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## **Who said low status?**

### **A study on factors affecting the perception of translator status**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

This article is a follow-up to a questionnaire-based investigation on the status of Danish company translators reported on elsewhere (Dam and Zethsen 2008). In the present study we focus on the so-called *clear low-status* and *clear high-status ratings* found in the questionnaire data. These ratings are matched with the respondents' answers to a series of questions aimed at eliciting information about a variety of parameters relating to their demographic and professional profiles, working conditions, attitudes, etc, with a view to identifying possible correlations. On this basis we identify some of the factors which seem to affect the perception of translator status, i.e. some of the possible reasons for low- and high-status evaluations. The analysed sample is too small to allow definite conclusions, but a series of preliminary hypotheses are put forward, especially as regards the sources of the seemingly general perception of translation as a low-status profession.

#### **KEYWORDS**

Translator status, status parameters, status perceptions, company translators, the translation profession.

## **1. Background**

This article is a follow-up on a previous article in which the present authors explored the concept of translator status and conducted an empirical investigation on the status of Danish company translators (Dam and Zethsen 2008). The present article relies heavily on the theory, methodology and data of our previous article, and we shall therefore start this paper by giving an outline of our earlier work.

Our point of departure was a gap in the literature. So far, translator status has hardly ever been researched—empirically or otherwise—as a subject in its own right. However, when we go through the translation literature, we frequently come across references to translation as a low-status profession in both professional and scholarly journals (e.g. Venuti 1995, 1, 17; Hermans and Lambert 1998: 113, 123; Koskinen 2000: 54, 60; Bassnett 2002: 12, 13; Snell-Hornby 2006: 172). Thus, the consensus among translators and translation scholars is that translator status is decidedly low, though the subject remains underinvestigated. On this background we are currently conducting a major project which aims at studying the status of different groups of translators.

The study we reported on in Dam and Zethsen (2008) explored the occupational status of one of the most visible and strongest groups of Danish translators, namely translators with an MA in specialised translation who are employed full-time on permanent contracts in major Danish companies with a

visible translation function and a clear translation profile. The reason we chose to look at this high-profile group was to ensure robust findings: if it turned out that even this group of translators had a low occupational status, this would strongly support the claims about translation as a low-status profession found in the academic and professional literature.

Our study was based on questionnaires aimed at charting out the status of the translators as perceived by themselves and others. The respondent group representing the views of others was the so-called 'core employees' of the companies in question. By core employees we mean the employees who carry out the work which defines the company (e.g., in a law firm, the lawyers; in a bank, the economists). We assume that the core employees have a high status in the companies and that their opinions carry some weight. Also, as regular users of translation, we assume they constitute a group for whom the company translators are particularly visible.

