Pym, Anthony, Grin, François, Sfreddo, Claudio and Chan, Andy (2013). *The Status of the Translation Profession in the European Union.* London/New York: Anthem Press, pp. 190, £60/$99 (Hbk) or £25/$40 (Pbk). ISBN 9780857281265 (Hbk)/9781783083473 (Pbk).

"The status of translators … concerns the *perception* of a translator's value … Status is created by a set of social signals." (vii)

Thus begin the "numerous stories" that this book has to tell – of countries, of translator associations, and of segments of the translation profession. It describes how translators "signal" their status – skills, competence and reliability, *inter alia* – to buyers who lack the ability to judge the product they are buying (the authors draw a disconcerting parallel here between translations, legal services, and used cars). Such "signals" include things like academic qualifications, accreditation, and membership of professional associations, and the central argument that underpins the discussion of them is that "most of the traditional signals are failing" (vii) and that this is causing disorder in the market. The book is based on a literature review supported and validated by country profiles to which representatives of different sections of the profession have also contributed, though this is not an empirical study.

The book comprises six chapters, including eight case studies (Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, with the USA, Canada, and Australia as comparators), discussions of sociological and economic modelling, and some "policy options for enhanced signalling". Eight general recommendations and five extremely informative Appendices complete the survey.

And an impressive survey it is, too. Key terms are defined, to clarify the scope of the research, and an account is given of how translators are represented in official statistics and of specific professional segments ("sworn", "authorised", and "legal" translation). There is a particularly interesting overview of the role of translator associations that has not, to my knowledge, previously been undertaken, alongside a brief discussion of the market value of membership of such bodies.

The case studies focus on two broad questions for each country: the relationship between academic training and professional certification; and the historical development of these two elements as signalling mechanisms. Again, the thoroughness of the survey is admirable. However, there are some perhaps unwarranted assumptions and misperceptions. For example, the UK case study uses an assumption that the country "has 3.25 per cent of the world potential market" to argue that "it might have 10,420 professional translators and interpreters" (48),

and that, given the combined membership of the professional associations after adjusting for dual membership, this gives a "very high 76.7 percent" (49) of association membership, something that feels improbably high, while the validity of correlating potential market share with numbers of practitioners is not fully explained. The profile of the profession is not further nuanced: para-professionals (most notably project managers in translation companies) are excluded, and there is no acknowledgement that about 30% of UK freelance translators work part-time (Fraser and Gold, 2011), although the issue of part-time working as part of "pluri-employment" (77) is discussed more generally in a later chapter. The authors also allude to "the move to outsource government translation and interpreting services to a private company" (49), whereas only court interpreting has (so far, at least) been outsourced (https://www.justice.gov.uk/courts/interpreter-guidance).

Chapters 4 and 5 are the most interesting sections of the book. Under the heading "Sociological modelling", the data obtained from the case studies are framed in a broader discussion of such crucial areas as models of professionalism, the changing role of translator associations and the role of employer groups, the female domination of the profession, the high proportion of part-timers and freelancers, and a fascinating comparison of translators and computer engineers as "emerging professions" (83-88). Meanwhile, chapter 5 on "Economic modelling" considers information on rates of pay and earnings and uses a sophisticated set of statistical tools to look at market equilibrium between quality and price.

The final chapter, "Policy options for enhanced signalling", unites all these threads in a discussion of options for "policy or some kind of public intervention regarding the existing [status] signalling mechanisms" (109), illustrated by a SWOT analysis of the main policy options, which underpins the all-important but brief final recommendations.

The main shortcoming of this painstaking and thought-provoking book is that, despite its detailed literature survey, sophisticated statistical modelling, and careful analysis, the central argument – that "most of the traditional status signals are failing" and, therefore, "translation service buyers cannot effectively determine the quality of a translator" (5) – is not adequately substantiated. While there is some evidence – albeit anecdotal – of "competition among practitioners" (something translation shares with virtually all professions and, indeed, crafts) and that "unskilled outsiders cannot be easily excluded from the labour market" (72), the authors offer no evidence of "a 'vicious cycle' [sic] of unprofessional behaviour and mistrust of practitioners" or of a high "mobility ratio" (that is, professionals leaving the profession). Indeed, other surveys and online forum discussions show a high regard for Codes of Conduct and reveal that practitioners regularly exchange information, warning colleagues

about unsatisfactory agencies and companies, and actually divest themselves of unsatisfactory clients rather than the other way round.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding that the authors had essentially conducted a literature review, I felt that the omission of the views of users – translation agencies or companies and corporate language services – was a major omission: users are arguably in the strongest position to describe what most effectively signals quality to them.

Since the work for this book was done, the EU's Directorate-General for Translation and the two main UK associations, CIOL and ITI, have staged a collaborative event entitled "Future-proofing the profession: equipping the next generation of translators", including recommendations to stakeholders (the full report can be viewed at www.iol.org.uk/images/Events/FPP/FPP-Report.pdf). The CIOL also conducted a survey of practitioners, academics and translation company professionals (www.iol.org.uk/images/Events/FPP/FPP-Survey.pdf). Both documents place heavy emphasis on training – not just initial training or certification but also Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Well over half of all respondents (57%) believed CPD should be actively promoted, with a further 29% supporting a move to make it compulsory and just 12% believing it should continue to be voluntary (as it is under the CIOL Code of Conduct; the ITI Code makes it mandatory). Almost 100% of respondents believed that the professional associations are the best providers of such training. On the (admittedly limited) basis of this survey, it is clear that practitioners are informed by what their clients are telling them – and that their clients are telling them that ongoing skills development is a key signalling mechanism.

Bibliography

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