

The Translation Profession in Malaysia: The Translator's Status and Self-Perception

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to discuss the current status of translators practising in Malaysia and their perceptions towards the profession. The study was motivated by the dearth of literature on the status of the translator's profession in Malaysia. Past studies have shown that translation is not considered a full-fledged profession in many other countries. Translators also do not perceive their own job as belonging to a profession due to a number of reasons. This study which adopts hermeneutic phenomenology as its method of inquiry is mostly qualitative in nature with an inclusion of some basic quantitative measures. The findings of this study has revealed that though Malaysian translators regard themselves as professionals in society, clients and the public unfortunately do not share the same views. The translators also cited unfair competition from amateur translators and unprofessional practices in their profession due to a lack of code of ethics, as challenges which seriously undermine the status of their professions. The findings of this study markedly highlight the concerted effort that is needed to set up a professional body to represent the translators in Malaysia.

Keywords: translator; status; perception; translation; profession

INTRODUCTION

Translation is considered to be one of the emerging professions in developed countries (National Research Council of United States, 2001). It is a quasi-profession that is facing many challenges en route to attaining the full professional status. The aim of this study is to investigate the current status of Malaysian translators and their perceptions of their profession. Challenges and issues which affect the translator's status are also highlighted in this study and they lead to a careful consideration of suggestions which can help pave the way towards recognising translators as full-fledged professionals.

The evidence of translation in Malaysia can be traced back to the early Malay civilization. During the 13th and 14th century, Arab missionaries brought Islam to the Malay Archipelago and during the Islamization process translators took on the important role of translating books written in Arabic into Malay, with most of them being religious books. In the colonial era, a few famous local literary works such as 'Hikayat Raja Pasai' and 'Hikayat Merong Mahawangsa' were translated into French and English respectively in 1849 (Othman, 2007). Hence, via the translation effort, not only were foreign materials introduced to Malaya, but Malay literature was also unlocked and shared with the nations that came to its shores in the early days.

In present day Malaysia, three organisations that have emerged to play a major role in translation work are *Persatuan Penterjemah Malaysia/Malaysian Association of Translators* (PPM/MTA), *Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia/Malaysian National Institute of Books & Translation* (ITBM), and *Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka/ Institute of Language and Literature* (DBP). PPM is an association with about 1200 registered members which seeks to

promote cooperation and also protect the interest of translators in the country (Bell, 2007). PPM also conducts training, workshops and courses in translation for interested individuals. ITBM was created to spearhead the translation industry in Malaysia by providing translation courses and also undertaking the task of translating materials from foreign languages into Malay and vice versa. PPM often collaborates with ITBM and Malaysian universities in organising biennial translation conferences. The DBP, on the other hand, is instrumental in creating new terminologies in Malay and promoting them so that foreign language terms can be matched with their equivalent pairs in Malay. DBP also serves as a resource centre for translators who wish to translate materials into the Malay language.

Where education in translation is concerned, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) is the sole tertiary institution in the country which offers a discipline specialising in translation and interpretation up to the doctoral level. Apart from USM, ITBM offers professional diploma and certificate courses while PPM/MTA conducts a diploma in translation in collaboration with DBP. Possessing a certificate, a diploma or a degree in translation is a prerequisite in applying to become a member of the PPM/MTA, which acts as the main representative body of Malaysian translators.

Although there is clearly a substantial amount of translation work being carried out in Malaysia by ITBM, DBP and members of PPM, little is really known about the goings-on in the Malaysian translation scene. For one, the size of the translation market in Malaysia is yet to be properly documented. In an earlier preliminary study by Intan and Quah (2004) on the translation service advertised online in Malaysia, it was already clearly highlighted that many individuals refer to themselves as translators and this includes private companies which offer translation services yet it is difficult to determine the actual number of practising translators in Malaysia. Now, ten years later there is still no study to clearly indicate to what extent the translation service in Malaysia has grown. It is also not visible if there is a set of standard regulations enforced in overseeing the translation services provided in the country and there is certainly a glaring lack in research on the status of the profession in terms of its recognition and reception in society. Hence, this study aims to investigate certain aspects which leave gaps in our knowledge concerning the translation profession in Malaysia. These aspects relate in particular to the status of the profession and the self-perception of translators towards their trade. This study hopes to provide as distinct a description and profiling of the translators practice in Malaysia as is possible through the findings of this study. It is also hoped that the findings of this study will give rise to meaningful suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of the quality and status of the Malaysian translation profession.

