated skills of the migrants (which can only be determined through direct interactions) may not be considered. However, the decision lies within the regional Chambers of Crafts, while the assessment of professional knowledge and skills depends on the interessement devices used. This analysis indicates that beyond the law and regulations, further measures are generally taken to coordinate the cross-border transfer of knowledge. Thus, the BQ-Portal, the lead Chambers, and local experts should be mentioned here.

First, the BQ-Portal represents a self-learning platform. Since Chambers of Crafts are individually responsible for the recognition of foreign knowledge and skills, the use of this portal potentially connects the decisions in the different Chambers and aligns their translations. This portal is externally managed and contains (especially for recognition bodies) information for processing applications, including country profiles on foreign vocational training systems or frameworks of curriculum that enable a comparison between foreign and domestic professional knowledge and skills. In addition, it contains an internal forum that can be used by employees of the Chambers of Crafts. Specifically, they can upload the results of their examination procedures (in the form of expert opinions) and make them available to others. Second, another means of standardizing the results of the recognition procedures is through exchanges with so-called lead Chambers, i.e., Chambers of Crafts that have been deemed responsible for a certain country under the Federal Recognition Act. For example, they are responsible for gathering expert opinions for other chambers regarding Applications for Recognition of professions in the country. Here, the lead chambers and the BQ-Portal represents a way in which country-specific knowledge about vocational training systems can be bundled and made accessible to other chambers in a compressed form.

Third, it should be noted that in both cases, the information can be incomplete, since not all countries are included and the gathering of knowledge is an ongoing process. Thus, local experts, such as those in the training centres of the Chambers, act as interessement devices that can shape the translations. They also act as a local source of information for carrying out comparisons, as mentioned by the interviewees. In addition, they are experts who base their judgments on experiential knowledge of the vocational training in Germany, which they gathered during their professional careers. Since there is traditionally a close connection between practice and theory in this sector (Thelen, 2012), these experts both work and teach in their respective profession.

In the final step (Figure 2), shifting up occurs in which the information previously extracted from the individual case is changed, since an individual Notification of Recognition must be published according to

the standards of the Federal Recognition Act. In this case, it is possible that an application is rejected or that either partial or full recognition is certified.

Overall, the information contained in the Notification of Recognition does not represent the individual characteristics of foreign professional skills and knowledge, since they are simply reduced to selected parts of such information. In other words, it is primarily a legal document that represents the decision of the recognition authorities (Müller & Ayan, 2015). Since this information can be objected, the retention of legal standards, such as references to laws, is necessary. In this regard, it is structured into several aspects. Its first aspect is the disclosure of the procedure and its conclusion, including the reasons for the conclusion and the legal assessment of the case. In the case of partial recognition, the deficits of foreign skills and knowledge are listed. This listing can then be used to complete further training, as discussed in the following section.

The document concludes with the fees for the procedure and the legal remedy. In this capacity, the Notification of Recognition also serves as an interessement device. Specifically, it defines the procedural standards for translating qualifications and forces the recognition authorities to translate the qualifications according to the training regulations. The decision must also be reasoned and any deficits in foreign vocational knowledge and skills must be highlighted with reference to the contents of the German curricula.

Overall, this procedure presents itself as standardized, since legal regulations define their approach and the results must be materialized according to set standards. Even though the variety and complexity of different professional systems challenge the objectivity (as the section beforehand showed), the bureaucratic requirements distinguish this procedure from the approach in other countries (e.g., the United Kingdom), where there are no uniform standards for the assessment of professional skills (Meghnagi & Tuccio, 2022, p. 21).

5.3 Vocational Training

When applying for jobs, applicants may use the Notification of Recognition, regardless of whether it certifies partial or full recognition. However, in the case of partial recognition, this document can be used to find appropriate continuing education. In the following excerpt, the head of a professional training organization describes this process of translating information (in particular, missing components or deficits) in the Notification of Recognition:

> "So, when an applicant applies for recognition at the Chamber of Crafts, there is a committee that compares his/her training with the German training, finds reference points, and finds deficits. These deficits are then passed on to us. Then, I receive an evaluation and look up which courses the applicant would have to take with us." (I22, the head of a professional training facility.)

Since the missing components for full recognition are highlighted in the Notification for Recognition, training organizations can determine the necessary courses. In this regard, since the recognition certificate can be subsequently changed, it enables related actions to be taken by other training organizations. Based on the interviews, it appears that in many cases, counsellors assist migrants in deciding how to best proceed. Additionally, both the financing of further training and the identification of adequate courses are described as prerequisites.

During the training courses, the process of shifting down occurs and the former certificate with missing components is replaced by a newly trained professional (Figure 3). In contrast to the document-oriented approach in the Chambers of Crafts, further education is based on the knowledge and skills obtained in their courses/examinations. Here, the skills are assessed in execution. In this way, the transparency of the translation decreases because unlike documents, not all of the information about professional skills and knowledge can be objectively assessed during personal interactions. Latent characteristics, such as linguistic skills, motivation, ability to fit into groups, etc., can promote

(or hinder) translation processes because they affect the ability to complete the training measures. Hence, incorporated knowledge that might have been latent before the translation of skills and knowledge, might be enhanced by the completion of vocational training.

Furthermore, successful completion of any training is communicated to the Chambers of Crafts and certified so that the results can be attached to the case file. Again, the materiality changes and the results are written down, i.e., shifting up occurs. Therefore, professional knowledge and skills are institutionalized through full recognition (Figure 3), while the issuance of partial recognition is an instrument that makes the procedure more than a reductive translation of foreign professional knowledge and skills, but a process that potentially promotes additional skills and knowledge in the host country.

