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Translation Theory and Professional Practice:
A Global Survey of the Great Divide

Abstract

This paper is the result of a global survey carried out this year to around 1000 translators and interpreters, the majority of whom had university training in the area. The object of the survey was to investigate the habitus of the translator and to compare it with the academic belief in functionalism and the empowerment of the translator either as a mediator or as a social agent. The replies indicated strong responsibility towards the original text, and very little towards the reader or the wider community. Also, while the scholars appear to be convinced that their theories support the professional translator, in practice it would seem that university trained translators (and interpreters) rate theory very low on their list of ideal university training.

Literature regarding the term "profession" is discussed as is what distinguishes an occupation from a profession. Classic trait theory suggests that a profession requires a number of minimum requisites, such as a well-grounded school of theory, influential professional bodies and professional exams. The 'professional' translators and interpreters were asked to explain in their own words what makes translating a profession. They also replied to questions on status.

As a result of the replies it was possible to identify a large homogeneous yet scattered cottage industry. Their 'professionality' lies in their individually honed competencies in the field. They are dedicated and mainly satisfied wordsmiths, who take pride in their job. They decry "the cowboys" (from secretaries to students) while realising the seriousness of the competition due mainly to the very low status accredited to translators worldwide. Interpreters, on the other hand, saw themselves – and were seen by translators – as having a relatively high professional autonomy. Interestingly, relatively few of the respondents had only one "main role". Gender is seen here as an important factor in this grouping

Finally, as a result of the replies, it is asked whether we (academics/translation trainers) are providing the theory and the training that will encourage the development of the profession – if indeed it can be defined as one.

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1.   The Theory

Ever since "the cultural turn", over 30 years ago, and the rise of the functional school, belief in the importance of the translator as much more than a (more or less) faithful copier has taken hold. Edwin Gentzler (2001: 71), for example, talks of a revolution which has broken "the two thousand year old chain of theory revolving around the faithful vs. free axis" and has empowered the translator.

Today, metaphors abound pushing the translator away from office or room-bound photocopiers and walking bilingual dictionaries to world travellers. They "cross boundaries" (Bassnett 1997: 11) and are "no-mads-by-obligation" (Cronin 2003: 126). This idea of freedom (at least from the constraints of the conduit metaphor and immanent meaning) has allowed interpreters and translators to be hailed as active participants in (re)creating meaning. Many have triumphantly suggested that they are (or should become) mediators (Hatim/Mason 1990), "cultural mediators" (Katan [1999] 2004); "cross-cultural specialists" (Snell-Hornby 1992) "information brokers" (Obenaus 1995), or "cultural interpreters" (Gonzalez/Tolron 2006), particularly interpreters (e.g. Harris 2000, Mesa 2000), and "experts in intercultural communication" (Holz-Mäntäri 1984).

Mona Baker (2008: 22) paints an ever brighter Brave New World:

> "…highly professional translators who belong to the same 'world' as their clients, who are focused on professionalism and making a good living, and who are highly trained, confident young men and women. These professional translators and interpreters go about their work in a conflict-free environment and live happily ever after."

In all cases, the academics are awarding translators creative, managerial and specialist roles, which almost automatically results in calls for the end of the invisibility of the translator.

Anthony Pym (2000: 191-192) suggests that this change is already happening at the upper end of the market. For some scholars, translators, particularly in the literature field, have always 'created' rather than 'transferred'. Jose Santaemilia (2005: 14), for examples, introduces his edited volume as follows: "The idea of 'manipulation' is inherent into the phenomenon of 'translation'".

More recently, scholars have turned their interest to the translator's "specific political commitment" and to the even more committed "in-

evitability of political engagement" (Brownlie 2007: 136). As Christina Schaffner (2000: 9) notes "The new impetus which has come to Translation Studies is the focus on culture as being linked to notions of power, asymmetries, difference and identity". The shift now is not so much "creating understanding" through disassociated mediation (e.g. Katan 2004), but on redressing the imbalances and becoming an "agent of social change" (Tymoczko 2003: 181), or "an activist" involved in re-narrating the world (Baker 2006, 2008; c.f Scarpa 2008). Global politics, now seen as immanent in every translation decision, means that translation is "a process of power" (Wolf 1995). Maria Tymoczko (2007) concludes, exhorting:

> "…the ability of a translator to be empowered – to be heard, to be seen, to be able to make engaged choices, to exercise a full range of translation options, to improvise, to invent, to construct meaning, to convey cultural difference, to make interventions, to exert activist agency".

There are, however, some detractors. Carol Maier (2007: 254), for example, who takes increased visibility as a given, suggests that professionals are not ready to face the conflicts that increased visibility can involve. Also, as some are beginning to mention, it is a very academic force that is driving the idea of empowerment. John Milton (2001), for example, talking specifically about Brazil, suggests that "Translation Studies as an academic area exists as an almost separate domain from that of professional translation … and that there is minimal contact between these areas".

The object of this paper, then, is twofold: first, to investigate to what extent the academic theories and beliefs are reflected in the workplace, and the extent to which the "new impetus" or indeed any impetus from Translation Studies has made an impact on the profession. Second, to what extent do translators actually have the autonomy to intervene, to mediate or tackle conflict? Are they high-flying professionals, in a position to control output "and live happily ever after"?

This reality is not easy to analyse because the profession is almost totally unregulated. This lack has a number of unfortunate consequences: literally anyone can practise the trade; there is no agreed and policed (national/international) professional code of conduct or quality control, and there is no one practicing body or association to refer to when talk-

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ing about 'the translator'. And outside of major conurbations through-
out the world, there may well be no visible sign of an association or
even translation agency.[1]

2.   Questionnaire Design

To partially answer at least some of these questions, it was decided
to use formulate an on-line questionnaire in the hope of contacting as
many 'professional' freelance translators as possible. The first questions
asked for practical information, such as previous academic/profession-
al training and present role(s), and languages used. The most important
part of the survey was dedicated to attitudes and beliefs about 'the pro-
fession' itself. Particular questions focussed on how translation should
be taught, the role and status of the profession (ideally and in practice)
and personal satisfaction.

The questions were compiled using a default online[2] template, which
allowed for a number of permutations. Apart from the classic multiple
choice, there was the possibility of using a matrix, allowing for more
than one choice per row, as in the following:

Have you completed training in ...	Degree	MA	Phd	Course
languages	✓			✓
arts (non language)				
sciences				
translation		✓		
interpreting		✓		
e-translation tools				✓
specialized language				✓
Any other training? (please state)				

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1   For example, my local town, Lecce (pop. 100,000), boasts a 2nd level university
course in Specialised Translation in six languages, but no Language Provision Agency;
and no local branch for any of the national associations. The town's Yellow Pages has 5
entries under "Traduttori e Interpreti": 3 are for freelance translators, whilst the other 2
are Congress Organisers with "interpreting services".

2   The "Surveymonkey" site was used (www. monkeysurvey.com), which allows one
to compile a questionnaire online using a default template. "Surveymonkey" also offers
a number of simple filtering options to analyse the data.

In the above case, for example, the respondent has a first degree in languages and also has an MA in translating and interpreting. She has also taken further courses: in learning a foreign language, in the use of a specialised language and in the use of e-tools.