The focus of this investigation is thus directed by two research questions, which are:

- (1) What is the current status of Malaysian translators? and,
- (2) How do Malaysian translators perceive themselves in relation to their status in the translation profession?

STATUS AND PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRANSLATOR

Pym, Grin, Sfreddo and Chan (2012) define 'status' as a set of social signals which indicate the presumptions that one possesses a level of qualification or competence in the desired skill and the value which is tied to the skill. This definition is congruent with the argument by Sela-sheffy and Shlesinger (2008), who postulate that one's occupational identities are tied to what one does in one's occupation and the values upheld. Pym et al (2012) further identify five characteristics which comprise the meaning of status and they are as follows:

TABLE 1. Five characteristics which comprise the meaning of status

1. Recognition & prestige:	Appearance or recognition of the status of the translator in official documents. It could be an indication such as allocating translators or interpreters a category of their own in forms where one's occupation needs to be stated; in other words, recognizing translating as a standalone profession which can be classified as a specific field.
2. Authority :	The source of power which provides translators with the certification to carry out translating. The authority could come from a government institution, professional body or even educational institutions.
3. Remuneration :	The status of an occupation is determined by the amount of remuneration it receives for the service rendered and vice versa.
4. Professional Exclusivity:	One of the features to determine the status of a profession is whether there is exclusivity in the profession, i.e. whether only a small number of people who possess the competence and recognition are allowed to practice while others who may not possess the required skills and knowledge are legally barred from practising their craft.
5. Trustworthiness :	As the translation process involves bridging two cultures, the element of trust is essential when translators communicate with clients. The trustworthiness of a translator may come from the institution which recognises the translator.

On the other hand, Dam and Zethsen (2010), who conducted research on the status of translators in Denmark, used a different set of criteria to frame their components of status: first, the salary received by translators for their services; second, the level of education and qualification possessed by translators; third, how visible their profession is in the eyes of their employer/s and the society; and lastly, the power and influence translators command at their workplace. The common criteria from the two studies mentioned are rate of pay and visibility and recognition. The present study will also include education, as education received by translators would lead to their professional qualification, which will eventually tie in with their recognition.

Bem (1972) defines self-perception as the process where one develops knowledge of self via observation of one's own behaviour. Self-perception is very influential due to its ability to account for how people develop self-knowledge from behaviour even when there is inconsistency between prior beliefs and behaviour. Understanding how people come to know themselves is important because self-knowledge is considered a basis which people use in the process of forming values, preferences and attitudes. In this study, the aim is to make translators reflect on their work and the status of their profession in order to help them see their current status and the challenges and issues that affect their position as a practising, professional translator.

Findings from past studies have pointed out that the status and prestige of translators fall behind other established professions in the society. Leech (2005), who examined the visibility of translators in England and the public perception of them, found that the public lacks understanding of the skills required to become a translator and the awareness of what

translators can contribute to society. The public also rated translators poorly against other professions in relation to status and rank. In a poll study conducted by Katan (2009) on translators from selected countries around the world, a substantial 31% of the respondents, who are professional translators, perceive their profession as that of a lower status, with many of the respondents likening the translator's practice to the work of a secretary.

One of the major reasons why translators perceive themselves as having a lower status is the lack of recognition given by the public. Ferreira-Alves (2011) investigated the self-perception of translators in North Portugal and revealed that although many translators consider themselves as professionals, they feel that society does not value their job as a translator. Bahk-Halberg (2007), in his study, revealed that there are Korean translators who regard themselves as professionals, but their clients treat them as an assistant or a secretary. Some of these Korean translators who have 4 to 5 years of work experience cited low status and unappreciative clients as two of the major reasons which force them to eventually quit the translation profession.