Figure 3 illustrates the translation chain of foreign professionals in Germany. Spokespersons, as the representation of the translation, are shown in the squares. Additionally, the arrows with solid lines represent the general translation processes, while the arrows with dotted lines represent movements that are not general translation processes, but have proven to be typical for the translation chain in this research project. The involvement of the various organizations is highlighted through different shades of grey.

Figure 3: Complete translation chain for counseling,
including spokespersons and shifting (own representa-
tion, based on Pelizza, 2021)
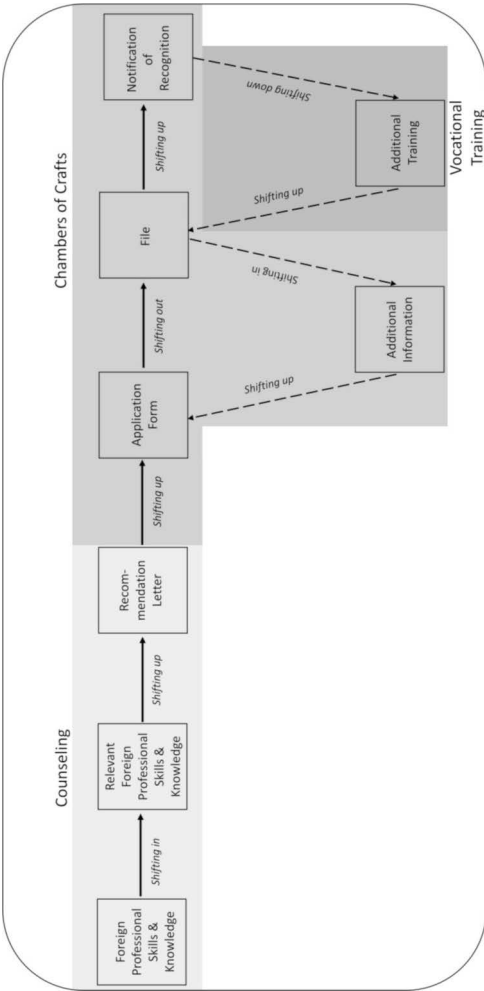
6   Conclusion and Implications

This study focused on the organizational translation practices of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany. Such practices were examined on the basis of expert interviews with consultancies, Chambers of Crafts, and vocational training organizations. In addition, by focusing on the concept of shifting, changes in the meaning of professional skills and knowledge during the translation chain were analysed. Overall, the translation of foreign skills and knowledge in Germany presents itself as a complex process characterized by a high degree of standardization, compared to the translation procedures in other countries such as the United Kingdom.

As for the Application for Recognition and the Notification of Recognition, they are based on the interplay between different (human and non-human) actors. Since they are highly standardized documents, they coordinate translations and foster actions in other organizations. Moreover, collaboration emerged through materialization, which was operationalized with the concept of spokespersons, while interessement devices coordinated the actions within organizations, since they set the standard practices and helped determine the translatability of the information. For example, the BQ-Portal supported the local Chambers of Crafts in their decision-making. The results thereby indicate that foreign skills and knowledge are translated according to German standards, whereas any skills and knowledge that cannot be translated according to the set standards are excluded from the process.

Overall, two implications can be made:

1. There are both formal and informal translations in the process of transforming foreign professional knowledge and skills.

In this regard, counsellors start by narrowing down the information on foreign skills and knowledge by focusing on usable information for the formal recognition of qualifications. In this case, foreign skills and knowledge are de-contextualized to determine the options for using them in Germany. Since usable information is distinguished from non-

usable information, possible connecting actions can be established, which might not have been clarified earlier. However, the translation of skills and knowledge remains imprecise.

In this regard, the translations in the Chambers of Crafts are mainly semantic changes, since they are document-oriented, while the person behind the document remains out of focus as rational decisions are made. In addition, even though translations become more tangible, employees must adhere to written rules when performing the procedures. However, the concept of shifting indicates that changes in the translation of professional skills and knowledge can be made by focusing more on professional training organizations. Here, the concept of shifting down occurs as the focus changes from professional skills and knowledge (or lack thereof) to an applicant willing to train to become a member of the labour force. Meanwhile, language skills or the motivation of the student might make a difference in passing a necessary class/course. Hence, this leads to the second implication of this study:

2. The ability to work in a specific profession is not only assessed, but it can also be produced.

The German approach of translating foreign professional skills and knowledge can be connected to the idea of recognizing prior learning or identifying adequate training measures through the identification of deficits (Andersson et al., 2005; Diedrich, 2013). Overall, the German approach appears to be a more bureaucratic process than those observed in other countries. In this case, additional training measures are not mandatory, but concrete training measures are made possible by the Notification of Recognition.

In this study, the concepts of shifting, spokespersons, and interessement devices present a fruitful approach to gaining a deeper understanding of the changes in foreign skills and knowledge as well as the involvement of different actors during the translation chain. With these concepts, it becomes clear that examining the actions of only one organization can obscure prior and downstream actions. Therefore, to

understand the translation of professional knowledge and skills, the chain of actors should be considered.

Finally, from an analytical point of view, it might be fruitful to consider companies and their recruitment practices as an important addition to the translation chain. Through this approach, an even more specific understanding of the successful labour market integration of foreign professionals can be established. This is especially important considering that the current status of the evaluation of materials (on which this study is based) has not yet allowed any dependable statements to be made in this regard.

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