As the respondents were often asked about their beliefs, a rating scale was used, allowing them to weigh the degree of feeling about an issue:

2. How responsible ideally do you think a translator should be for ..	Always	Most of the time	At times	It depends	Hardly ever	Never
Contextualising the target text for the reader		✓				
If "at times"/"it depends" .... when?:						

The survey was made available on line from February to June 2008. The link to the questionnaire was distributed in 2 principal ways (neither of which can claim scientific validity). The first was through personal contact, from individual to individual from an initial mailing list of academic colleagues, past students and professional translators. The second way was through a small number of national translation associations (Australia, Spain, Italy).

2.1. The Respondents

The global response (1151[3] replies) breaks down as follows (figure 1 shows the first 25 countries covering 98% of the translators).

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3 A total of 1213 began the questionnaire. 1151 answered the "country of work" question and 73.6% (890) completed the survey.
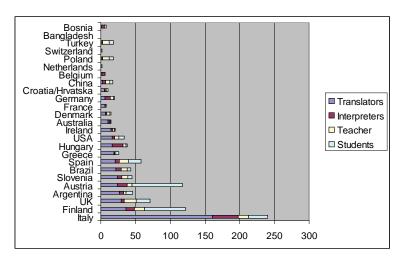
Figure 1. Country of work

As to their role, the largest group, and the group of most interest, was that of the professional translator (573[4]). This was calculated by counting the number of responses to 'full time/1st job': 'freelance' (427), 'agency' (53) and 'permanent' translator (93). The number of professional interpreters was 157. Altogether, 92 of the translators also divided their time equally as interpreters:
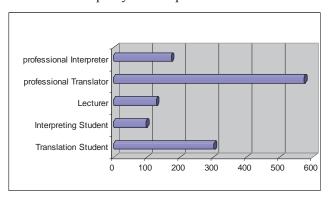

Figure 2. Full-time/1st job

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4   This number does not reflect the actual number of translators (542) but the number of roles, as the questionnaire allowed the respondents to tick more than one "full-time/1st" role. For example, 16 respondents ticked both 'agency' and 'freelance'.

2.2. Professional Translators

If we focus on the group of professional translators, by far the largest single group work in Italy (161). The translators' declared mothertongue broke down as follows: Italian and English (64 and 50 replies) followed by Spanish and Finnish (49 and 33). The 10 most important working 2nd languages are as follows:[5]
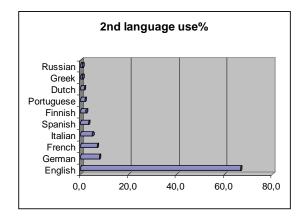

Figure 3. 2nd language use

Though this sample of respondents does not pretend to reflect the geographical distribution of professional translators, the second language use is certainly in line with FIGS,[6] the languages chosen for web localisation.

As confirmation of the fragmented nature of the profession, the vast majority of the professionals were freelance:

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5   Only 353 respondents answered this question, hence the low count/country.

6   "The localization industry has long used the acronym FIGS, which stands for French, Italian, German, Spanish, the most popular four languages chosen when companies enter Europe", John Yunker, http://goingglobal.corante.com/archives/2005/04/
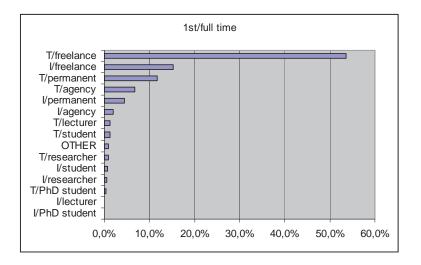
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Figure 4. 1st/Full-time role

But, what is more interesting is the fact that the majority of academics (80%) and students (55%) also work professionally as permanent, agency or freelance translators or interpreters. Between 20% and 30% of the 'permanent', 'full-time' translators and interpreters actually treated the job as their 2nd or even 3rd role.

In fact, very few in the profession have *only* one role. Over two-thirds (69%) 'also' had a 2nd role, while over half (54%) 'at times' had a third role. This is apart from the 75 (8%) who vaunted a 4th role, which mainly centred around teaching, though also included "painter", "journalist" and "mother".

The main areas of activity between translators and interpreters differ as would be expected (e.g. literary work for translating, and public services work for interpreters). What is interesting is the fact that the translators are involved in a greater number of areas. In all cases, the figure for 'involved in' is higher if not double that of the interpreter – an indication that as a profession translators are less specialised than their interpreting colleagues.

Yet, there were few who translated 'anything and everything' that came their way, which suggests that the respondents were indeed 'pro-

fessionals' – a point we will return to later. Also, 17% had been working for over 21 years in the field (the average was 10 years experience, with only 3% having worked for 1 year or less).

Below is a breakdown of translator and interpreter 'main', 'secondary' and 'at times' areas of work:
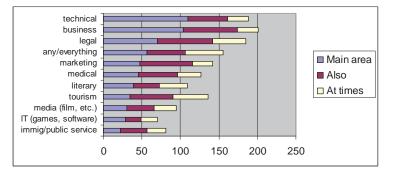

Figure 5. Areas of work (translators and interpreters)

These figures can be compared with Jean-Marie Vande Walle's (2007) data for translation output in Europe in 2006:

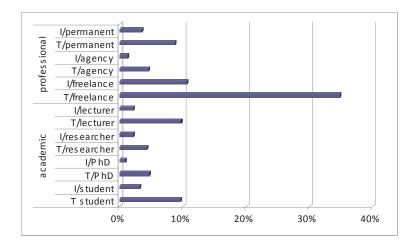|	Main area …		Involved in …		
	Translator	Interpreter	Translator	Interpreter	Vande Walle
Immigration/public service	4%	9%	13%	24%	-
IT (games, software)	5%	1%	23%	13%	-
media (film, etc.)	5%	4%	26%	23%	-
tourism	6%	6%	20%	26%	-
literary	7%	3%	28%	20%	1,1%
marketing	8%	7%	31%	28%	-
anything and everything	8%	14%	26%	31%	-
medical	8%	6%	39%	26%	8%
legal	12%	15%	36%	39%	12%
business	17%	18%	34%	36%	12%
technical	19%	16%	54%	34%	36%
administration					9%
scientific					4%

Figure 6. Areas of work

Technical, business and legal interpreting and translation account for most of the work, both according to this sample and to Vande Walle's classification. Clearly, the two sets of figures do not entirely match. We do not know, for example, how marketing and tourism would be classified, nor at which point science becomes technical, and when business becomes administration.

One difference, though, is clear: the high proportion of literary translators in the sample. 7% of the respondents wrote that literary translation was their principal activity, and 28% mentioned that they were also involved in literary translation. This certainly does not reflect the market globally. In fact, Vande Walle reserves just over 1% of the European output to literary translation. But the figure does point to the fact that 'professional translators' which this survey targeted, are more likely to be involved in literary translating than their "unqualified but cheap labour" competitors.

