

BOOK REVIEWS

Attila IMRE

AN INTRODUCTION TO TRANSLATOR STUDIES

Editura Universității “Transilvania”, Brașov, 2020, 218 pp.
ISBN 978-606-19-1285-8

Titela VÎLCEANU
University of Craiova

As announced by the title, i.e., *An Introduction to Translator Studies*, the book has an innovative and complex character – almost half a century ago, in 1972, Holmes paved the way for Translation Studies, in full awareness of the need for a well-grounded, coherent theory of translation beyond empirical research. In the new millenium we are witnessing a paradigm shift: from process- and product-oriented views to agent-centredness. In fact, *translatorial action* (Holz- Mänttari, 1984; Nord, 1997; Schäffner, 1998) has long been highlighted by functionalism, although to my best knowledge, the name and/or the (sub)field of *Translator Studies* have not been (widely) acknowledged yet (Chesterman, 2009; Cook, 2015). Needless to say that within the well-established discipline of Translation Studies, translators are focused on rare occasions, mainly when discussing their competence with a view to designing competence-based curricula and assuring translation quality.

It is within this context that Attila Imre’s book (2020) might be considered to advocate translatorship in the age of globalisation and technological advancement, when polarised discussions about CAT tools and human translation seem to proliferate. Admittedly, the author overtly states that translators should become more visible (drawing on Venuti, 1994), and should raise the status and prestige of their profession.

The structure and organisation of the book are coherent, and the holistic approach indicates a global vision alongside (meta)cognitive and methodological flexibility. Throughout the book the information is presented in a systematic way,

providing multilayered insights deriving from the author's experience and expertise as a translator, translator trainer/academic, researcher. The main chapters are fully rounded by *Tasks* involving critical thinking skills, and by the Annexes as supporting evidence.

The first chapter, *The Importance of Translation*, underpins a synchronic approach to the complex interplay between language, culture, translation and technology. From a sociological and market-oriented perspective, translation is demand-driven and the translator is "a service provider" (p. 17), a claim supported by different statistics. The "evergreen" question of translation as an art, craft or science seems to lead to an integrated solution: translation is an art (starting as a pastime, going beyond literary translation to new media translation), craft – associated with "the professional level" (p. 19). The author postulates "the @evolution of translation" (p. 20, in line with Gouadec, 2007) against the background of a successful industry in which specialized translation (coming in different sizes and shapes) prevails. Defining and operationalizing the key notion of *translation*, Imre indicates the "clash of theories" (p. 24): translation as communication, translation as text or code interpretation, etc. The lower status of translation as compared to the original, triggering the translator's marginal status, is denied when laying down the principle of equal authenticity governing the EU translation activity. By inferencing, we understand that translation cumulatively means transgression, linguistic and cultural immersion, cultural mediation and compliance with professional ethics. In its contemporary recast, *equivalence* becomes *effectiveness* (p. 29) or the client's degree of satisfaction (p. 31) as the author suggests following the examination of seminal theories and adopting a pragmatic functional stance. Furthermore, on the global market, *translation* should be rather replaced by *translation project*, on account of its purpose and quality (p. 33). Translation as relevant communication assigns the translator the role of cultural mediator undertaking domestication and localization while downsizing the source text. On a par with economic and geopolitical power, language power differentials are present in translation (see, for instance, the few localized versions of Microsoft in German, French, Japanese, whereas in Romania, the English original text is retained – pp. 41-42). Although not connected by the author in a direct way, the questions of the impact of technology on the future of English and on the future of translation, allegedly point to the criteria of reliability and wide spread of technology – in this respect, we note Imre's detail-oriented approach to and steady concern with *globalization*, *internationalization* and *localization* at the descriptive and reflective levels.

The second chapter is entitled ambiguously: *Translator Management*, which invites to two different readings: actively – the translator as a manager, or passively – the translator being managed by an unspecified agent. The status of the translator should be linked to prestige - although officially recognized, the

translator still striving for acquiring a high profile. Specialization is understood in terms of field (literary vs. non-literary translators), (self-)employability (in-house / "dependent" (Robinson 61) translators vs. freelancers / "independent" translators (Robinson 62)), location (office-based, home-based and "remote" translators (Gouadec 102)), but, in spite of the rising demand for professionals/specialized translators, there is such a (misleading) category as "field-independent" translators, comprising translation teachers, trainers and theorists (Robinson 60). In line with Imre, we strongly believe in the existence of borderline cases in the sense that teachers, trainers and theorists can also activate as translators. Discussing the translation job profile and marketplace, the author points out to the underlying complexity of the translation industry which, unfortunately, does not benefit from reliable statistics to describe it accurately in terms of the number of translators vs. the number of interpreters, active vs. occasional translators, professionals vs. non-professionals undertaking translation work, etc. Imre aptly identifies the difficulties associated with setting up the translation business, securing clientele, and developing transversal skills - marketing, accounting, digital - which seem to turn into specific ones, further incorporated into the overarching notion of *translation competence* (knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, demonstrable behaviour). Therefore, *translation competence* sub-sums an array of skills (a preferred term from a hands-on perspective): "IT, decision making, communication, language, terminology management, project management and cultural understanding", complemented by "managerial skills" (p. 83) and marketing "self-advertising" skills (p. 93) in the case of freelance translators. The author dwells on the topical issue of translation quality assurance, in full awareness that there is no error-free translation and that a new typology of errors has emerged due to the (improper) use of MT and CAT tools; he is familiar with the available software, even with the (post)editing one, critically discussing the related strategic benefits and costs. The translator's competence and job profile are associated with social skills and personality traits, such as self-confidence, discipline, emotional intelligence, lifelong learning orientation, working under pressure, loyalty, etc. (p. 87ff). The discussions centered on pricing / translator's fees are based on authentic data and provide a basis for comparison of the market-driven phenomenon in different countries across the world from a dynamic perspective. Indirectly, the figures presented may be an indication of professionalization and translation policy making.