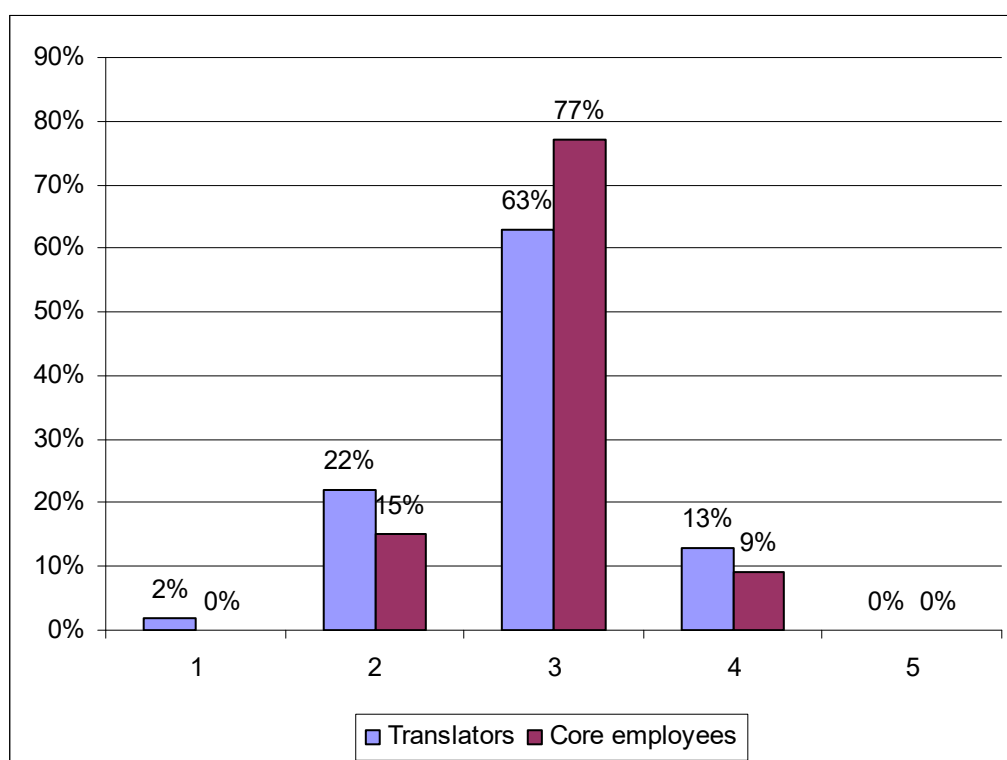
There were two sets of questionnaires, one for the translators and one for the core employees. The content of the questionnaires was mainly centred around four parameters we had identified as particularly important indicators of status, both generally and specifically in a Danish context (Duncan 1961; Nakao, Hodge, and Treas 1990; Ollivier 2000; Ugebreveta4, 2006). These so-called status parameters were: (1) *salary*, (2) *education/expertise*, (3) *visibility*, and (4) *power/influence*. There were also a few general questions about job status and prestige and a number of factual questions (age, gender, year of graduation, educational background, etc.) which provided additional information on the respondents' profiles and helped to confirm that they complied with the stated criteria. Most of the questions relating to the status parameters were designed to be answered by ticking (typically) one of five statements representing different degrees of agreement with the questions. The five possible answers generally were: (1) *to a very high degree*, (2) *to a high degree*, (3) *to a certain degree*, (4) *to a low degree*, (5) *to a very low degree or not/none at all*.<sup>1</sup>

The final sample consisted of 49 core-employee and 47 translator questionnaires representing a rather large proportion of Danish company translators with the chosen profile. The data from the completed questionnaires were entered into a statistical software programme, SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences), which allows statistical analyses and cross searches of all kinds. The graded response categories accompanying the questions in the questionnaires were converted into numerical values for the purpose of the analyses, as this allowed the calculation of mean values. In this paper, the response categories are also represented by means of numbers (1-5) in many of the figures which show the research findings in section 3 below (e.g. "to a very low degree or not/none at all" = 1, "to a low degree" = 2, etc.).

As explained, we had expected the analyses of the study to yield a relatively high-status picture of the translators chosen for our sample as they had a strong professional profile. However, although the findings of our study did not

indicate an extremely low perception of occupational status, the responses of both translators and core employees did indicate a lower professional status than expected. The results thus appeared to support what is generally claimed in the translation literature—that translation is perceived as a low-status occupation by translators and non-translators alike.

One of the results which best illustrates the relatively low status of the sampled translators was obtained from the responses to a question which was geared to inquire very directly into the issue of translator status. The translators were asked “What is your status as a translator in the company?”, whereas the core employees were asked “What status do the translators have in your company?”. Their answers were distributed as shown in Figure 1 below (the answering possibilities, represented numerically as 1-5, were listed in the questionnaires as: “very low status,” “low status,” “a certain status,” “high status” and “very high status”):



**Figure 1. Degree of translator status as perceived by the translators and the core employees.**

As Figure 1 indicates, the preferred answer for all respondents—translators and core employees alike—was the rather neutral middle category (3), “a certain status:” 63% of the translators and 77% of the core employees ticked the middle category. This is probably the closest we get to a “don’t know” or “cannot/do not wish to answer” category, which we deliberately did not include in order to force the respondents to take a stand with respect to all the questions. The remaining answers are predominantly found to the left of the

middle category in the figure, representing a low or very low degree of status. Thus, a total of 24% of the translators gave one of the two lowest ratings to their occupational status, whereas 15% of the core employees placed their answers to the left of the middle. Also, we may note that none of the respondents chose the highest category (5, "very high status"), and that only 13% of the translators and 9% of the core employees chose one of the high ratings to the right of the middle (category 4, "high status").

