ON THE ABILITIES, TOOLS AND VALUES INFERRED BY THE JOB OF A PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER

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Abstract

The main focus of this article pertains to the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that effect and impact upon the translation as a product and process and also upon the values and skills that need to form the mind-set of the professional translator and interpreter.

Keywords: translation, linguistics evolution, translator and interpreter as professions

In a world governed by change, speed and head-spinning evolution and mind-blowing inventions, the overly-debated collocation 'slave to two masters' in regards to what a translator is, has suffered a slight, but significant twist: it appears that the number of 'masters' the translator needs to answer to has increased, since it is not only the author of the original and the end receiver of the translation that the translator needs to consider, but also the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that have an effect and impact upon the translation as a product and process. "Just like any other professional, the translator needs to be a master. Of words, of languages, of cultures the languages belong to. This is not an easy task, nor a light responsibility, on the contrary. Regardless of what we refer to, the translator of written text, or the translator of spoken speech, (the interpreter), this professional needs to develop a specific mind-set. In addition to the specific knowledge and skills that he needs to master, dealing with at least two distinct languages, handling written and/or speaking skills, he would have to possess certain psychological features to help him manage sometimes stressful situations."[2]

Therefore, it has become a cliché by now to affirm that there is a number of perquisites that a translator needs to attain, or that translation is an outside and inside type of job. Outside, since it deals with the client's material, to a text already tailored by a writer/speaker and an inside job, since it deals with the hidden meanings the material enclosures. But, it would be fair to say that there is so much more to that: translator is a time- and energy-consuming job, one that requires language and culture knowledge, patience and empathy, inspiration and hard-work; the mind of a translator is prone to be somehow preoccupied by the original and the product of his translation, always going to be torn between choices. Neverthless, one should not forget the stressful and daunting deadlines and other such externally-imposed factors can be for a translator and time-limitation, speed and memory for an interpreter. "It takes much more than a dictionary to be a good translator, and translators are not made overnight. To be a good translator

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[2] aprox., from B.O. Han, *Some insights into the mind-set of a translator* in Studia Universitatis Petru Maior Philologia. 21/2016, p. 118, http://www.upm.ro/cercetare/studia%20website/Studia%2021.2016.pdf

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requires a sizeable investment in both source and target languages. It is one of the most challenging tasks to switch safely and faithfully between two universes of discourse."[3]

In order to have a better insight upon what the professions of a translator and interpreter are really all about, we decided to go straight to the source and ask a professional. Thus, we invited a young free-lance trained translator and interpreter, Petru Emil Luncan[4], to answer a few questions, to provide us with a better understanding of what makes this job a whole.

From the very beginning we were interested in what the most appealing and challenging aspect in the life of a freelance translator and an interpreter was. The answer we received was: "I always considered that freedom is the most appealing aspect, and it is followed closely by the access to up-to-date information. That's why knowledge is power, and we have to use it wisely. The diversity of languages and people I met is also of great importance, because I am all the people I met and all the documents that I read." It appears that the translator we interviewed is highly keen on the strengths that empower the translator: access to knowledge, yet, to be used wisely, information and freedom, desideratum of everyone living in a free and civilised world. Another worth-mentioning aspect is the opportunity to get in touch with new people and documents, which can only widen one's range of prospects, opportunities and views.

Regarding the most difficult aspect in the life of a freelance translator and interpreter, our interlocutor admitted that: "Work and private life balance definitely is the most challenging one. There is no border between the two because you are the business. I knew from the very beginning that Time Management will be the key strength and weakness of my passion – translation. After almost 10 years now, I can say that the most valuable asset that we trade on a daily basis is our time, our life. As an interpreter, travelling is the most difficult part mainly because people do not understand that you are human too, they do not take into consideration the time zone, the time spent on the road and they expect you to be as fresh as ever even after a 10 hours meeting." Obviously, just like in the case of any professional of today, joggling between time and work, work and family, etc. is never a stress-free undertaking, yet, it is something that needs to be dealt with and managed appropriately.

There is a quote[5] that says: "Find a job you enjoy doing, and you will never have to work a day in your life." True as it may be, there is still a lot of effort one needs to make in order to make sure that what one loves doing is done at its best. The job of a translator and/or interpreter falls out of the '9 to 5' type of jobs, as it is a job that sometimes requires around-the-clock availability, which can only add extra pressure upon the translator's and/or interpreter's shoulders.

This is one of the reasons the one undertaking the jobs of translator and interpreter needs to benefit from a number of qualities. Our interview revealed the

[3] Acc. to Leila Razmjou, *To be a good translator,* http://translationjournal.net/journal/28edu.htm.
[4] See endnote to this article
[5] Quote that seems to be attributed to Confucius, Marc Anthony or Mark Twain

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following opinion in this respect: "Basically the two jobs, even though they are quite different, have the same basis – the human traits and values – integrity, care for details, social and technical skills and eagerness for knowledge and novelty. You can teach/learn how to stay on a chair for 10-12 hours a day, or more, until you deliver the project, or you can teach/learn how to talk, which language register to use, but it's a must to have the above-mentioned values." These values have become intrinsic ones by now and they reveal self-discipline and good command of one's personal and professional assets and resources.