2.3. University Trained Professionals

About three-quarters (885, 73%) of the total number of respondents have university training[7] in 'languages', 'translation' or 'interpreting', which more than covers the 864 who translate professionally. Clearly, a number of respondents who have a first degree are still working on a post-graduate programme full-time, and hence do not do any professional translating. In fact, if we look at a select group of those who gained a translation or interpreting qualification at university level, it is clear that while most are working 'full-time' (598, 64%), mainly freelance (428, 29%), a sizeable minority responded that they were (also) at university either as 'full-time' lecturers (111, 12%), researchers (60, 6%) or studying for a further qualification (172, 18%):

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7   University training includes degree, MA and PhD.

3.   Profession or Activity

The New Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (1999) is clear about how an activity becomes a profession, through "the development of formal qualifications based upon education and examinations, the emergence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline its members, and some degree of monopoly rights" Clearly, according to this dictionary, translation cannot be regarded a profession, as a number of the respondents commented. For example:

> "…its access is not controlled and standards [are] not strictly regulated by a professional body; because although it requires special skills, practice etc. it can be learned as a trade and work is found on the basis of experience rather than [on] qualifications".
> *Public services/immigration interpreter, UK; 4 years.*

The *New Fontana* type of definition is known as a "static or "trait" perspective, which, as Lester (2007: 1) points out "can be debated endlessly" according to view. In fact, Macdonald's (1999: 1) introduction to his *Sociology of Professions* comes with the following warning: "'Professional' and similar terms have a wide range of uses in everyday speech, many of which are value laden…. So, when the word 'professions' is used in this book, it is a kind of shorthand, not as a closely defined technical term". And to conclude, Dietrich & Roberts (1999: 6), in their review of the literature state: "There is no precise and unique defini-

tion of 'professions'". They claim, in fact, (following Atkinson 1983 and Friedson 1983) that the distinguishing feature of professionalism is purely the ability to gain societal recognition as such; that "it is merely a title claimed by certain occupations at certain points in time".

So, respondents were hence asked the seemingly obvious question, if translating was, 'a profession'. 955 agreed that it was, indeed, a profession, with only 41 who disagreed:

Break down by 'main activity'	Interpreters	Translators	Teachers	Students
Yes	96% (111)	96% (381)	94% (106)	98% (183)
No	4% (5)	4% (16)	6% (7)	2% (4)

Figure 8. T/I is a profession

The following is a list of the countries with 5 or more respondents (including teachers and students) who polled 100% 'translation *is* a profession':

Country	Respondents	% of total
France	6	0,5%
Turkey	14	1,2%
Poland	14	1,2%
Denmark	16	1,4%
Hungary	26	2,3%
Germany	30	2,6%
USA	31	2,7%
Brazil	40	3,5%
Argentina	50	4,6%

Figure 9. Countries with 100% 'translation is a profession' reply

A sizeable minority (7%) found the related question "Why is it a profession?" rhetorical, commenting "Because it is" and "Why not". Even more, 13% (35 respondents) replied with the fact that:

> "It's a profession if [it] can be described as how you make a living, how you spend most of your time, how you answer the question "What do you do?"".

Business/technical freelance/I, Degree in I, MA in Linguistics, Brazil; 16 years.

"...a job like any other: you pay taxes, you earn a living.."
Media freelance/T, Degree in Languages, Slovenia; 5 years.

"What else would it be, if it is a job you are doing for living?"
Full time T/Agency, Master in T, Finland; 3 years.

Most replies related to the traits definition and included a mixture of specialised (practical) skills, competences, expertise (24%) and/or (theoretical or background) knowledge and education (20%). Very few actually mentioned 'qualification', though many did mention specific training (24,9%), which may or may not imply a degree in specialised translation or interpreting. Other aspects worth mentioning are the emphasis put on experience, hard work and the requirements of constant on-the-job study and practice (which covers 12% of the replies):
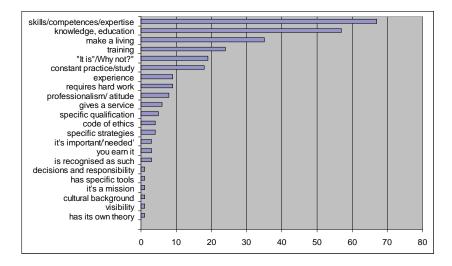

Figure 10. What makes 'translation' a profession?: percentage replies

Just over 80% of both interpreters and translators also agreed that there was, unlike most professions, no career structure in the profession. The implication is that translating is a profession when it is 'earned' individually as a result of having made a name for oneself individually.

"...takes a lot of hard work, study, linguistic competence and experi-
ence to work as a translator".
Freelance technical translator, Master in T/I, Ireland; 5 years.

"Translating is a great job with a long learning curve, but very reward-
ing in individual instances".
*Permanent Economics translator, Master in T and Sciences, Austria;
12 years.*

"...able to provide translation services to an increasing number of cus-
tomers over the years and trust your own competence more and more.
Well, perhaps this could be called 'personal development' rather than
'career structure'".
Freelance literary T, Master in T, Finland; 12 years.

Hence, it is the 'professionalism' (actually mentioned by 3% of the re-
spondents) of the individual practitioners which renders the activity a
profession. Though a few mentioned the need for some form of profes-
sional bar, there were a larger number who felt that no form of diploma
would be sufficient to turn an amateur into a professional.

Over 50% of the respondents in this survey have had university train-
ing in translating or interpreting; and of the 275 full-time students, 154
study translation and a further 41 interpreting. So, the phenomenal lack
of "has its own theory" (a mere 3% of the replies), considered by many
scholars an essential trait for any profession (e.g. Hoyle & John, 1995),
should have the translation theorists thinking.

As to the university trained translators themselves there was little
evidence of the importance of their training in their replies. While over
95% were convinced that they exercised a profession, of the 191 re-
spondents who left a comment, only *one* mentioned that it is "a pro-
fession with its own science, studies". A few (33) mentioned that "It is
a profession because it requires specific training"/"special education",
though this often meant "T/I requires training (if only on-the-job), prac-
tice, experience, i.e. a variety of skills and tools". Of the 33, only 11
actually cited "academic studies" or "specifically designed universi-
ty training" as a mark of the profession. University training, it would
seem, pales in comparison with the individual, life-long learning, train-
ing and specialization gained through on-the-job experience.

3.1. Low Status

The few negative responses varied greatly according to country. One country in particular, Slovenia, polled a disproportionate proportion of negative responses. Of the 66 respondents (6% of the total), 5 ticked 'not a profession', i.e., 12%, over double the global average. And though Italy polled 7 negative responses, this is only 4% of the cohort.