The third chapter, *Managing Cont(r)acts*, is mainly anchored in business psychology and communication frameworks, in an attempt to determine the controlling factors and indicators of a successful translation business: the number of clients (both regular and irregular), the clients' degree of satisfaction, etc. Tips and tricks of the trade are provided: it is advisable to start with "easy targets" (p.

128) – friends, relatives, acquaintances who are most likely to credit the translator, or with agencies; the overriding attitude should be *honesty* to clients. In what follows, the whole procedure and governing rules ((e-)mail, phone, video and social media, telemarketing ethics) of contacting clients and building sustainable professional relations is developed, again, the author inserting valuable advice such as creating a bilingual, or, at least, an English “convincing professional website” instead of direct cold contact (p. 138) in order to provide updated information about the translation tools used, client satisfaction (testimonials or referrals), fees, translation samples, etc. The next step involves negotiation and contract drafting – Imre warns novice translators against pitfalls such as “test translations” and “the absence of a purchase order”, as well as against sensitive issues such as copyright, confidentiality, support, technical specifications, quality assurance (proofreading, editing), payment and deadline, security measures (non-competition and completeness) (p. 138 ff.). Imre also raises the question of “happy clients” (p. 144), i.e., of meeting the clients’ needs and interests. Pragmatically, we associate “happy clients” with felicity conditions, therefore, with the (right) parties executing the contract correctly, completely and honestly. The professional service provision is taken to the next level by implementing “the after service” (drawing on the Japanese model promoted by Chriss, 2002; p. 145). Axiomatically, Imre states that “The major leverage of professional translators is still their preparedness” (p. 146), which might translate as identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

The fourth chapter, *Translator Status*, can be considered a refocus on the translator’s professionalization. It is true that the question of the translator as a professional has been tackled incidentally in the previous chapters, but this time it is addressed systematically, from top-down and bottom-up perspectives alike. More than half a century after the official recognition of the profession (in 1953 when FIT (Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs) was established in Paris), the translators are still keeping a low profile; to make matters worse, some of the regulations for certifying the translators are controversial, while the growing popularity and availability of online translation tools represent a menace that “will not lead to a more respectful and authoritative profession”, let alone professional pride and self-esteem. On the contrary, “job dissatisfaction” (p. 152ff.) is fuelled by the lack of consideration, constant pressure for low-cost service provision in parallel with the use of advanced technology, etc. Above all, “the market disorder”, allowing for a large number of translators “with questionable qualifications and skills” (p. 152), the rather limited authority of professional bodies (national translators’ associations), binding legal matters (such as copyright) act as deterrents. In other words, *authorship* and *ownership* of translation need to be settled. Another argument sustaining the idea of the low-profile translator, as an endangered species (metaphorically speaking), lies in the

parallel, emerging denominations of the profession: “language expert, technical expert, cultural expert, terminologist, project manager, language assistant, specialist in language and culture, documentation manager, assistant manager” (cf. Gouadec, 245, cited by Imre, p. 154). The translator’s *invisibility* (Venuti, 1994), perhaps, with the notable exceptions of literary translators who are acknowledged by having their names on the inside cover of the translated book (enjoying a “cultural, symbolic and social” capital – Dollerup 138–39, cited by Imre, p. 158) and of audiovisual translators present in databases due to crowdsourcing initiatives, becomes a question of expertise, financial security, fame and power. This diagnosis is followed by suggesting that qualified translators are on demand on the market, and that translator training programmes or courses offered by many universities, some of them having the EMT quality label, and the use of dedicated software (mainly, SDL Trados and memoQ) in academic training have resulted in benchmarks. On the other hand, paradoxically, these highly qualified graduates are not (fully) assimilated by the market on account of charging higher rates. Furthermore, Imre empowers translators by endorsing the learnability and manageability of translation via continuous training and certification by the competent authorities (it is the case of *sworn translators*, for instance). The in-depth analysis of the Romanian situation (by contrast or comparison with other countries worldwide) is based on a multisided perspective (practitioner, researcher, teacher/trainer) – the observations are truthful and unbiased. The tone is optimistic: “it is the market that truly regulates this status” – although we disagree, in the sense that we do not believe that the Romanian market has established mechanisms for the natural selection of highly qualified and high-performance translators, we admit that small steps have been taken in the right direction. Furthermore, as long as quality top ranks for the clients (rather than low price), there is still hope that human translation is here to stay in spite of technological advancement and that the status of the translator profession will rise.

