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Introduction

Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Miriam Shlesinger

Questions of identity and status are not yet central topics in Translation Studies. The recently rising cultural and sociological perspectives on translation and interpreting have brought to the fore, among other things, such issues as power and ideology and the role and ethics of translators and interpreters (Pym 2002, Calzada-Perez 2003, Inghilleri 2005, Angelleli 2004, Diriker 2004, Wadensjo et.al 2004, Pym et al. 2006, Wolf 2002, Wolf and Fukari 2007, Milton and Bandia 2009), translation fields and markets (Heilbron 1999, Heilbron and Sapiro 2002, Gouanvic 2005), and an emerging discussion of translators' habitus (Simeoni 1998, Inghilleri 2003, Torikai 2009). Relatively little attention has been devoted, however, to the social formations of translators as specific professional groups with their own social constraints and access to resources, their status struggles and sense of professional selves (see, however, Henderson 1987, Hammond 1994, Choi and Lim 2002, Sapiro 2004a, Sela-Sheffy 2005, 2006, 2008, Gouadec 2007, Dam and Zethsen 2008).

This theoretical landscape seems to have developed as a natural trajectory of TS. On the one hand, the bulk of writing on translation *norms* in recent decades has already established the importance of cultural factors and systemic relations in *constraining the performance* of translators and interpreters (Toury 1995a, 1999, Lambert 2006, Schäffner 1998, Shlesinger 1989, 1991, 1999, Hermans 1999, Meylaerts 2008, Sapiro 2008). On the other hand, critical writings have offered assessment and judgment of the alleged *invisibility* and *submissiveness* of translators (Venuti 1995, 1998). A common denominator of all these theoretical discussions has been the (implicit or explicit) assumption that the majority of translators, in many different social settings, suffer from an inferior status, manifested in their translation output by a tendency to conform to domestic cultural norms and in their reluctance to claim active agency in cultural change (exceptions are periods of concentrated efforts of culture planning where translators serve as important agents of change; Even-Zohar 1990, Toury 2002). However, having emerged historically from the tradition of philology, linguistics and literary studies, the leading paradigms of TS are still focused, as a rule, on translation practice and on

their communicative contexts. A comprehensive research project centering on the social *agents*, namely on the practitioners who perform these activities, still awaits its turn.

The collection of papers in the two back-to-back special issues of *TIS* (issue 4(2) of 2009 and issue 5(1) of 2010) is an attempt to contribute to this emerging research, which stands at the crossroad of TS and Culture Research. It is about translators' and interpreters' professional identities and status, that is, about the experience of the people who create and shape the translating professions, and the way they understand their occupational world and make sense of their job, so as to locate themselves as professionals and maintain a specific identity and dignity.

Identity is now a buzzword in the humanities and the social sciences. Being conceived not as a given entity, but rather as a dynamic and multi-layered cultural construct, collectively produced and reproduced through social struggles in transforming cultural settings, it has everything to do with status and self-esteem. Surprisingly, however, it has scarcely been discussed with reference to the occupational context. While academic studies and public debates over identity focus primarily on typically political categories of stereotypization and hierarchy, such as ethnicity, race, gender or religion, the occupational dimension is given scant attention. However, it is hard to overestimate the role of occupations or professions in shaping identities–work, after all, is what many people do during large parts of their life. Not only do occupations constitute major components of people's understanding of their lives, but they often create fields of action in which cultural repertoires are constantly constructed and negotiated, and group identity and values are maintained and perpetuated or transformed, thereby building people's perception of themselves and their world (Davis 1994). Thinking about occupations in this way opens many fascinating directions for the study of human agency in creating, maintaining and changing their immediate and broader social spaces, and the way the individuals themselves are created and transformed while moving in these spaces.