What is notable is a) the total agreement in disparate countries, such as the US, Brazil and Argentina that translators *are* professionals and b) the similarly disparate mix of countries where a small minority (such as Slovenia, China and Australia) distinctly feel otherwise. The most common reasons given were: lack of control (licensing, standards), no career structure, the part-time nature, "anybody can do it", and most importantly, considering Dietrich & Roberts, lack of "societal recognition":

> "It often is not even regarded a 'job' but a 'hobby' e.g. [what] a 'desperate housewife' does to earn some extra money and get out of her boring every-day life..." .
> *PhD student and freelance/T, Austria; 10 years.*

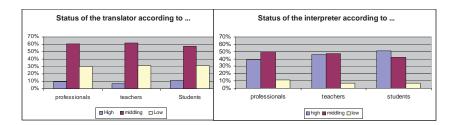> "...not universally recognised as such. It is either a cattle market undermined by global markets and rates or a mafia in the case of interpreting".
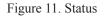> *Technical freelance/T, UK, MA in Languages, Course in e-tools; 21+ years.*

> "...people also underestimate and believe that is very easy to be done without training. People believe that if you speak a foreign language you can work as a translator and an interpreter, they do not realize that a translator and an interpreter have to work very hard, they need to read a lot, do a lot of research, consult grammars and dictionaries and sometimes even be an expert in the specific field that you work as I do".
> *International relations, freelance T, Courses in Interpreting and Translating, Brazil; 4 years.*

Given, though, that most agreed that translating *is* a profession, respondents were then asked to consider how the profession is perceived in the market. The specific question was: "What level of social status, regard and esteem does the job have?"; and respondents were asked

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to distinguish between translators and interpreters. They were given 3 possibilities: 'high', 'middling' and 'low'. No further indications were given. The graphs below show how (on the left) translators are perceived according to 'professionals',[8] teachers and students, while the graph on the right shows how interpreters are perceived:

Figure 11. Status

The table below groups the professionals, teachers and students together to give an overall view of how those involved (and how those who wish to be involved) see the profession:

What level of social status, regard and esteem does the job have?	Translator		Interpreter	
High	(81)	10%	**43%**	(306)
Middling	(485)	**59%**	**48%**	(337)
Low	(251)	**31%**	9%	(66)

There is general agreement among all respondents that interpreters are regarded with relatively high status/esteem, with 43% 'high'. Only 9% of the respondents classified interpreters as 'low'. Translators, on the other hand, are clearly perceived by all as having at best a middling status (59%). More importantly, it should be noted that almost a third (31%) of the respondents classified the translator as having 'low' status.

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8 The 'full time/1st job' interpreters and translators responded almost exactly in the same way, both regarding the esteem of translators and interpreters, and so were grouped into 'professionals'.

To further understand what 'low' status actually means, the respondents were then asked to "give an example of (an)other job(s) with the same status". Here, there were a number of clear similarities and difference between translator and interpreter replies. (The graph is ranked first according to translator response):
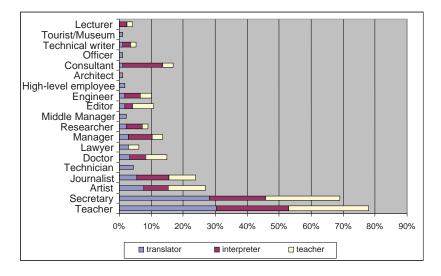

Figure 12. Same status jobs

To begin with, teachers and secretaries were by far the most popular choices, accounting for over 50% of both translator and interpreter responses, and almost exactly in equal proportions:

Another job with the same status:	According to: translators		interpreters		teachers	
Teachers	28%	55	23%	9	23%	15
Secretaries	26%	51	35%	14	11%	7
Proportion secretary/teacher of total	54%	106	58%	23	34%	22
TOTAL respondent replies (all jobs)		197		40		64

Translators also saw themselves as creative artists and journalists (12%), followed by 'conduit' technicians (4%). Interpreters follow a similar path apart from an individual high peak of creative 'consultants' (8%).

It is notable that virtually no translator suggested 'consultant', nor indeed the much vaunted (by academics) 'expert' or 'specialist'.

Indeed, the comments attached to the high "secretarial" response underlines the awareness the professionals have of the yawning gap between the (academic) belief of translators "enjoy[ing] more prestige and increased pay" (Gentzler 2001: 74), the professionalism of the job and actual perception:

> "Ideally a translator is highly regarded, but actually the working conditions are less respected than those of any secretary, and bargaining conditions are zero".
> *Frelance translator, Italy, Degree in Languages; 12 years.*

> "I must admit, though, from some clients' perspective the job of a translator is of the same level as a secretary"
> *Frelance translator, USA, Arts Degree and Master in T; 15 years.*

> "Most of the time, translators are socially regarded as mere secretaries of texts producers, however, I think that interpreters are better considered".
> *Legal interpreter/translator, Spain, Degree in T/I; 6 years experience.*

> "At the moment a secretary although I hope that this will change soon".
> *Freelance medical translator, France, Degree in T/I, Masters in Arts and certification in "Medical Editing; 17 years.*

> "Secretary!"
> *Permanent translator, Switzerland, Degree in T; 20 years.*

> "Typist".
> *Permanent legal T, Finland, Master in T/I; 21+ years in "translating between 3 A languages and 6 B languages".*

What is striking, in terms of the academic/professional divide is that the translator/secretary equivalence is actually enshrined in the EU official classification of the profession (Eurostat):[9]

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9 The latest version "NACE Rev. 2 – CPA 2008", updated 29/09/2008, " is to be used, in general, for statistics referring to economic activities performed from 1 January 2008 onwards". http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/nacecpacon/info/data/en/NACE%20Rev.%20 2%20Introductory%20guidelines%20-%20EN.pdf

74.8 Miscellaneous business activities n.e.c. 749×
74.81 Photographic activities 7494
74.82 Packaging activities 7495
74.85 Secretarial and translation activities 7499×

If we look in more detail into "Secretarial and translation activities", the sub-group includes typing, transcribing and photocopying:

NACE 1.1 class 74.85 Secretarial and translation activities

74.30 Translation and interpretation Translation and interpretation
activities
82.11 Combined office administrative Combined secretarial activities
service activities
Specialised secretarial activities:
- typing
- transcribing from tapes or discs
- proofreading
- photocopying etc.
82.19 Photocopying, document
preparation and other specialised
office support activities
- Telephone based support, except call centres and computer based phone support
- Stenographic services during life legal proceedings and transcribing subsequent recorded
Material

This document, the "General Industrial Classification of Economic Activities within the European Communities", known by its acronym as "Nace Rev 1" recently revised as "Nace Rev 2" [10] is designed to harmonise "statistical classification of economic activities in the European Community". As the "preface" states, "this legislation imposes the use of the new classification uniformly within all the Member States";[11] and indeed in France the professional (APE) group code is visible, along with other administrative information, as the following example from a freelancer's webpage shows:[12]

10 "Correspondence table NACE Rev. 1.1 – NACE Rev. 2", p. 46. http://circa.europa.eu/irc/dsis/nacecpacon/info/data/en/Correspondence%20table%20NACE%20Rev.%201.1%20-%20NACE%20Rev.%202%20doc%20format.pdf
11 http://www.cso.ie/census/documents/pser_appendix2.pdf
12 http://www.aegistrad.fr/mentions_legales.aspx

N° SIRET : 48746522100017
Code APE : 748 F (Traduction et secrétariat)
Numero de TVA intracommunautaire (UE): FR07487465221

SIRET no. (business ID number): 48746522100017
APE code (Trade ID number): 748 F (Translation and secretarial work)
Intercommunity VAT no. (EU): FR07487465221

Hence, the EU, itself one of the world's largest employers of professional translators (and interpreters), upholder of multilingualism, diversity and multiculturality, is also obliging professionals throughout Europe to classify themselves as equivalent to secretaries, Also, as translating and interpreting is grouped together with typing, transcribing and photocopying, we can safely presume that the profession is still officially perceived, in 2008, as a form of text-based copying. This is a very far cry from "consultant", "mediator" or "agent of social change".