## 2. Introduction to the study

The status ratings in Figure 1 constitute the point of departure of the present study, which focuses on the so-called *clear low-status answers*, which are defined here as those to the left of the rather neutral middle category (3), i.e. category-1 and category-2 responses, on the one hand, and on the so-called *clear high-status answers*, which are defined as those to the right of the middle category, i.e. category-4 responses (category-5 ratings are in principle included too, but the category is consistently empty), on the other hand. For reasons of simplicity, the so-called clear low-status answers are simply referred to as "low-status answers" and the clear high-status answers as "high-status answers" in the following. We take the low- and high-status answers to be particularly interesting as they reflect clear respondent opinions with respect to translator status. As to the non-controversial category-3 ratings, we do not consider them to be of particular interest, and they will not be dealt with any further in this article.

To open up to as many insights as possible, we shall not limit ourselves to addressing the question of who said *low* status, as the title question indicates, but also of who said *high* status. We are interested in what characterises the respondents with a clear low-status or high-status perception of translation—demographically, professionally and attitude-wise—and we shall attempt to reach a description of their profiles by looking into how they respond to the other questions in the questionnaires (about for example age, gender, salary level and so on, cf. section 3 below). Through a description of the response patterns of these respondents, we hope to be able to identify some of the factors which affect the perception of translator status, i.e. possibly some of the reasons for both low- and high-status evaluations. Ultimately, such a description should contribute to shedding light on what is required to enhance translator status, although such an aim is beyond the scope of the present paper.

The present study, then, sets out to identify possible correlations between low- and high-status answers, on the one hand, and responses to the other questions in the questionnaires, on the other hand. Where we are able to find clear correlations, we assume that the respondent characteristics revealed by their answers to the other questions affect their perceptions of translator status. Technically speaking, this means that the low- and high-status ratings serve as dependent variables in the present study, whereas the parameters

identified through analyses of the other questions in the questionnaires function as independent variables.

### **3. Analyses and results**

The parameters which were analysed for a possible correlation with the low- and high-status ratings are the following:

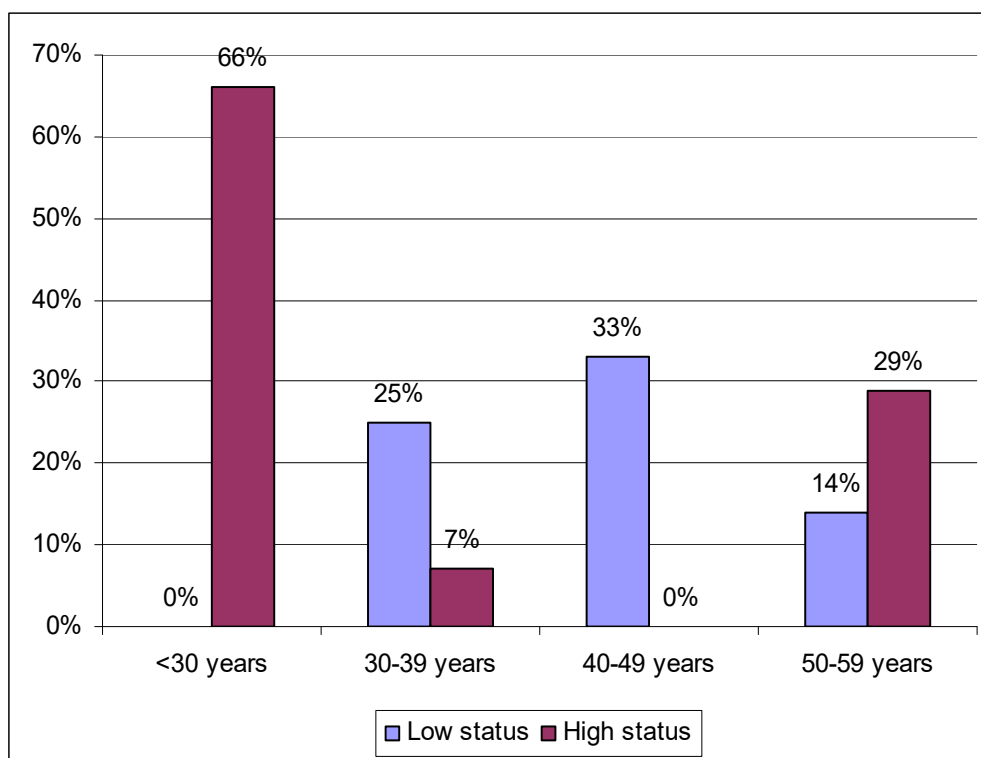
- parameters of a demographic nature (age and gender, sections 3.1 and 3.2);
- parameters indicating professional identity as a translator (state-authorisation, job denomination and working time dedicated to translating, sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5);
- the four status parameters of salary, education/expertise, visibility and power/influence (sections 3.6, 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9);
- and finally a parameter which is not traditionally regarded as a status parameter, but which is nevertheless frequently mentioned in the translation literature, namely appreciation (section 3.10).