Translation is a fruitful field for the study of precisely such social creativity. It is the contradiction between the potential power of translators and interpreters as cultural mediators, on the one hand, and their obscure professional status and alleged sense of submissiveness, on the other, that makes them such an intriguing occupational group. Their insecure status as a profession is especially paradoxical today when so much attention is being devoted to cross-cultural processes such as globalization, migration and trans-nationalism. While the social agency of translators may seem less pivotal in settled cultural contexts with highly established, self-assured cores and strong hegemonic cultural traditions (such as the Anglo-American ones; e.g., Gentzler 2002), it is much more evident in multicultural, peripheral or emerging social settings (e.g., in the rise of modern Turkey;

Ayluçtarhan 2007, Tahir-Gürçağlar 2008, Demircioğlu 2009). Even in the former environments, with their overpowering mechanism of naturalization and anti-foreignization tendencies, knowledge of (certain) foreign languages and borrowing from (certain) foreign cultures are warmly welcome and are valued as important symbolic resources. In the latter environments, however, which depend more acutely on procedures of translation for their maintainability, translators' position as a profession would have been expected to be much stronger and more visible. Nevertheless, all the evidence shows that the professional status of translators and interpreters is, by and large, ambivalent and insecure. Complaints are rife about their being seen as 'servants' of a higher authority, and as those who belong 'behind the scenes' (Jänis 1996), "not as aware as they might be of their own power" (Chesterman and Wagner 2002). This does not mean that they are actually submissive or lack occupational pride, or that they are at the bottom of the occupational prestige ladder. Nonetheless, their self-perception and dignity as an occupation are still vague and constantly being questioned, negotiated or fought for. This identity problem is the underlying theme of the articles in this collection. Not only does it bear directly on translators' and interpreters' job performance, it also makes their self-imaging work and use of cultural resources a pressing issue on which they depend for recognition.

From the perspective of the sociology of professions, translators and interpreters are an extreme example of an understudied semi-professional occupation. The sociological literature on professions offers a body of theory and history of the formation of modern professions, their institutions, forms of knowledge, career patterns, education and jurisdiction (e.g., Larson 1977, Abbott 1988, Torstendahl and Burrage 1990, Freidson 1994, Macdonald 1995). Concentrating on institutional and formal factors, these studies are largely embedded in the context of the more traditionally institutionalized and prestigious liberal professions known as the 'success stories' of professionalism, notably medicine, the law, or accounting. However, from our point of view, precisely the 'failed professionalizing' occupations (Elsaka 2005) or the underrated ones offer exciting case studies, in that they reveal more acutely strategies of coping with threatened status. Following examples from occupational groups that are to varying extents under-professionalized or marginalized, such as journalists, school teachers, nurses or craft-artists, translators and interpreters serve here a quintessential case for examining how an occupational group deals with its own indeterminacy and marginality.

Unlike sociologists of the professions, who put much weight on formal, institutional and economic factors of the professions, our aim with the present collection of papers is to trace the symbolically functional codes of behavior, attitudes and values shared by members of an occupation so as to maintain it as a social figuration. This aspect stands at the heart of the theory of cultural *fields* (Bourdieu

1980, 1986) or of human *figurations* (Elias 1993, 1996), theories that are designed to deal with all kinds of socio-cultural formations, and especially those lacking clear institutionalized boundaries. Rather than through formal procedures and means of control, the dynamics of a group develops, in Elias's and Bourdieu's view, through a set of distinguishing mental dispositions (a *habitus*) that are internalized and exercised by its members (Bourdieu 1986; also Jenkins 1992, Lahire 2003, Sapiro 2004b, 2004c, Sheffy 1997, Sela-Sheffy 2005). Typically, Bourdieu's theoretical framework has drawn its examples from fields that defy professionalization, or are hardly defined as occupations at all, such as the intellectual field or the arts. To a great extent, such fields serve as models for the status dynamics in the field of translation (Sela-Sheffy 2006, 2008, forthcoming).

Consequently, while the sociological theory of occupational prestige highlights economic achievements as parameters of prestige evaluation (Treiman 1977, Nam and Powers 1983), our present approach draws attention to the *cultural resources* that endow an occupation with *symbolic* values, beyond material and economic constraints, assuming that these values are defined by the groups of actors competing with each other in each and every field (Bourdieu 1985). Understanding translation as a site of social action in this sense thus emphasizes the personal dispositions of its practitioners and their group relations. How these individuals perceive themselves, what kind of capital they pursue, how they struggle to achieve it and what their cultural resources are, all these questions are at the core of the articles in the two-part Special Issue of *TIS*.

