



Attila Imre: *An Introduction to Translator Studies*

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Review by

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The very title of the book, *An Introduction to Translator Studies*, points to the fact that the author's focus is on the translator as one of the key agents in the translation process. *Translator studies* is a fairly new direction in translation research, identified by Chesterman (2009), who introduced the term to refer to investigations focusing “primarily and explicitly on the agents involved in translation, for instance on their activities or attitudes, their interaction with their social and technical environment, or their history and influence” (2009: 20). For Attila Imre, this approach materializes into a description of many relevant aspects of the translator's job, in an attempt to provide guidance for the main target readers, i.e. the “novice” or “would-be” translators, “who are interested in the translator's common and ever-growing challenges” (p. 11).

The author discusses at length both theoretical and, most importantly, practical issues which shape the translator's training and career from the relationship between translation and communication or translation and language to tips on how to interact with clients or how to start one's business as a freelance translator. He draws attention to the fact that, although translation is “an ancient field of activity” (p. 15), his aim is to “put the translator in the limelight of the 21st century” (p. 56), which means looking at traditional linguistic and cultural competences in the light of globalization and of the development of technology (CAT tools, machine translation, etc.), which have engendered new types of texts and new ways of translating, changing irreversibly the global translation market in terms of expectations and interactions. It should be mentioned that the topics are discussed in the context of the global translation market in general and/or at the level of the European Union and its various members, with an emphasis on Romania and Hungary.

The volume consists of five main chapters, divided into sections and subsections, guiding the reader through a wealth of information. In chapter one (“The Importance of Translation”), the author states plainly that he will investigate translation as “a *product* and a *service*” (p. 17) and the translator as “first and foremost a service provider” (p. 18). Special attention is paid to the relationship between translation on the one hand and language, communication, and culture on the other hand in the 21st century, considering “the impact of the development and present state of information technology (IT), globalization, internationalization, localization and translation (GILT), resulting in particular challenges for both translators and translations” (p. 16). These challenges pertaining to technology, business, and ethics are presented in detail throughout the entire volume. The first chapter deals with a number of definitions and theories of translation, reflecting a myriad of focal points, which underline the complexity of the term and of the field it stands for. Among the multitude of aspects it addresses, there are: the relationship between the original and its translation, the translator’s status, the idea of perfect translation, the translation of literary texts versus the translation of non-literary texts. It discusses translation in connection with traditional concepts, such as equivalence, domestication, foreignization, but also with newer ones, such as task, activity, service, project, which pertain to translation management. The last part of this chapter is dedicated to the (sometimes turbulent) relationship between translation and technology, stating that computers (and the Internet) have revolutionized the field through the emergence of CAT tools, translation memories, term bases, and (neural) machine translation, giving rise to the phenomena abbreviated as GILT, a blessing and a curse for the translator.

The pragmatic approach of the volume becomes more visible in the second chapter (“Translator Management”), which starts by clarifying the notion of translator: defining the translator in the present-day context, identifying the various types of translators (professional versus amateur translators, full-time versus part-time versus occasional translators, in-house versus freelance translators), describing the translator’s marketplace, and attempting to provide a quantitative analysis of the translation industry – which proves to be a difficult task in the absence of reliable statistics. The author also emphasizes the competences that a 21st-century translator needs: linguistic, cultural, domain-specific, translation, research, and technical competence, the last two having changed considerably in the age of computers and the Internet; for example, research competence used to refer to searching for information in a limited amount of resources, while today it means coping with a tidal wave of information coming from an increasing number of sources. Also, technical competence now refers to being proficient in using IT tools and systems – “translators already know that computer literacy is a must” (p. 79) – and keeping up to date with the latest developments in the

relevant technology. In addition to competences, the translator's profile includes certain character traits such as the willingness for lifelong learning, the ability to work under pressure or in isolation, loyalty, or humility towards the text.

Having sketched the translator's profile, the author brings forth the concept of self-management applied to freelance translators, considering that "a good start-up would have to deal with the multitude of roles a one-person-translation agency is faced with" (p. 92). The discussion on self-management centres on some of the main aspects of project management such as visibility (self-advertising), time, and money. Thus, self-advertising can be achieved through various instruments such as the CV, the business card, the website, and through networking, joining professional associations. Time management is concerned with the role played by prioritizing, assessing the translator's availability correctly, setting realistic deadlines and complying with them, while in managing finances a freelance translator should always take into account the workload, the speed, the standard rates, as well as surcharges and discounts, the taxes owed, and, at the same time, keep an eye out for possible financial threats, e.g. disloyal competition, lack of clients.