3.2. The Competition

Below is a graph showing the percent of respondents, and their reply to "Where do you see competition coming from?":
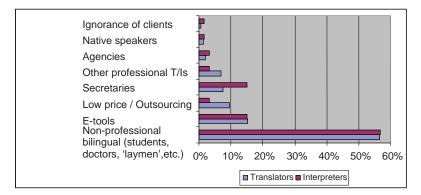

Figure 13. The competition

We have already seen that many respondents likened their job to a secretarial activity, so it is hardly surprising that also almost a quarter of

the respondents (8% of the translators and 15% of the interpreters) specifically mentioned "secretaries" as competition:

> "Secretaries and employees who speak foreign languages but have no T/I specialisation"
> *Freelance T/I, Degree in T/I, e-tools and interpreting courses, Italy; 14 years.*

> "Secretaries whose bosses think that translations can be done by anyone"
> *Technical T/freelancer. Courses in languages, e-tools, "Social sciences, information technology, linguistics, you name it", Czech Republic; 13 years.*

Yet, secretaries only form part of a much wider threat, which can be broken down into 2 distinct groups:

1. Non-specialist translation amateurs:

> "Secondary school students, uni students of all proveniences, taxi drivers, secretaries, civil servants with government jobs, school teachers, practically anyone with a uni degree and a smattering of a foreign language or without a degree".
> *T/freelancer, degree in Specialized languages and on-the-job training in a variety of specialised fields, Slovenia; 19 years.*

> "Cowboys".
> *Business T/Freelance, UK, Master in T; 18 years.*

2. Subject specialist translation amateurs:

> "The bigger 'threat' I believe comes from professionals from other fields (i.e. those with subject specific knowledge) who also happen to be bilingual / multilingual and translate within their own fields of expertise".
> *Medical T/freelance, Australia, Degree in T ; 18 years.*

> "Lawyers who take '3 month course in UK' following graduation, doctors the same".
> *Legal interpreter, Turkey, Degree in T/I ; 21+ years.*

These 'amateurs' account for two-thirds (65%) of translator competition and nearly three-quarters of interpreter competition (72%). A number of respondents also specifically mentioned price:

"Translators and Interpreters practicing market dumping".
Freelance/I, Italy, Master in I; 9 years.

"…students ready to work for peanuts, for example".
Freelance/T, Finland, Master in T; 6 years.

"Eastern Europe".
Freelance Marketing T/I, Italy, Degree in T, Master (San Diego); 13 years.

"Developing countries like India."
Technical freelance/T, UK, Degree in Sciences, course in languages; 16 years.

It is extremely noteworthy that 'e-tools', machine translation or CAT tools, are viewed equally by interpreters and by translators as much talked about but as of yet not serious competitors:

"MT (though this is more apparent than real)".
Freelance/T, Spain, Master in T and E-tools; 13 years.

"Machines, in the middle term".
Business Freelance/T , Brazil, Degree in Sciences; 10 years.

"...competition could be coming from machine translation and from multi-language providers (global companies)".
Agency/T, Slovenia, Degree in languages; 21 years.

Further competition, of course, comes from the hegemony of English as a *lingua franca*, which has certainly reduced the work available for conference interpreters worldwide, mentioned though by only 4 of the 54 interpreters who left a comment, and by one translator.

But, of course, the threat does not come from a specific 'profession' or area, but, as one respondent replied: "from EVERYWHERE! In Greece, anyone can declare themselves a translator". According to the respondents, it seems that 'Greece' can be substituted by every other country in the world, except perhaps in those rare countries such as Denmark, where: "We have a title (State-authorised translator and interpreter) which is protected and no-one else is allowed to certify translations". However, as the respondent continues "Anyone can set up shop as a translator (and a lot of people do after shorter university studies) but no-one may use our title".

There are, of course some groups who are more immune to competition from "cowboys". In fact, 20% (4) of the full-time literary translator comments were as follows:

> Literary translators:
> "Sorry, no experience in this because of my field – literary translation".
> *Master in specialised languages, Australia; 15 years.*
>
> "Nowhere. The outsourcing to India, for example, of translation into English is a mess. Four years of study, for example, of French is not enough to become a translator into English of that language".
> *Master in T/I, USA; 21+ years.*
>
> "If you're a good literary translator, you needn't worry about competition: growing, you'll get more work!"
> *Master in T/I, Italy; 4 years.*

The other group which felt relatively immune from competition was the interpreter (7, 13% of those who left comments), such as the following:

> "For interpreters (thinking here mostly of conference interpreting) there is no real competition".
> *Business interpreter, Master in T/I, Finland; 13 years.*

A similar number 8 (15%) of interpreters mentioned healthy competition from colleagues. Just like the translators, the greatest threat comes from amateurs 17 (31%) and from low prices 5 (9%), especially from Agencies.

Respondents were also asked to reply to the following summary of Terence Johnson's (1972) influential *Professions and Power*: "A profession tends to dominate and rebuff competition from ancillary trades and occupations, as well as subordinating and controlling lesser but related trades" How true is this in your experience/opinion in T/I?" Their replies show us that both translators and interpreters 'in part' are able to withstand the competition, which consolidates the view of survival of professional individuals rather than of a profession itself:
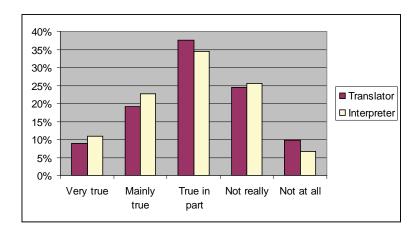
Figure 14. "The T/I profession tends to dominate and rebuff competition"

3.3. Autonomy

According to Lester (2007:2) one characteristic of the traits theory regarding professions which does stand the test of time is: "the exercise of autonomous thought and judgement, and responsibility to clients and wider society". Autonomy can be considered in a number of ways. Hasan (2002: 540; see also Williams 2002: 92) coined the terms "Higher" and "Lower Autonomy Professional" (HAP and LAP), and linked autonomy to domination: "The greater the possibility for making policy changes, and for passing on policy decisions to others as instruments for carrying them out, the more dominating the professional location".

To what extent, then, does the translator dominate her professional location? According to Chesterman (2000: 26) "The translator [is] at the centre of a causal model. If we exclude alterations made to a translation after it has been submitted to the client, there are no causes which can bypass the translators themselves. They themselves have the final say". Here, it does seem that the academics and the professionals are in agreement. In terms of percentages we have the following:
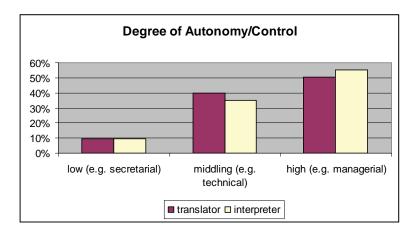
Degree of Autonomy/Control

Figure 15. Degree of autonomy/control

Clearly both translators and interpreters see themselves (and their counterparts) as having high, managerial, control over their output. Over 50% of the professionals believe that they are the specialists who alone can *manage* the final product, while up to 90% believe that they effectively have at least *technical* control over the task to be done. Those who felt that their autonomy was low gave 2 basic reasons. The first has much to do with the copier/creator divide.