Another reason is that there is incongruence between how translators see themselves and how the public or the client sees them. Bell (2011) states that translators see themselves as a bridge between two or more cultures, and that translation is a complex process where one uses a variety of strategies to process the source text into a target text. However, the client or the public see translation as a mechanical, almost instantaneous process of converting one language to another, and that translators are workers that carry out the process much like a labourer. Also the fact that many in society perceive that anyone who is bilingual can translate does not augur well for translators; there is a presumption that the translation job can be carried out by almost anyone who is able to communicate in two or more languages and as such there seems to be no exclusivity in the trade.

Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (2008) lament the status of translators as a marginalized profession, as remuneration of translators is inconsistent and often low. They attribute this situation to a few factors. The first is the weak regulation of institutions which should ensure that a fair rate is given to professional translators for their work. The poorly defined criteria for the translation service received also leads to the poor rate received by translators for their service. Other studies have proven that their arguments hold true, as the rate of pay for the translating has decreased gradually. The society of French translators or *Société Française des Traducteurs (SFT)* (2010) reported that the rate of 0.16 euro cents per word for English-French translation in 2008 dropped to 0.14 in 2009 (SFT 2010). Across the Atlantic, the same phenomenon is observed in Canada, due to the fierce competition between professional and amateur translators (Service Canada, 2012). Apart from the low pay, Leech (2005) attributes the low status of translators to a number of other factors, including the translators association not playing a role in educating the public on the importance of the translation profession, obscure career paths, and the dominant view of the profession as a part-time occupation.

Furthermore, Sela-sheffy and Shlesinger (2008) also explain in their study that the profession of translating is widely regarded as a female-dominant profession and thus gender discrimination in remuneration is a contributing factor to the low pay received by translators. The fact that the profession is dominated by females is confirmed by surveys conducted by various institutions. For example, Service Canada (2012) reported that in 2006, women already held 60% of the jobs offered in the field, adding that the percentage would grow larger as 75% to 85% of new graduates in Translation Studies are women. Research conducted by Kelly, Stewart and Hedge (2010) in the United States and SFT (2010) in France also reported that 77% and 76% of their translator - respondents respectively were women.

HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

This study uses hermeneutic phenomenology as it provides the interpretive platform needed to elucidate the perceptions and opinions of participants, such as ascertaining the status of their profession and their perception of the translation practice, which they may have difficulty in articulating (Crotty, 1998). In pure phenomenological research, the aim of the research is oriented towards describing rather than explaining. By adding an interpretive dimension to phenomenological research (such as hermeneutics), the approach will help the researcher to understand human experiences (i.e. the status and self-perception of translators) captured through language and in context (van Manen, 1997).

The selection of hermeneutic phenomenology as the research methodology in this study is justified as the research seeks to describe the status and self-perception of translators. The study also wishes to investigate the problems and the challenges which affect the status of translators. Hence, the nature of the research requires interpretive research which studies everyday experiences to gain knowledge through describing, illuminating, theorizing, or deriving meaning (Higgs, 2001). This research falls into the interpretive paradigm as it also aims to construct a reality as perceived by professional translators of their profession. This can be done via reflecting on the shared experience of translators.

One of the methods which subscribes to the philosophy of Hermeneutic phenomenology is the fusion of horizon. Gadamer (Koch, 1995) labels pre-understanding and prior knowledge as prejudice, and this is said to form the past horizon. In contrast, the outcome of the current research and the interpretation of the subject is labelled as the present horizon. Understanding takes place when the past horizon merges with the present horizon, where there is a dialogue between pre-understanding, interpretation and sources of information (Koch, 1995). This includes the addressing of knowledge gaps in the past horizon (Paterson & Higgs, 2005).

As this study aims to understand the translation profession in Malaysia, the researcher first developed a pre-understanding of the research area by conducting a comprehensive literature review before going into the research proper. Findings from the literature review constitute the past horizons of this study. The outcome of the new research, which forms the present horizon of the study, would later be merged with the points of view and knowledge of the researcher to form a new understanding of the research subject. The existing knowledge gaps in the past horizon are bridged with the findings within the sphere of the present horizon. Hence, in order to illustrate the use of fusion of horizons, the findings for each aspect will be summarized in a table which will present the past horizon, present horizon, and the interpretation and implications of these horizons when fused together.