All this naturally raises important methodological questions. While several works in this collection use a variety of qualitative methods, such as text analysis, biographical studies or interviews, other articles report on primarily quantitative (survey) studies. What emerges from these articles is that quite an impressive body of knowledge has already been gathered by surveys on translators in different parts of the world. Serving still as a major tool of sociological research, this quantitative method poses intriguing challenges to culture analysis. A well known problem in analyzing surveys is that the respondents' replies cannot be taken at face value, as if they were reporting the unmediated reality of their life and attitudes. The fact is often disguised that, like any other communicative practice, responding to questionnaires is motivated by the need to maintain dignity. As Bourdieu (1983) argued, people will only provide what they assume to be a respectable reply, according to their own cultural repertoire. However, since the questionnaire reflects the researcher's model of the world, respondents are often requested to address questions to which they *do not have ready-made answers* as part of their own cultural toolkit (to use Swidler's concept; 1986), therefore the results may often remain enigmatic if not misleading. Bearing all this in mind, however, surveys are still an important tool for collecting large-scale rich evidence, which can reveal

certain patterns in the practitioners' *commonly accepted attitudes* towards their professions.

In defining the aims and focus of the present collection in this way, three basic assumptions must be emphasized:

[1] This endeavor is not meant as a call for yet a new shift of paradigms in TS, as it were, towards purely sociological research. Rather, it is an attempt to look at translators from a different, external angle, as a field of cultural production. This attempt can also contribute to furthering a systematic integration of socio-cultural insights and working tools in the currently accepted frameworks of studying translation within complex cultural contexts. By analogy to other fruitful interdisciplinary research frameworks, such as, notably, socio-linguistics, cultural sociology or sociological history, such integration is also expected to be productive for our understanding of the *translation activities*. That is, concentrating attention on the *practitioners* themselves should also give rise to valuable insights on the ways these individuals *may act and perform as translators* (Toury 1995b).

[2] Consequently, this collection of papers is not intended as a call for a new *theory of translation*; it is, however, intended to advance access to and better use of *existing Culture Research theoretical frameworks*. Following previous studies, as well as our own and the studies reported in the present collection of papers, we suggest that these theoretical frameworks consist mainly of two major directions, namely: (1) that of the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1985, 1986) for examining the dispositions and value scales of the different groups of translators and interpreters; and (2) that of the *repertoire* (Swidler 1986, Even-Zohar 1997) for accounting for the multilayered and diversified stocks of working patterns available in specific fields, constraining the action of those who enter them.

[3] Finally, an underlying assumption of this collection of papers is also that a Culture Research approach contributes to the critical discourse on translators' ethics and ideology and the activist demand on interfering and reformulating translators' social role. We need, so we believe, to have a better idea about the *people who do translation*, their background, aspirations and sentiments, as well as about their social spaces and specific constraints, in order to effectively take a stance in questions of translators' agency and empowerment.

<div align="right">Rakefet Sela-Sheffy</div>

Contributions

The articles in these two successive issues are revised versions of papers presented at the international workshop organized by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Miriam

Shlesinger, and held in Tel Aviv in March 2009 under the auspices of the Israel Science Foundation (ISF). The workshop was planned as a brainstorming encounter between people working in different disciplines, who share a scholarly interest in questions of identity and status of the professions. While our focal case was that of translators and interpreters, our goal with this workshop was to contribute to the study of identity in the framework of occupational fields in general. We aimed at contributing to the deepening and expansion of our theoretical and empirical understanding of identity and status processes in *semi-professional settings* throughout the world, with special reference to the field of *translators and interpreters*, based on comparison of research cases, and examination of research methodologies, within the broader context of the interface between TS and Culture Research. The workshop papers explored parallel and differentiating dynamics between the various translatorial professions, as well as other semi-professional occupations, in different cultural and national settings.

This workshop took place within the framework of our ongoing research project dedicated to this topic (Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2008, Sela-Sheffy [forthcoming]),[1] a qualitative, interview-based study, aiming at a comparative analysis of identity and status among six sectors of translators, interpreters and subtitlers in Israel today. Since there is no systematic listing or other documentation of this voiceless working community, in-depth interviews has been our only recourse. Locating the candidates and going out on interviews all over the country has been an exciting experience. Our heartfelt thanks go to all our interviewees, who were willing to open up and share with us their stories, their views and expectations, from which we learned so much. Seventy-eight interviews have been accumulated so far, all of which have been painstakingly transcribed and documented. Since these are unstructured interviews, each lasting around two hours, they have yielded a huge amount of complex material, which we started analyzing only recently. Much of the work still lies ahead of us.