> "…fidelity constraints do not leave space for professional autonomy [unlike] the one managers might have"
> *Freelance T/I, Degree in I, Finland; 2 years*

Others saw their lack of autonomy in terms not so much of the copier/creator divide, but more in terms of what Charles Derber (1982: 169) termed 'proletarianization', which he divided into two levels. "Technical proletarianization", he defined as "loss of control over the process of the work itself", which as Chesterman and the professionals agree is not the issue. At the second level, Derber (1982: 169) talks of "ideological proletarianization":

> "…the loss of control over the product [including the inability] to choose or define the final product of one's work, its disposition in the market, its uses in the larger society, and the values or social policy of the organization which purchases one's labor or define the final product of one's work".

Clearly, translators in particular suffer at this level of proletarianization. Chesterman, in fact, excludes "alterations" made after the translator has finished her work. One interpreter's comments succinctly summarise the problem:

> "The interpreter has complete control of his or her output, I would say, because their output is instantaneous, nothing to tamper with there. As a terminologist for an IT company, I had complete control over my own work and the work of others. As a freelancer I have it only when I work for my long-time clients who don't make a change unless they consult with me. But if the client decides to make minced meat out of my work, as long as I'm not signed under the translation, they're free to do so as long as I get paid. I assume freelance translators frequently do not have control over their output. They do have control over how they negotiate their business agreements - but to me it seems that frequently they perceive themselves as being at the mercy of the client, as having no negotiating power."
> *Interpreter, Degree in Languages, Course in translation, Slovenia; 19 years.*

The ability of others to make "minced meat" of one's work is clearly a sign of a more LAP role. While the translators continue to be or to "perceive themselves as being at the mercy of the client" it will be difficult, to put it mildly, to foster future activists, consultants, mediators or even autonomous specialists.

4.   Translator Focus and Loyalty

The second part of 'ideological proletarianization' concerns how the product will be used in the market. For the translator, the reader should be the key factor in the "disposition in the market, its uses in the larger society". How much then can or does a translator "choose or define ….the values" of the readership?" This question also focuses on the functionalist translation theory, which, according to (Gentzler 2001: 71):

> "…allows the translator the flexibility to decide which approach would work better in the given situation. The translator/cultural worker thus enjoys the license to participate actively in the production of the final text. Indeed the functionalist approach views the translator as a cross-cultural professional, not as a secondary, mechanical scribe".

Respondents were hence asked, "If the job is considered to be a 'good linguistic transfer of the original', to what extent is the translator or interpreter concerned with reader or listener reaction?" They were also asked to decide to what extent 'ideally' was different to 'in practice'. The graph below shows how three groups responded: all those who have a university qualification in translation, 'full-time interpreters' and 'full-time translators':
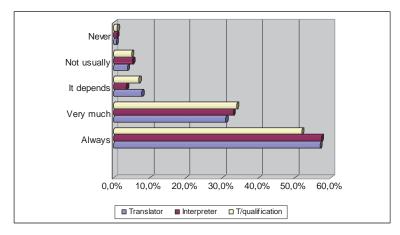

Figure 16. "Concerned ideally with listener/reader reaction"

Only just over half the professionals (56%) believe that listener/reader reaction is *ideally* always their concern. The interpreters are only slightly more united in the view that client reaction is the supplier's concern, though there is an equivalent difference at the other end, with slightly fewer interpreters believing that the supplier ideally should be concerned with client reaction. Surprisingly, perhaps, the group with a qualification in translation are no more concerned with the client than the group of professionals as a whole. This suggests that the *skopos* theory functionalist thinking has yet to permeate the profession, and that Gentzler's prediction, "the future of the functionalist approach appears assured", is certainly not (yet) the case.

For those respondents who *do* believe that reader reaction is always important, the gap between the professionals' ideal and what they are allowed to do in practice gives lie to their lack of autonomy. Only just

over half of those who believe in the ideal of focussing on the listener/ reader also believe that this is or can be a reality.

4.1. Loyalty

The respondents were also asked to decide where their loyalty lies. They were given 4 choices:

> the original text/speech;
> the reader/listener;
> the client, commissioner (specifications etc.),
> it depends, meaning yourself, i.e. your own T/I choices, which may os-
> cillate between all the above at any given moment

Below, are the results for '1st, most' loyalty:

Figure 17. Main focus/loyalty. Interpreters and translators

The interpreters feel most loyalty to the source text, or at least so they say. This seems to contradict their earlier comments regarding concern with listener reaction. However, there are two considerations to be made. First, almost half the interpreters (47%) agreed that the listener comes a close second. Also, according to research carried out by Şeyda Eraslan Gerçek (forthcoming), "Interpreters are more interventionist than they confess to be". What we can say is that both translators and, more markedly, the interpreters "confess" themselves to be more loyal to the source text than to the target text or audience. So, it is cer-

tainly too early to claim "the Death of the Author" (Arrojo 1997). Also, consideration of 'self' and the 'commissioner' is decidedly less of a professional translator/interpreter's concern than the academics would suggest.

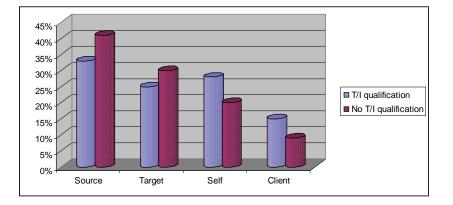If we look at the impact of university training we can see the following:[13]

Figure 19. Main focus/loyalty according to qualification

There is certainly a shift away from the pre-eminence of the source text, though it is still the first choice for university qualified professionals. What is curious is that the target text/audience has not benefited from this shift. Instead, in 2nd position we have a sign of the beginnings of a HAP stance. Belief in the autonomy of self, the translator, to make strategic decisions is felt by 28% of T/I-trained professionals. Of all the professionals, as might be expected, it is the literary translators who profess the most autonomy, with 38% stating that it is they who decide on translation strategy. In fact, true to form, 76% of the literary translators see translation as between the source text and them.

Returning to the differences between the T/I-trained professional translator and others, we can note loyalty towards to the commissioner. And here, scholars, such as Gentzler (2001: 74) may be more on target, with the concern that "practising translators … may also find them-

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13 358 out of the 536 non-T/I trained respondents replied to this question, and 387 of the 519 T/I qualified professionals.

selves sacrificing their independence, becoming more subordinate to the initiators, authors of the brief and brokers in the definition of the text's *skopos*". Yet, even though 15% of the translators declared themselves loyal to the initiator, this is still hardly a significant figure: the commissioner still comes last, the source text remains king, whether oral or written – and the receiver gets barely more than a quarter of the translators' loyalty.