An invitation to participate in this study and a survey questionnaire were sent out via email to 500 translators in Malaysia. The respondents were identified from the mailing list of translators who are members of the Malaysian Translators' Association (MTA) and *Institut Terjemahan Buku Malaysia* (ITBM). Of the 500, a total of 50 translators filled out and returned the survey questionnaire for this study. 20 of the 50 respondents were purposively chosen to participate in the interview. The respondents of the interview are practising, experienced translators who possess academic qualifications in translation.

The questionnaire consisted of 31 items covering the following areas: demographic information; details of professional status and practice; respondents' perceptions of their profession; and the role of education and training in their profession. 99% of the questionnaire consisted of close-ended items. The close-ended items were set against the 1-5 point Likert scale. Only one open-ended response question was inserted at the end of the questionnaire to elicit written comments from respondents. The survey questionnaire was piloted on five Malaysian translators. Comments and suggestions from the pilot study were

taken into account in the further improvement of the questionnaire before the final survey was carried out. The questionnaires were analysed using Microsoft Excel, as only descriptive statistics was used in tabulating and presenting the numerical data for this study.

According to Zubaidah (2002), open interviewing for the purpose of data collection can be approached using an informal conversational style, a guided interview approach, or a standardized, open-ended interview. Each type of interview selected depends on the method of preparation, conceptualization and instrumentation, and the style and inclination of the researcher. This study is based on the standardized, open-ended interview. A series of questions was developed to guide the researcher in eliciting the responses needed for this study, yet some allowance was made for follow-up questions and prompts to gain responses which could indirectly contribute towards the results of the study.

The interview began by first asking the participants about their experiences in translating followed by various aspects of their job such as rate of pay, work life and their perceptions towards the translation profession. Next, the translators were asked to talk about whether their education had been instrumental in helping them to become an expert or professional. They were then asked to express their views on some of the most important issues, challenges and problems affecting their status as a translator. All interviews were transcribed. The participants' quotes which reveal salient issues are presented in thematic clusters as can be in the discussions that follow:

ISSUE 1: A WOMEN'S PROFESSION

TABLE 2. Gender of respondents

Gender breakdown	
Male	17 (34.0%)
Female	33 (66.0%)
Total	50 (100.0%)

Past research has clearly revealed that translation is a largely feminized profession (Kelly, Steward & Hegde, 2010; Société Française des Traducteurs-SFT, 2010). This phenomenon is reflected in the present study as two thirds of the respondents are also female. As the sample is drawn randomly, it strongly suggests that the percentage breakdown is a reliable indication of the actual percentage of the population of translators as a whole in Malaysia.

There are a number of explanations as to why women dominate the translation profession. Research conducted by Dam and Zethsen (2010), which compared the perceptions of both sexes towards the translation profession, revealed that women perceive the profession of translation as more prestigious than their male counterparts. Wolf (2007) posits that women-dominated professions are usually more subservient and least likely to go on strike. Hence, the translation profession lacks the power and authority which can help it stand as a profession on its own. Dam and Zethsen (2010), also cited women as a possible stumbling block towards the elevation of the status of professional translators, as their association with the field rendered the profession as 'part-time', flexible and home-based. These characteristics which are associated with the profession of translating could very well be one of the reasons the translation profession is viewed as an inferior profession compared to others. This argument is further supported in the following excerpts, where the respondent describes the reasons for taking on the job and her opinion on the gender bias in the translating profession.

'when I discovered this opportunity (translating) to work from home, I went and did a professional diploma (in translation)... the job is flexible I can work anytime I like and take care of my children.' [IW/M/R7]

'many I met via teraju (online translators community) also of course , most translators I find are mothers who are like me... so we have something in common you see.. I know very few not many men who are translators...'
[IW/M/R7]

Respondent 7's opinion on her profession presents one reason as to why translation is attractive to mothers. She appreciates the flexibility of workplace and time which allow mothers like her to earn an income from their living rooms with their children near them. Hence, the present horizon lends more evidence to support the past horizon.

