

The Professional Profile of the Translator of Specialist Texts in Poland

Introduction

The reason for giving particular attention to the translator of specialist texts in the present paper is that it is specialist texts that occupy the main position on the translation market nowadays. Although it is impossible to establish the exact numbers to represent the proportion of various types of translation performed currently, already in 1994 J. Sager [1: 297] estimated that literary translation amounts to merely 0.3% of all translations made worldwide, counted in pages, and J.F. Aixelá [2: 44] stated in 2004 that technical translation accounts for 80-90% of the translation market. The number of specialist texts translated in Poland has been growing since the 1990s. This is undoubtedly a result of the country's opening to foreign economies. Since 2004, when Poland became a member of the European Union, the demand for specialist translation has been increasing even more rapidly.

Methodology

The research method selected for examining the professional profile of the translator of specialist texts in Poland was a questionnaire survey, since, as noticed by H. Fulford and J. Granell-Zafra [3: 6], it allows to collect data from numerous subjects. Another advantage of this method, which the author of this paper considers crucial for ensuring reliable answers to the asked questions, is the anonymity of the respondents. The research was carried out in January 2011. The questionnaire survey was created and published on the Internet so that all participants of the research could respond in a comfortable and time-efficient manner. The link to the questionnaire was posted in forums of several specialist translator Internet portals, such as ProZ and GlobTra, and Goldenline, a portal for a variety of professionals. Additionally, a version of the survey in .doc was prepared and sent, together with the link to the Internet version, to a large number of translation agencies with a request for disseminating it further among the translators with whom they cooperate. Due to that, potential respondents were able to choose a preferred form of completing the questionnaire. Unsurprisingly, only one respondent chose the .doc version of the questionnaire, and all the remaining participants of the survey submitted their answers via the Internet. Overall, 126 respondents took part in the research, 4 of whom proved to be non-specialist translators, and thus were excluded from the analysis. It is impossible to determine what percentage of specialist translators in Poland the final 122 respondents constitute, since there is no record of such professionals but it can be safely said that the numbers go into several thousand. Hence, the results of the conducted research cannot be treated as fully representative but are hopefully sufficient to provide at least an outline of the professional profile of Polish specialist translators.

Work experience in years

The first aspect to be established in the analysis was the translators' work experience counted in years. A division into nine categories was made and the data on the number of years in the profession was gathered. The most numerous group of translators turned out to be those with 5-9.5 years of experience (32.2%), immediately followed by the translators who have performed the profession for a shorter period than 5 years (27.3%). The third group in terms of size consisted of translators with work experience of 10-14.5 years (14.9%), and the next of 15-19.5 years (9.9%). The least numerous groups were those of 20-24.5 years (5.8%), 25-29.5 years (5%), 35-39.5 years (3.3%), and there was only one person with 30 and one with 40 years of work experience as a translator (0.8% each). This might imply that there are more translators on the Polish market with several years of professional experience than those with dozens years of work experience or, which seems to be more than probable, that those less experienced are more willing to take part in such research or less preoccupied with their work than those more experienced. Furthermore, the opportunities to become a translator are considerably greater in Poland than a decade or two ago.

Education

The issue of translator training is currently widely discussed. Although N. Gallardo and C. Way [4: 95] claim that "it is possible for the translator to translate specialised texts in a field that he may not be very familiar with, basing on his linguistic knowledge, extralinguistic knowledge and text analysis which permit the communication of the message, however specialised the text", the majority of scholars present the view that the translator of specialist texts needs to be equipped with both high language competence in the languages from and into which they translate and in specific field-oriented knowledge [e.g. 5: 21], which, however, does not mean that they necessarily need to combine two or more professions [6: 88]. There is a controversy in the issue whether specialist translations ought to be performed by specialists in a particular field who have an excellent command of the foreign language in question or whether they should have a philological or linguistic training and additionally acquire knowledge in a given specialty; it seems that whatever the conclusion, specialists in particular fields with sufficient competence in at least two languages and satisfying translation skills to be able to translate specialist texts and, additionally, the willingness to work as translators are too scarce to consider the former option realistic. Therefore, L. Rayar [7: 134], among many scholars, discerns the necessity to train translators in particular fields and postulates to expand the curriculum of linguistics faculties with courses which would prepare translators for such field-oriented work.

The present state of affairs as to the translation training in Poland is an important subject of scholarly debate. R. Szubert [8: 320-327], for instance, describes translation curricula for students of German philology in several universities in Poland. He notices that there is an increasingly greater interest in practical translation classes among students and, although still not perfect, the programmes are becoming more and more satisfying for students.

Similarly, M. Sowa and U. Paprocka-Piotrowska [9: 223-230] provide a description of a translation curriculum in one of Polish universities for students of French philology and conclude that along with mastering the students' competence both in French and Polish, more specialist translation training is advisable.