4.2. Invisibility

A further aspect which can only limit a translator's ability to exercise control of her habitus is the enduring belief that one of the particular aspects of this profession is its invisibility. Participants were asked to what extent that "Ideally a translator/interpreter should be invisible":
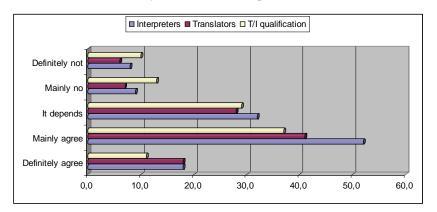

Figure 19. "Professionals: A T/I should be invisible"

The majority of interpreters (60%) and translators (59%) agree that 'mainly' or 'definitely' s/he should be invisible. The impact of university training (which also includes those who do not work professionally) is minimal, with just a slight nod towards visibility (48% 'mainly' and 'definitely' inclined to invisibility). Also only 11% compared to the 18% of all professionals were completely convinced about invisibility.

There is a tiny hard core within each group who definitely feel that the professionals involved should be visible. However, the figures involved are very small: the total number of translators and interpreters

in the last 2 columns (54 and 19 respectively) make up only 13% of the total number of respondents. The university trained group does begin to stand out with 10% definitely claiming visibility, nearly double that of the group of translators as a whole (6%) The profession as a whole though, even with this figure, continues to underline the *non*-activist nature of the job.

At this point, though, it should also be noted that about a third of the I/T qualified professionals would have graduated before 1998, and a full 12% before 1988 – well before the activist views had become mainstream in the academic world. It is, in fact, the students and teachers who are more inclined to the (idealised) view of a visible professional. It should also be pointed out that a) the percentages are still hardly revolutionary, and b) possibly a majority of the students targeted by this questionnaire had been inculcated with this author's particular views on translator visibility.
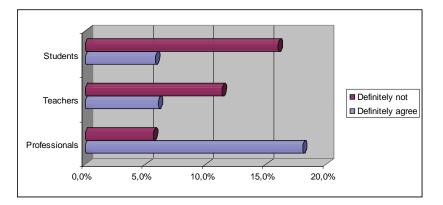

Figure 20. "A T/I should be invisible". Comparison between students, teachers and professionals

The professional desire to remain invisible coheres in general with a LAP profession, and indeed with Simeoni's (1998: 12) definition of the "submissive and subservient" habitus of the translator. Michaela Wolf (2007: 136-141), in discussing "Women in the Translation Field" cites Krais's "gender specific habitus", and has no doubts that female translators (*ergo* translators as a whole) are "primarily dominated agents" (Wolf 2007: 137).

Though no questions were asked regarding gender, it is clear from the comments that most professionals are female. As translation can be carried out at home, as one interpreter put it, the job is "family friendly", which is certainly a factor in its attraction. Clearly, though, the female, cottage-industry nature of the profession also has its downside, as more than one respondent noted:

> "Translators are poorly organized and mostly female (at least in Finland), and too shy to ask for more money (unlike interpreters)".
> *Freelance/T, Master in Languages, Finland; 8 years.*

> "if you are a freelance professional, you always face the problem of feeling inconvenient for asking for the amount of money that is reasonable for your job, because in general it seems too much for an average person. (But then, if you remind them about the prices at a hairdresser and that you made more effort, studied harder and longer then the people in the beauty profession)".
> *Tourism/Immigration freelance/I, mother, master in T/I, Phd in Arts, Hungary; 7 years.*

As Wolf (2007: 137) comments "female translators … do not really join in the game of masculine domination", when it comes, for example, to asking for money. Without a doubt, this is an important factor when considering why we have HAP potential professionals working in LAP conditions.

Wolf (2007: 136) suggests that a lack of university qualification in translation "seems to contribute to the weak structure of the 'translation field/space'". Clearly, this survey, which targeted academically qualified translators, shows that a university course in translation has done little (so far) to change the habitus, and that whatever it is that has been taught, it has done little to change the LAP nature of the profession.

5.   University Training

Universities now offer courses specialising in translation and/or interpreting at all levels, and the debate regarding what should be taught and how is lively, as a number of international conferences and volumes on the subject testify (e.g. Schaffner & Adab 2000, Baer & Koby 2003, Musacchio & Sostero 2007). Hence, it seemed important to ask the professionals to decide the order of importance of a variety of subjects for an imaginary course in Translation and/or Interpreting. The respondents

were asked to choose on a 5 point scale between 'most important' and 'optional'. The graph below shows the percentage spread of thoughts on the importance of a module entitled 'Translation Theory' according to the university trained group of translators:[14]
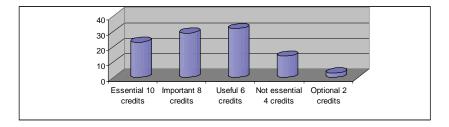

Figure 21. % Spread of replies for translation theory for translation-trained re-spondents

This shows a fairly clear peak at 'useful'. If we look for a moment at the whole group of professional translators, and concentrate only on the modules they regard as 'most important' for a university course, they responded as follows:
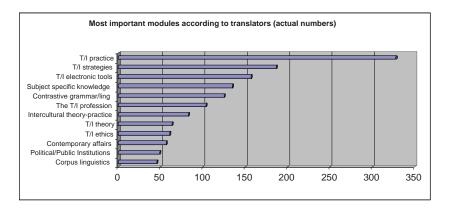

Figure 22. Most important university modules according to all translators

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14 "University trained" was calculated by summing those who had a degree, a masters or a PhD in translation.

This shows that the top five 'most important' professional translator interests are practical, technically based skills, all focussing on finding the right word (practice, strategies,[15] e-tools, subject knowledge and grammar). Further down the list, i.e. less important, we find the translation scholar interests, such as the profession itself, theory and ethics. It is these subjects which would help the translator consider their level of autonomy, become "self reflexive" (Tymoczko 2007: 19), and hence improve their ability to emerge as a profession as "cultural mediators" or "activists". According to this survey, though, this type of university course is of secondary importance. However, there is even less agreement on the importance of both the more traditional courses on background knowledge (institutions) and the more recent introduction of courses on corpus linguistics. What seems to be the guiding choice is 'immediate spendability', in terms of a translator's ability to translate at word or sentence level. Corpus linguistics, we might suggest, is ruled out quite simply because it is not a tool that a practicing translator would use.

University training appears to make virtually no difference to this ranking. Within the top five there is an inversion only of the last two subjects, contrastive linguistics narrowly overtaking subject specific knowledge. Below this group, study of the profession itself loses out to intercultural theory-practice, which is heartening for this particular author, but still leaves the subject half-way down the list of 'most important modules'.