Past horizon	Present horizon	Implication (Interpretation)
-Translator-respondents in past studies have been overwhelmingly female (Kelly et al, 2010; SFT, 2010) -Women see translation as prestigious (Dam & Zethsen, 2010) -Flexibility makes the profession weak (Wolf, 2007)	-A majority of Malaysian translators surveyed are female. -In Malaysia, women are attracted to the profession most likely due to the flexibility in the place and working time	-It provides a possible explanation as to why the profession is 'invisible', as most translators can work from home and therefore, may not possess characteristics which make them distinguishable in the public.

ISSUE 2: QUALIFICATION

The next indicator of status is the translators' academic or professional qualifications. The following discussion will focus on the data related to this indicator.

TABLE 3. Qualifications of respondents

	No of respondents
Diploma	2 (4.0%)
Bachelor Degree	29 (58.0%)
Master Degree	15 (30.0%)
Doctorate	4 (8.0%)
TOTAL	50 (100%)

All the respondents have some form of academic qualification and the highest percentage of the respondents possess a Bachelor degree. A further investigation during the interview revealed that 52% of the respondents have a diploma or at least a certificate in translation. This finding points to a possibility that for Malaysian translators, they could have graduated with degrees in fields other than translation but later, they decide to pursue a certificate or a diploma in translation in order to practice. This possible theory was confirmed by two respondents in the interview.

'...I started working as a naval officer in the navy for ten years, then I worked for a European company for 5 years and I started translating 10 years ago after taking my certificate in translation...' [IW/M/R8]

'...I actually did not take translation studies in university. I did a mathematics degree, when I discovered this opportunity to work from home. I went and did a professional diploma (in translating)...' [IW/M/R7]

It is therefore evident that some Malaysian translators practice translation with academic qualifications in fields not related to translation. Leech's (2008) findings attribute the public's poor image of translators to the lack of a standard entry-level qualification. As there

are no regulations on the level of qualifications needed to practise translating in Malaysia, it is highly likely for the image of the translation profession to be affected by this. Hence, it would be insightful to investigate the respondents' perception on education and its significance in their practice as translators.

TABLE 4. Respondents' statements about their education

	STATEMENTS	Mean Score Malaysia (n=50)
22	I need more training to be a professional translator.	3.67
23	Many translators that I know have qualifications	3.60
24	One can learn how to be a competent translator by receiving prior training	4.22

From the responses to statements 22-24 in the questionnaire as can be seen in the table above, it is evident that Malaysian translators feel that they need additional training to be professional translators. Overall, the respondents agree that one can gain competence in translating by undergoing training. However, the results of the interviews do not echo the findings of the study, as translators interviewed were of the opinion that it is not essential for translators to have received prior training before they began translating. They expressed a preference for practical experience over academic study and prior training:

'Not necessarily. If you are good in SL and TL, you do not really need to study translation if you possess sensitivity of the use of SL and TL, and the culture of SL and TL.' [IW/M/R2]

'it boils down to the art of translation, if you are good in the languages or have a flair and sensitivity for languages then you can translate without really having to receive proper training. But in order to secure better translation work from bigger companies, untrained translators would need to go for training to get the certificate.' [IW/M/R4]

'...when you (translator) want to apply for job you can say that I have a diploma here it is... and you get a better chance getting the job than the next person who doesn't have diploma but could be better than you...seriously the course does not make you a better translator... it depends ...' [IW/M/R7]

These perceptions can be explained in that there is no standard regulation to ensure all practising translators possess an appropriate academic qualification prior to commencing their practice. The lack of regulations would also lead to a lack of level of education required by the translators prior to taking up translating as a profession. Pym et al (2012) believes that the low status of translators in many developed countries can also be attributed to the fact that most clients in Europe and America prefer to engage the service of translators based on their experience and internal recruitment tests devised by clients, instead of looking at qualifications and membership of translators' associations. The similar observation was also made in Malaysia, where bilingual persons may be hired to translate even when they do not have any training in translation (Noraini, 2009). Godbout (2013), who studies credentialing of translators in Canada, discovered that one can substitute his/her academic qualification (bachelor in translation) with 4 years of working experience in translating. This further supports the fact that education is not seen as a pivotal element to the practice of translators.