The fourteen articles assembled here are divided thematically between the two successive issues. The first issue [4(2), 2009] comprises six articles, dealing with *questions of status and field*. These articles report on empirical studies, cutting across occupational and geographical arenas, all of them linked to the overriding themes of status and field. Esther Monzó-Nebot offers a study of status struggles between occupational groups investing in different types of symbolic capital, using an example from professionalization processes of translators and interpreters in Spain. Starting with a theoretical synthesis of concepts from both the sociology of professions and Bourdieu's economy of practice, her article "Legal and Translational Occupations in Spain: Regulation and Specialization in Jurisdictional Struggles" highlights two major status strategies–distinction and legitimation–as employed by occupational groups to advance their interests in the market. Using

this framework she then discusses two particular conflicts of Spanish certified ("sworn") translators and interpreters–their jurisdictional struggle against public notaries and their struggle against court translators and interpreters. Her analysis traces the strategies through which jurisdiction has been progressively claimed by notaries and court translators, and the ways the certified translators have struggled to reclaim their status.

Andy Chan's study of the "Effectiveness of Translator Certification as a Signaling Device: Views from the Translator Recruiters" addresses the issue of translator certification in Hong Kong, which has recently attracted much attention in both professional and academic circles, with a view to examining its symbolic power in creating occupational opportunities for translators. Building on the economic theory of signaling, and using an experiment with fictitious translators' resumés, as well as interviews with translator recruiters, he examines the importance of formal educational qualifications in the recruiters' decisions to hire translators. His findings point to the relatively minor persuasive role of certification, by contrast to that of an academic degree.

An overview on survey research in the field is provided by Franz Pöchhacker, who introduces "Conference Interpreting: Surveying the Profession" with a corpus of 40 survey-based studies among conference interpreters as a way of gaining knowledge about the profession, including the role perception of individual practitioners. Touching on qualitative research design issues such as sampling and question types, he shows that the *role* of conference interpreters emerges as one of the dominant concerns.

The subsequent articles are all survey-based. David Katan, in his "Occupation or Profession: A Survey of the Translators' World" analyzes the results of several hundred replies to an online questionnaire circulated worldwide, focusing on translators' and interpreters' mindset and their perception of their working world, inquiring specifically about the impact of translation theory and university training on their self-perception as professionals. Katan's questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, giving rise to intriguing discrepancies between responses of one and the same respondent. His results point to a non-significant influence of theory and training on the occupational self-image of the respondents, most of whom engage in intricate identity work, declaring, on the one hand, that they feel themselves to be "professionals" due to their specialized knowledge and abilities, and on the other hand, reporting an acute awareness of their lower social status. Notwithstanding, most of them are reluctant to change their occupational status quo.

Similarly, in their "Attitudes to Role, Status and Professional Identity in Interpreters and Translators with Chinese in Shanghai and Taipei," Robin Setton and Alice Guo Liangliang report on a survey, the first of its kind in mainland China

and Taiwan, on patterns of professional practice, self-perceptions and aspirations of translators and interpreters, given the rising demand for their work in the wake of China's emergence as a major player in the global economy. All in all, their findings point to a burgeoning professionalization process, with most respondents expressing a pragmatic attitude to their role and their contribution to society while downplaying 'cultural mediation.'

In her "Conference Interpreters and their Self-representation: A Worldwide Web-based Survey," Cornelia Zwischenberger analyzes findings from a recent worldwide Web-based survey (limited, in this case, to members of the International Association of Conference Interpreters [AIIC]), outlining the methodological potential and pitfalls of Web-based surveys, which have gradually penetrated translation studies. Comparing existing metatexts and newly collected evidence from the Web-survey, she examines the way respondents describe their role and claim key-role in guaranteeing successful communications

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[The next issue [5(1)] of *TIS*, due to appear in Spring 2010, will present the remaining eight articles — by Reine Meylaerts, Ruth Morris, Hannah Amit-Kochavi, Lena Baibikov, Kumiko Torikai, Claudia Angelelli, Nadja Grbic and Sebnem Bahadir — centering on *questions of role and identity*.]

Note

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