Needless to say, all these qualities and professional requirements would not be complete unless supported by the necessary tools that are being used by the translator and interpreter in order to ensure a qualitative work. Nevertheless, the free-lance professional we interviewed acknowledged that among the tools used, "the main tool of any translator is obviously the brain. That involves all tools related to well-being of mind and body, and, because we are living in the digital age, the PC/laptop is my other half. In regard to the use of the PC, I use various types of instruments from charts, excel datasheets, personal glossaries, TMs - translation memories, and TBs - translation databases created by me or provided by my clients. (…) Because I'm a smart hi-tech fan, I think that we are lucky to have companies and enthusiasts who invest a lot of time and money in developing CAT[6] tools. This process was started more than 20 years ago. The latest trend is cloud and machine translation."

Although he embraces hi-tech assistance which he considers helpful in his work, our specialist feels the need to make us aware of the threats and dangers anyone using Internet technology might be subject to. "But beware, everything comes with a price tag, e.g. data privacy and data integrity is a major flaw in case of cloud translation, and translation quality is the major one in the case of machine translation. The trend is upward, but without the three aspects mentioned above (DP, DI and TQ) it can go rapidly downward."

On the other hand, even if a technology enthusiast, our specialist admitted the significance of paper-back dictionaries: "I highlight also the importance of hardcopy dictionaries - they are not obsolete, and some of them are still the best on the market, especially for specialised fields like oil&gas, medicine or automotive." A great amount of care is also dedicated to the physical and psychical health of the professional: "In order to maintain your mental hygiene, I recommend to work not more than 10 hours per day and to practice sports and meditation on a daily basis."

When asked to state his opinion regarding what some consider to be a threat, i.e., that technology-based tools will soon 'put translators out of business', the answer was that only the translators who are not really professionals or are not yet specialised, might be prone to such a danger. He admits that "there are instruments that can translate relatively well, for general content, but specialised language requires skills that machines, AI,

[6] CAT tools – computer aided translation tools

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translation engines cannot handle yet. But, taking into consideration the technological boom in the past decade, anything can happen in the following one."

Another threat hovering over this profession refers to the possibility that CAT tools might weaken the memory ability of a translator. When confronted to this idea, our specialist answered, by kindly sharing from his own professional experience: "Based on my experience I can say that it is not necessarily the CATs that reduce the memory ability, but the use of PCs and electronic devices and gadgets. CATs are just a small part in the big information system. Therefore, they can both increase the level of specialised information and reduce the memory ability." What we could understand from this is the idea that we need to use the technological support we can have access to, but in a professional manner and only as an aid not a substitute to our knowledge and brain.

We decided that an advice coming from a professional translator and interpreter would best end our interview. Therefore, we asked the question pertaining to the advice anyone willing to embrace the job of a translator and interpreter might find useful. The answer proved once again that the specialist we interviewed takes his job very seriously and is a trustworthy professional. "First of all they would need to do a SWOT analysis and a visit to a mentor or, if they do not know one, to the career counsellor that works in any institution of higher education. Besides, each and every one of them should find by themselves if this is the lifestyle that they want for a long time, or quite for a life-time. When you know what you want, and you are sure that you really want it, then you can do it. Otherwise, you just try to do it, and that's a loss both for you and for the translation field. As I already said, beyond the moral skills that I was talking above, a good translator needs to have the knowledge and the managerial skills as a freelancer and micromanagement skills as an employee. If one has all these skills and abilities, training and a strong personality, his or her path is open."

We have, thus, figured out how challenging the task of translators really is, how it appeals to all senses and how important it is for them to be able to adjust to all types of materials in order to provide the expected outcomes. They ought to master, besides the immediate and surface meanings of words they need to deal with, also the hidden from the eye, deeper meanings.

We consider it safe by now to state that the job of a translator is endowed with the power to put a work up or to put it down, to give it credit or to discredit it. It is the personality of the translator, the professionalism of the one handling the linguistic and cultural items that make the difference.

Endnote:

About Petru Luncan

Petru Emil Luncan graduated PMU of Târgu-Mureş in 2008. Ever since he dedicated his life to his passion - plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, especially through translations and interpreting. Always striving for excellence, he developed a self-training system, and now, after almost ten years as a freelance interpreter and translator, he is able to provide

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in-depth analysis regarding major quality related matters and processes related to translation and interpreting, internationalism and business strategy. About him, in figures: more than 50000 pages translated, more than 2000 hours of interpreting, more than 100 international events, almost half million kilometres travelled for business purposes only, and more to come.

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