Past Horizon	Present Horizon	Implication (interpretation)
-Academic qualification can be substituted by working experience (Godbout, 2009) -Translators do not believe that education & training are essential in their practice as translators (Katan, 2009). -Clients look to the experience translators have rather than their qualification when it comes to giving translation work (Noraini, 2009; Pym et al, 2012)	-Translators in Malaysia possess the relevant qualification to practice translating. -Malaysian translators also concur that education is not important to their practice as translators, though they do agree that having academic qualifications is useful in helping them to translate better or to secure clients.	-Challenges the notion of being a profession, as a professional possesses specialized skills and knowledge to practice his/her craft. -Jeopardizes professional exclusivity as translators can practice even when they do not have any qualifications, as it is not mandatory to the practice of a translator.

ISSUE 3: REMUNERATION

TABLE 5. Comparison of mean pay rates of translators in Malaysia, United Kingdom and Finland

	Malaysia	UK	Finland
Reported rate per word	RM 0.38 (0.10 Euro)	0.09 Euro	0.25 Euro
Recommended rate per word	RM 0.35 (0.08 Euro)	N/A	N/A

* Source: Malaysian Translators Association, Pym et al (2012)

To investigate the remuneration of translators, the rate as reported by the respondents was compared to the rate recommended by the Malaysian Translators' Association. The recommended rate charged by translators in the United Kingdom and Finland are also given for comparison. Both countries were chosen as they are European countries with an advanced translation market and they serve as a benchmark in this study.

The mean pay rate reported by the Malaysian respondents falls within the recommended range of rates given by MTA. In comparing the rates per word across countries, it was found that Finnish translators are better paid than those in the other three countries. Malaysian translators are paid as much as the UK translators if the Malaysian rate RM 0.38 per word is converted into Euro which is 0.10 Euro per word. As the rate can only represent a numerical significance, respondents were further probed via likert scale items and questions during the interview on their perception of the remuneration they receive.

TABLE 6. Respondents' statements on their income as translators

STATEMENTS	Mean Score (n=50)
20 I received a good income as a translator	3.66
21 One cannot make a living as a translator in Malaysia	2.36

Responses to statements 20 and 21 in the questionnaire show that the Malaysian translator-respondents in this study, who charge and are paid the rate as recommended by the association, are in agreement that they receive a good income as translators. In confirmation of this, they disagree with the statement that one cannot make a living as a translator in Malaysia. This finding contrasts with some of the past studies carried out in other countries where translators are poorly paid for their services. Feedback from the interview further echoed the sentiments expressed in the questionnaire as some respondents reiterated that Malaysian translators can earn a very good living.

‘Yes they are well paid now... With technological advancement, you can advertise yourself online and find and do work for agencies and clients overseas... Some translators earn more than 30,000 thousand a month... You can earn a good income if you are highly competent and are able to deliver.’ [IW/M/R4]

‘A translator can hit more than (MYR) 50,000a month ...if he or she really works very hard. You take big jobs and they rush you to finish over short period of time... you can add 50% to your fee... and they will pay ...’ [IW/M/R7]

‘...more than (MYR) 10,000 ...It fluctuates ... sometimes you get high around (MYR) 20,000...’ [IW/M/R8]

However, the respondents also highlighted the fact that translators who earn a good income provide service to clients who are mostly from multinational companies. Hence, it is evident that a translator’s remuneration is very much dependent on the profile of his/her clientele.

Past Horizon	Present Horizon	Implication (Interpretation)
-Translators earn a meagre income, with translating fees falling in selected countries (SFT, 2010 ; Pym et al, 2012)	-Malaysian translators’ rates fall within the recommended rates given by Malaysian Translators’ Association Some translators earn a very lucrative income by translating	-It is evident that the income of a translator is directly affected by the type of clients which translators obtain work from.

ISSUE 4: TRANSLATOR’S PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS THEIR PROFESSION

As a part of a larger study to profile the translators in Malaysia, the translators were queried on their perception of their translating practice and also on the translation profession as a whole.