Returning to the response spread over the five options, rather than just 'the most important', the graph below shows the most important areas of agreement according to university trained translators. As the percentage agreement on the last two categories ('not very important' and 'optional') was always low for all of the subjects, the graph focuses only on the first three weightings:

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15 Translation strategies is, admittedly, a wide category. From the comments, it has been understood as referring mainly to rules regarding language or discourse and translation procedures; and not to more general translation theory. "Strategies" are certainly part of "immediate spendability", in that they provide a ready-made *modus operandis.*
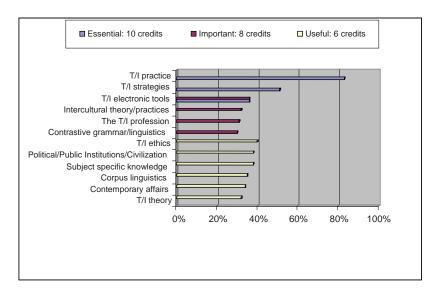
Figure 23. The most important areas of agreement per option, according to university trained translators

In first place, 83% of the respondents agreed that translation practice was 'essential: 10 credits'. The remaining 17% responded either 'very important' (11%) or 'useful (6%). The second two places, strategies and e-tools, follow as before. This request for "practice, practice, practice" along with that for e-tools to facilitate the practice does not sit easily with academia (Katan 2007: 118-121; Scarpa 2007: 161-162), and certainly makes it difficult for those scholars who wish to theorise the political over the pragmatic.

Scrolling down the response-spread list, with less agreement over what is 'most important', so we find more agreement over what is 'important'. The most agreement regarding 'important: 8 credits' is e-tools once again. Intercultural theory-practice also fares well here, with 33% of the respondents agreeing that the subject is 'important'. Study of the profession itself is also seen as 'important'. Many of the comments, in fact, pointed to the unpreparedness of graduates for the profession, and spoke of the need to learn about tariffs, invoicing and so on.

Earlier, we saw the percentage spread of replies for the importance of the study of 'Translation Theory', which, taken in isolation shows that

most agreement is for a relatively lowly 'useful' 3rd place. But what really shows the yawning gap between scholarly theory regarding translation, translation training and professional practice itself is that this 'useful' position is the least 'useful' of all the options presented to the group, coming well below every single practice-oriented skill, and even below corpus linguistics.

Interestingly, the non-translation qualified translators themselves[16] seemed to approve of translation theory, with a peak of agreement at 'important' (32%) rather than useful. However, a good 9% also considered theory 'optional':
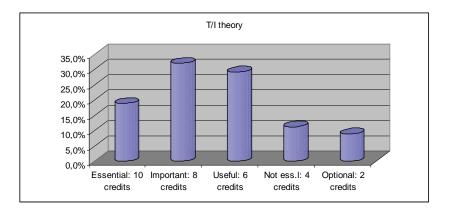

Figure 24. % Spread of replies for translation theory according to non-T/I-trained respondents

The non-T/I trained professionals broadly agreed also that hands-on practice should be the core of a university course. However, as with translation theory, there seems to be more interest in a range of the more 'self-reflexive' subjects at university. So, we might say that potentially, there is interest, but that the universities have yet to deliver.

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16 Respondents who had no degree, MA or PhD in T/I: 390 answered this question, which will also include some students who do not translate professionally.
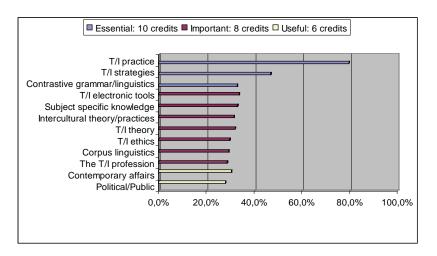
Figure 25. The most important areas of agreement per option, according to non T/I-trained translators

6. Satisfaction

Personal experience of students of languages and of translation over the past 25 years has shown the extremely idealised world they have of the profession. The expectations are high, with notions of interpreting at high-level political summits or translating the next *The Name of the Rose*. Very few are prepared for the realities of interpreting between on-site engineers at a steel mill or counting the words in the clutch-assembly section of a car instruction manual. So, the respondents were asked to express their present level of satisfaction in comparison with their expectations:
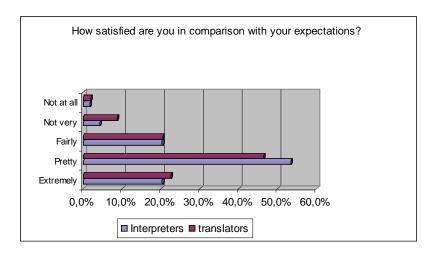
Figure 26. "How satisfied are you"?

Given, the fact that the translators are LAPs, that their qualifications, time, effort, professionalism and constant study is rarely valued, the results regarding satisfaction might be considered surprising. There is also very little between them and their higher status interpreting colleagues. In fact, the vast majority of the group as a whole is either 'pretty' (50%) or 'extremely' satisfied (21%); and if we add 'fairly' satisfied we include 91% of all translating and interpreting respondents:

> "I have done this job for about 40 years and I still like translating and I still like spending sometimes a whole day or more looking for the 'right' word...".
> *T/Freelancer, Degree in translation, PhD in Arts, Italy; 21+ years.*

> "It is often a very low-paid, lonely, unappreciated job, but what joy when the translation comes out right!"
> *Freelance literary/T, Degree in Science, Greece; 21+ years.*

> "Translation and interpreting happen to be my passion, and whether or not they receive the approval of others outside of the professions, I will continue to follow my heart after both professions".
> *Business freelance/T/I, Degrees in Arts, Science and Communications, Australia; 21+ years.*

"This is the best job in the world! :)".
Legal/Business T/freelance and interpreter, Masters in I, Italy; 4 years.

So, it would appear that translators and interpreters are able to find immense satisfaction, as linguists, looking for and finding *le mot juste*. And, interestingly the positive comments are not just from literary translators.

Hence, we might consider the translating profession a 'caring profession', notoriously underpaid, with the only, yet fundamental, difference that translators care for the text rather than for the client. To a large extent a translator's work and interest starts and finishes with the word, and there is little interest in investigating the context(s), and nor for that matter becoming social agents for action. Clearly, the fact that they have virtually no ideological proletarianization' and work on a 'time/ pay-per-word' basis can only foster this LAP habitus.

Yet, though they are extremely aware of their relatively low professional autonomy this does not stop them from being pretty to extremely satisfied.

7.   Conclusion

The questions raised at the beginning of this paper focussed on the extent that the academic belief in the empowerment of the translator had filtered through to the workplace and the extent that university training had borne fruit. For the moment, at least, it would appear that translators are anything but freed from the constraints of the conduit metaphor, are hardly empowered, and fail to see the relevance of translation theory. Professional translators, unlike Baker's (2008: 22) Brave New World portrait, do not (yet) "belong to the same 'world' as their clients". There seems to be little evidence that they are high-flying professionals in a position to control output. Yet, almost paradoxically they do seem to be "focused on professionalism", and may very possibly "live happily ever after".

Clearly, the cottage industry nature of mainly female translators has led to easy exploitation and LAP status and conditions. What also transpires is that translation scholars have not really taken their own target audience or clients into consideration.

The academics have yet to provide a solid theory which can help transform translation from an indifferently paid practical activity practiced by all and sundry into a dignified profession practiced by those who have studied the clearly defined principles that define the profession.

Future research, then, should focus on more fine-tuned questions to more controlled groups of university trained professional translators. The results should then be fed back to the academic scholars so that they can more precisely measure the size of the divide between theory and practice. This feedback should then help the scholars to (re)formulate theory for the profession and to monitor changes over time. This will be necessary both to safeguard the existence of the translation profession and translator-training in universities.

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