The conducted research proved that in the case of Polish specialist translators the total of 83.1% have philological or linguistic education degree, including 14.4% of those who have a degree both in philology or linguistics and in a different specialty (usually law or various technology-related faculties). As many as 68.6% graduated solely from philology or linguistics, while 16.9% do not have such a degree but are trained in other specialty fields. It is worth noticing that from among the examined translators over 31% have specialist language-unrelated education (exclusively or along with a degree in philology or linguistics) against nearly 69% of those who did not accomplish a specialist faculty other than philology or linguistics. However, 38.5% of the respondents declared that they had participated in a significant number of additional trainings, mainly concerned with specialist translation and the operation of CAT tools, which may be interpreted as a considerable interest in improving their qualifications in the profession.

Languages

The translators who submitted their answers to the questions were asked to provide information on the languages from and into which they translate. Each of the translators declared working with at least one foreign language (other than Polish). They listed 23 foreign languages overall. Obviously, English is the most popular one, with 76.2% respondents mentioning it as the language from and into which they translate. The subsequent languages are significantly less widespread in translation with the following percentage of the translators working with them: German – 27%, French – 14.8%, Russian – 9%, Dutch, Czech and Spanish – 3.3%, Slovak – 2.5%, Catalan and Italian – 1.6%, and the remaining languages, i.e. Latvian, Korean, Chinese, Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish, Danish, Ukrainian, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, Montenegrin and even Esperanto, which were mentioned only once, amounted to mere 0.8%.

Translation fields

The respondents were also supposed to specify the field of the translation jobs they accept within four broad categories, the results in the decreasing order being as follows: economic and financial texts – 70.5%, technical texts – 66.4%, legal texts – 63.1%, and the least popular were medical texts – 26.2%. The translators were also allowed to submit comments in which they could enter more specific fields, and it showed that several persons regularly translate texts related to information technology and food industry, and single translators receive texts concerning photography, aviation, science, brewery, and hotel industry. It is worth noting that 16.4% of the respondents are sworn translators, and from among those who translate legal texts 26% are sworn translators. This could imply that the supply of legal texts largely exceeds the supply of sworn translators in Poland but on the other hand not all legal texts require to be certified by a sworn translator. The question remains whether legal translators who are not sworn translators have similar skills and perform translations of similar quality and why companies choose to commission legal jobs to “normal”, not sworn, translators.

Reasons for translating specialist texts

The motivation of the translators to work in specialist fields is particularly interesting in the context of establishing the profile of the Polish specialist translator. The majority of the respondents (67.2%) pointed to the fact that these are simply the texts they are most frequently commissioned to translate. 36.1% of the translators justified it with their educational background and 20.5% answered that the texts they translate are related to the job they perform. What is curious, many translators provided additional reasons for dealing with specialist texts, the most frequent of which was that such texts are simply interesting for them (as many as 13.9% of the respondents). Several persons motivated it with the fact that they were well-familiar with a particular field and a couple of respondents mentioned the positive financial aspect of translating specialist texts.

Employment basis

The examined translators were asked to specify their professional status, i.e. whether they work as translators in translation agencies or companies based on employment contract or are freelancers or perhaps combine the two. The results showed that the overwhelming majority of them (86.1%) work as freelance translators, while 9.8% are employed based on employment contract, and only 4.1% perform their job on both employment bases. This is a reflection of the world-wide trend to reduce labour costs by both companies which need translation services and translation agencies by outsourcing translation jobs to freelance translators [3: 2-3].

The level of preoccupation with the profession of the translator

The information on the level of engagement in the profession of the translator was considered one of the most important factors in order to create a profile of the Polish translator of specialist texts. 61.5% of the respondents declared that translation was their sole profession performed at the moment. The remaining translators revealed that translation was their side profession (14.75%), or their main profession but not exclusive (13.1%), or one of the two equal professions (10.65%). In view of the fact that specialist translation is highly requiring, it does not surprise that over 74.5% of the translators perform the profession as their exclusive or main one. It is also understandable that nearly 11% of specialist translators treat the profession as one of two performed simultaneously, since it may be expected that a certain number of them work in a specific sector and are thus specialists both in the field and the related translation specialty.

Conclusion

Based on the survey results an approximate profile of a Polish specialist translator can be constructed. A typical specialist translator graduated from philological or linguistic studies, translates from and/or into English, has professional experience of below 15 years and probably has not (yet) completed additional training, specialises in legal, economic, financial and/or technical texts mainly because such texts are most frequent on the market. A typical translator also regards translation as the sole or primary profession and is a freelancer. Obviously, this is a generalisation but such a pattern can be derived from the survey results. The majority of specialist translators in Poland do not have a specialist education degree, are not sworn translators and have not completed any specialist course, yet they perform specialist translations. Therefore, it should be researched whether the entities with which they cooperate are satisfied with the quality of the produced translations, and further, whether or not those entities actually expect high quality of translation, and finally what the consequences of this situation are for the translation market. Another issue to be examined in the future is the methods and conditions of the translator's work, as well as the tools and aids which they use.

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