TABLE 7. Translators’ perceptions of their profession

STATEMENTS	Mean Score (n=50)
19 I enjoy working as a translator	4.32
25 Translation is a profession, just like law and medicine	4.34
26 Translation is a highly regarded profession in the society	3.52

Even though the findings of the survey show that the translators generally feel that their role is recognized by society, respondents who were interviewed stated that the public on the whole does not recognize translators as professionals. Some respondents in the interviews gave explanations as to why the profession does not receive its due recognition. Most cited that the public neither has the awareness nor knows the importance of having translation work done by qualified translators.

‘People (mostly) are unaware of the profession...’ [SQ/M/R11]

‘...in Malaysia (translation) not yet considered as a professional career. They do not treat translation as a career. Not enough knowledge or exposure to the profession...’ [IW/M/R3]

‘...professionals in respective fields appreciate the role of translators, but the general public may not be involved (translating documents for

professional purposes) so they do not appreciate the role of translators...'
[IW/M/R5]

'...the problem is that we do not see them as professionals but they live as translators & interpreters in the court and government departments... Malaysia being multilingual nation we employ a lot of translators and interpreter in the judicial department, in banking, these people also work as translator... as a profession we do not see them as translators but more as officers...' [IW/M/R6]

'some work in the civil service as administrative and diplomatic officers... Some are in ITBM working as translators, trainers and editors... Some work in banks, many of them also work as editors with book publishers... many of them also translate part time, especially those working with civil service...' [IW/M/R10]

Respondent 6 and 10 in the interviews gave a very plausible reason as to why translation is a less prestigious profession compared to others. The reason is because the visibility of the profession is very blurred. While doctors and lawyers are prominent or visible because of the distinct characteristics of their profession (attire, place of work, use of jargon, public's perception of the profession), translators are distinctly less visible because they don other hats for example as writers, editors or proof-readers and are often tucked away behind cubicles and workstations. The respondents see this taking on of multiple roles as possibly resulting in the public seeing translators more in the other types of work they carry out than their real function as translators. For example, members of staff who translate documents for their companies are seen as clerks rather than translators.

Past horizon	Present Horizon	Interpretation & Implication
-The notion that translators in the United Kingdom lack 'visibility in public' (Leech, 2005)	-Translators are of the opinion that they are professionals, but the public lack the awareness on what they do and do not value their service.	-Contradiction between how the translators see themselves (as qualified professionals) and how the public sees them (as officers, clerks, secretary, part-timers)
-Translators are being treated as a clerk or a secretary (Bahk-Halberg 2007)	-Tied to the notion of invisibility, as translators in Malaysia don other, more prominent roles than that clearly related to translating work	-The invisibility of their profession plus the lack of exclusivity of the profession results in the low recognition and prestige accorded to translators.

ISSUE 5: UNFAIR COMPETITION AND UNPROFESSIONAL PRACTICES

Of the many issues which affect the status of the translators, most respondents lamented the fact that they have to face unfair competition and unprofessional practices in their profession, which altogether undermine the status of their profession. Most respondents cited having to compete with amateur translators, who charged less and produced unsatisfactory work. This can be explained by past studies in Malaysia and Canada, which point out that clients do not take the academic qualification of the translators into consideration when they hire translators (Canada Translation Industry Sectoral Committee -CTISC, 1999; Noraini, 2009).

Most respondents in this study attribute this situation to the fact that there is a lack of regulations to keep rogue practices in check. This further supports the findings of Wood

(2004), who observed that translators who breach the ethics and laws in their practice are not barred from practising but are allowed to continue.

'...some translators make false claims about their qualification and previous work experience as translators since there is no entity to check on their background...'
[SQ/M/R37]

'If someone (a translator) does not translate their documents correctly, there is no penalty or demerit...' [SQ/M/R45]

'...for the amateur translators ...they advertise themselves online and sometimes they charge lower in order to get the job...' [IW/M/R2]

One of the respondents gave a very detailed scenario of the translation industry, pinpointing websites and even television show producers who engage untrained translators for translating work.