Chapter three ("Managing Cont(r)acts") enlarges on the relationship between translators, especially freelance translators, and clients, describing the stages in building such a relationship: initiating the communication with the potential clients via the available means (email, phone, social media) and/or using advertising techniques (e.g. cold contacting); negotiating and signing contracts with the future clients; maintaining the relationship with the clients. The author believes that "negotiating with the client is the extension of self-management skills of the translator" (p. 137), who must pay close attention to all the contract clauses (e.g. confidentiality, content, technical issues, payment and deadlines, conflict resolution). Once the contract is signed, the translators must strive to keep the clients "happy" on a very competitive market, by constantly producing high-quality work, paying attention to clients' needs, showing flexibility, preserving their credibility, etc.

In chapter four ("Translator Status"), the author is preoccupied with identifying the factors that influence (or even determine) the low status of translators such as the high number of practitioners, the invisibility of the profession, the market disorder, or the decreasing pay rates. To counterbalance this view, the chapter also presents factors that can contribute to raising the status of the profession. It is interesting to note that, although the role of higher education for translators is discussed in this second category, the author brings forth a number of very sceptical opinions about the potential of most university programmes to adequately prepare translators for the current job market, adding that "no qualifications are needed to become a (general) translator" (p. 165). This chapter also tries to clarify the terminology used to refer to translators recognized by the state, who may be called *authorized*, *sworn*, or *certified*, terms which provide

little information about the translators' educational background or domain of specialization. To support this clarification, the author provides in five appendices at the end of the book the texts used by translators and notaries public (where applicable) to signal a certified translation in English, Romanian, and Hungarian.

The final chapter of the book ("Translators and Ethics") provides an overview of the existing codes of ethics adopted by various translator associations, regulating the relationship between translators on the one hand and the text, the client, or the other professionals in the field (proofreaders, experts, etc.) on the other. Codes of ethics also try to define the translators' ethical conduct, advising them to strive for the best-quality translation, to refuse projects in areas where they are not competent enough or for which the deadline is too tight, to show loyalty to the client, or to be fair in setting the translation rates. When discussing the validity and impact of these documents, the author admits they are limited by the fact that joining an association is voluntary or that many translators operate outside the business (for example, occasional translators). In fact, this state of affairs prompts us to agree with Baker (2011: 274), who claimed that "we need to develop critical skills that can enable translators and interpreters to make ethical decisions for themselves, rather than have to fall back uncritically on abstract codes drawn up by their employers or the associations that represent them".

This brief outline of the main chapters shows that, although the book focuses on the translator, the translator's perspective is not the only one that the author embraces: there are various actors in the translation business that need to be considered – the client, the market conditions, the education institutions, the translator associations –, all of which represent different vantage points that are used to underline the many facets of the translator's job.

In addition, the chapters are accompanied by sets of diverse tasks which attempt to raise awareness of the various issues discussed therein. The readers are asked, among other things, to argue for or against certain ideas: for instance, literary translation is more difficult than specialized translation (p. 59), a non-paying client should be blacklisted and the news circulated on specialized forums (p. 148), translators should split the gains if they rely on highly skilled experts (p. 192); to compile lists of materials or documents, e.g. "collect ten proverbs in your native language" (p. 58), "create a portfolio with the necessary exam requirements and samples to obtain the authorisation in Romania" (p. 173); to assess their own skills or equipment, e.g. "describe your computer/laptop, in a similar way to major websites selling these products" (p. 124), can you manage money/time efficiently? (p. 124), are you a good negotiator? (p. 148); to design a business card or a logo (p. 124); to draft a CV (p. 124) or a translation contract (p. 148). The activities are clearly targeted at the translation student or novice and are meant to check their comprehension of the content but also to stimulate them to think of translation projects as real-life situations.

The volume includes a vast list of references in which both well-established authors and newer resources are present. A large portion of this section is dedicated to online sources, most of which were introduced in the 203 footnotes in the text. This is indicative of the fact that the book can be seen as more than a literature review in the classical sense; it is also an exploration of the relevant information available on the websites of companies, research institutes, translators' associations, the institutions of the European Union, which is synthesised in the sections of each chapter.