The fifth chapter, *Translators and Ethics*, investigates the question of professional conduct and accountability in an age in which freelance translators are numerous, in which the language industry has grown steadily and the internet has opened up endless possibilities of work and collaboration. The author specifies that morality means norm-governed behaviour in a narrow sense (right vs. wrong) whereas ethics is mostly concerned with the quality of human life (professional life, included), and compliance with cultural norms (organizational culture). In this context, the translators’ codes of ethics (CoE) or “rulebooks” may be enforced only to the members of professional associations (as communities of practice) – Imre lists the well-known *Translator’s Charter* (we add: approved at Dubrovnik in 1976, amended in Oslo in 1994) and the *Nairobi Declaration* (1976) sharing the principles of *confidentiality* and *competence* (p. 178). ISOs should be also

regarded as CoEs (e.g., EN ISO 17100); some authors even go as far as to propose a *Hieronymic oath* (Chesterman, 2001), “similar to the Hippocratic Oath taken by physicians” (p. 181). Prescriptive views are enshrined by having the translators translate into their mother tongue or in a language in which they have nativelike proficiency. According to Imre, any CoE should equally refer to the translation-client relationship – however, the translator seems to be “trapped” (p. 183) if client-orientation is understood in terms of securing client satisfaction at all costs, and Imre remains skeptical about the possibility of “educating the clients” (p. 184). Another important ethical dimension is related to competition, collaboration and networking among translators and translation agencies, or among freelance translators. Quality assurance falls within the scope of ethical conduct, too – in this regard, it means seeking proofreading, rejecting offers for which the translator is not qualified (lack of competence) or rejecting tight deadlines that would lead to compromise on the quality of the target text, although in practice this is not always a viable option. Imre concludes that “in a less and less regulated market and industry”, work ethics or CoEs are justified (p. 189) and likely to serve as flexible guidelines in such a fast-changing field of activity, and recommends checking against them (p. 192).

The final *Conclusions* put the preliminary ones (deriving from each chapter) in a nutshell, while also putting faith in the future of translation as a real-life purpose activity, managed by a qualified human resource. We would add that closer cooperation between translators, academia, the industry, and policy makers, based on mutual inputs, will boost “long-term engagement with the professional life and one-off duties”, and joint events and projects will strengthen quality benchmarks (Vilceanu 113).

The 13-page list of *References* (including print books and webography) is indicative of well-grounded research, as well as of the critical, constructive and creative exploitation of mainstream literature and examples of good practice. Last but not least, we consider that another important merit of the book lies in the fact that the insightful comments of the author may act as useful guidelines for translation coaching, which, in our opinion is still in the making in the Romanian (academic) environment and elsewhere, to say the least.

Works Cited

- Chesterman, Andrew. “Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath”. *The Translator*, 7(2), 139-154, 2001. DOI:[10.1080/13556509.2001.10799097](https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2001.10799097).
- Chesterman, Andrew. “The Name and Nature of Translator Studies”. *Hermes - Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, 42 (2009): 13-22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlc.v22i42.96844>.
- Cook, Guy. *Translation in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

- Chriss, Roger. *Translation as a profession*. 2002. DOI: <http://www.huntrans124.com/chriss.pdf>.
- Dollerup, Cay. *Basics of Translation Studies*. Iași: Institutul European, 2006.
- Gouadec, Daniel. *Translation as a Profession*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing, 2007.
- Holmes, James S. "The Name and Nature of Translation Studies". *Holmes, J.S., Translated Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*, 67-80, 1972, reprinted in *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Venuti, Lawrence. London and New York: Routledge, 172-185, 2000.
- Holz-Mänttari, Justa. *Translatorisches Handeln : Theorie und Methode*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1984.
- Nord, Christiane. *Translating as a Purposeful Activity. Functionalist Approaches Explained*. Manchester: St. Jerome Publishing, 1997.
- Robinson, Douglas. *Becoming a Translator. An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Translation* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge, 2003.
- Schäffner, Christina. Ed. *Translation and Quality*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Vilceanu, Titela. *Dynamic Interfaces of Translation, Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication*. Craiova: Universitaria, 2017.

BIONOTE

Associate Professor **TITELA VÎLCEANU**, PhD, Department of British-American and German Studies, Faculty of Letters; Director of The Department of Publications and Media, University of Craiova. Her teaching and research focus is on *Translation Studies*, *Legal English*, *Pragmatics* and *Intercultural communication*. She is also a Romanian language linguistic administrator (AD5) in the field of translation, certified by the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) - European Commission. She has attended numerous international conferences in country and abroad, and she has authored about 50 articles and 4 books. She has participated in 11 international interdisciplinary research programmes.

E-mail: elavilceanu@yahoo.com