'...so many untrained translators offering their services at a lower fee, which gives negative impact on the overall quality of translation, especially those engaged by media-conventional or electronics (TV and websites). This in turn affects the trained translators and tarnishes the professionalism as a whole...' [SQ/M/ R28]

Competing with amateur translators is a stumbling block to elevating the status of professional translators, as the competition would result in the public perceiving all translators as workers with minimal expectations as the amateurs are willing to accept assignments despite the low fee clients pay them. The quality of work from amateurs which is often below par also tarnishes the profession as translators are perceived as not taking their work seriously.

Past Horizon	Present Horizon	Implication (Interpretation)
-Amateur and untrained translators are able to secure work in the industry as the clients do not prioritize translators' academic qualifications in giving translation assignments (CTISC, 1999; Noraini, 2009) -Amateur translators who do not have qualification can be accepted into the translators' association in Canada if they can prove their work experience in translation. (Godbout, 2009)	-Competition with amateur translators is an issue which seriously affects the practice of translators -Most translators point out how there is no entity or a code of practice which hold translators accountable for their work in translating	-The implication due to the lack of professional exclusivity, where professional and trained translators are forced to compete side by side with amateur translators. -Possible reasons for unfair competition from amateurs: lack of role played by translators' association to protect the welfare of trained translators; public who do not value the service of professional translators

CONCLUSION

The study set out to examine the status of Malaysian translators and their perceptions about the profession. By applying the method of fusing past and present horizons in order to provide interpretation and explanation of the horizons, the researcher has gained insightful knowledge on the status of translators in Malaysia.

This study firstly validates the argument put forth by Sela-sheffy and Shlesinger (2008), namely that translation is a pink-collar profession as the majority of the respondents who were selected randomly for this study turned out to be female. Next, this study has

revealed that not all Malaysian translators possess the minimum qualification of at least a certificate or a diploma in translation. A lack of education and training in the translation field could very well affect translators being perceived as professionals. It is also disheartening to know that the translators who responded to this study do not see education as an important factor in their practice as translators.

An investigation on the rate of pay further revealed that the Malaysian translators are being paid rates which are recommended by the Malaysian Translators' Association (MTA). Some respondents also stated that the profile of the clientele plays an important role in determining the level of income earned; the translators who were interviewed revealed that translating can be a lucrative profession if one demonstrates competence and works for large multinational companies.

Some of the experiences shared by the translators during the interviews revealed the real challenges that stand in the way of promoting the status of their profession. Having to compete with amateurs has affected the credibility and exclusivity of the profession. The low status of translators is also related to the fact that any layperson that is bilingual can become a translator, when professional translators have had to spend years studying the art of translating and practising their craft. Hence, no distinction is made between the untrained, unqualified fledgling translators and the professional translators who have the relevant qualifications to be practitioners. This clearly puts the professional translators at a disadvantage, as they have no way of securing themselves against competition from amateur translators, who charge lower fees to procure work.

In light of the findings of this study, there is an urgent need to form a professional body to represent translators in Malaysia. Setting up of a professional body is seen as the best step in registering the practising translators and giving them legal recognition and certification to practice translating. This will also allow for standardization of service rates and ensure that professional translators do not lose out when competing with amateur translators. The professional body that is set up would also be a representative association to liaise with the government and related agencies to ensure the welfare of translators as a whole.

Apart from setting up of a regulatory body, there is also a need to educate the public on the merits of engaging professional translators to do translation work and on the meaningful contribution translators make to society. This would help change the perceptions of the public towards translators and would also encourage them to engage the service of professional translators to carry out their assignments. Providing a legal representative body and educating the public would definitely help change the perceptions of translators towards their profession. With all of these steps taken, it is hoped that one day translating will gain a full-fledged professional status and will be placed on par with other established professions in society.

As this research has shed light on the status and self-perceptions of translators in Malaysia, further efforts can be directed to investigate in greater depth other aspects which are closely related to establishing the professional status of a translator. These aspects include professional development, adherence to a code of ethics, the use of quality standards and the possible barriers standing in the way of the accreditation of translators and the institutionalisation of a professional body for translators. Alternatively, similar research can also be done on a bigger scale to include more translators. The number of respondents should be randomly selected and substantial enough to represent the population of professional translators in East and West Malaysia or could even be extended to the ASEAN region. This would then provide an Asian perspective to complement the study on the status of translators in the European Union conducted by Pym et al (2012).

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