As stated by the author, the target readers are novice translators or, we might add, translator students. However, in our opinion, the book is also aimed indirectly at teachers, especially those involved in training future translators, a claim supported by the very attitude of the author (a teacher himself), who offers advice on empirical issues and affords readers the opportunity to check their understanding of the text through the proposed tasks, a rather pedagogical approach. Both categories of readers can interpret the material in a positive as well as in a negative key. From the point of view of a prospective translator, this volume has the advantage of supplying abundant information on the practical aspects of getting started or operating as a freelance translator, which are usually less explored in the literature. It formulates guidelines for future translation professionals based on the current state of the business, from drafting a CV or a business card to approaching clients, from negotiating a contract to saving one's work and performing regular backups – no aspect of the job seems to be considered too unimportant by the author.

Nevertheless, at the same time, prospective translators might be overwhelmed by this large amount of information or become discouraged by the complexity of the business or by the pessimistic outlook that the author brings into discussion from time to time. Faced with the cold reality that, “as neither education nor training is officially required (although recommended), the market remains rather self-regulated and translators are associated with uncertain professional skills, a situation explaining a good part of low professional status” (p. 171) or that “the ‘new’ translator must be a jack-of-all-trades” (p. 171) (which begs the question “master of none?”), some translator trainees might change their minds about pursuing a career in this field. On the other hand, those who continue on this path will do so fully aware of the difficulties ahead, knowing what they might expect in terms of working conditions or professional status.

For teachers (especially those involved in training future translators in Romania), this volume confirms the realization that sometimes there is little they can do to help future translators in the framework of translation programmes (most of which) targeted at philology students in Romania, which is in line with the author's opinion that “university BA and MA level specializations may not necessarily endow would-be translators with competence characteristic of

professionals” (p. 190). This could be partially explained by the students’ low motivation in acquiring solely through theory values and principles like honesty, loyalty, or confidentiality, which are essential in the translator’s job. Whereas exposure to real translation situations and/or real-life translators might work better than a hypothetical classroom context, this alternative is not always easy to implement in the curriculum. Moreover, students often fail to apply the appropriate work ethics to their school assignments. Thus, “omitting the deadline is very unprofessional” (p. 187), and the same is true for submitting a translation which was not proofread or which the student obviously failed to check, at least at the basic level of spelling and grammar, a situation which still occurs in translation classes, showing that at times students are not at all aware of the work they are performing.

Also, the author validates the idea held by many teachers that preparing students for the translation field entails more than linguistic guidance or familiarizing them with the theory of translation: “experts know that language skills are simply not enough to become an expert in translation or interpretation” (p. 160) – it involves preparing them for a complex job which they may decide to approach on their own as freelance translators; hence “the education program should encapsulate management of time, money and clients” (p. 162) besides the relevant technology. However, the truth is that most schools in Romania are hardly equipped to mimic, for example, the time constraints under which translators regularly operate – there is little room for negotiating deadlines between teachers and students – or to keep up with the technological updates or to offer a hands-on approach to dimensions such as payment, job management, or client interactions. In fact, it would be very difficult for teachers or students to survey the business due to – as the author himself points out – the lack of reliable or up-to-date information in many areas of the translation industry (e.g. the number of freelance translators or of professional translators, the pricing) and the constant fluctuations that affect the field temporally and geographically (e.g. the most widespread language combinations, the technology used, the workload, the volume of clients). In this context, it is easier to understand why most university study programmes aimed at translator training have not fully embraced *translator studies* and why, contrary to Chesterman’s (2009: 15) observation, texts continue to be primary, while the translators themselves are secondary.

In conclusion, in this volume, Attila Imre proves to be a keen observer of translation as a profession, paying close attention to its evolution in the 21st century, when “there are more and more over-educated people, who – partially due to almost regular economic crises – try to prove their talents in the field of translation” (p. 170). In the light of the many challenges facing them, translators “might become either highly successful or reluctant to adapt to the technological challenges and shrinking wages, leaving space for newcomers

and non-professionals alike” (p. 15), leading to a “less and less regulated market and industry” (p. 189). However, above all, we believe that *An Introduction to Translator Studies* testifies to the author’s interest in and preoccupation with training prospective translators, his endeavour to answer their questions about the profession. It is true that, at times, the outlook is rather dark, the obstacles described seem almost insurmountable, and the career too taxing or not rewarding enough, but this does not stop the author from offering guidance to would-be translators, relying on his experience as a teacher and a translator. The book – the latest in a series – reflects, beyond any doubt, the author’s fascination for this complex and demanding profession and his unwavering efforts to better understand it and to adequately describe it.

References

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