Each of these parameters is explained in more detail in the following subsections.

#### **3. 1 Age**

All the respondents in the analysed sample – translators and core employees alike – were asked to state their age. The present section analyses if and possibly how the low- and high-status answers correlate with the respondents' age.

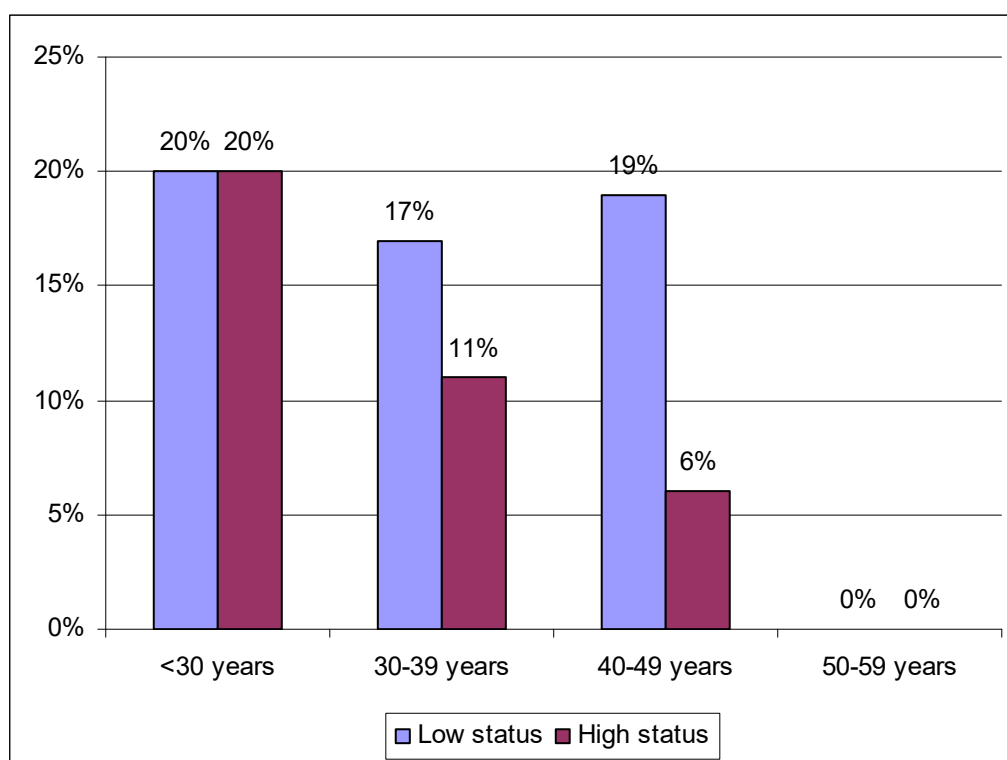
The translators in the sample were divided into four age groups, as can be derived from Figure 2 below. The percentages in the figure indicate the percentage of translators in each age group who rated translation as either a low-status or a high-status occupation as defined in Section 2 above:



**Figure 2. Percentage of translators with low- and high-status answers in the different age groups in the sample.**

As we can see in Figure 2, the proportion of low-status answers tends to increase with age, whereas the high-status answers decrease. The only exception from this general pattern is the highest age group (50-59), who generally tend to think of translation more as a high-status than low-status occupation. Thus, with the exception of a few answers, the results seem to reflect a relatively high self-esteem in young company translators, which gradually decreases, i.e. possibly a progressive disillusion. This observation may indicate that it is not the educational system that fosters a low-status perception among translators, but rather the social/professional environment in which they are immersed after graduation. This hypothesis is supported by the data we have on the translators' year of graduation (not shown here for reasons of space), which show that recent graduation correlates with high-status answers. There may be an alternative to the 'progressive disillusion' hypothesis, namely that translator status has changed over the years and that the more mature translators came in at a time when the status was lower than now.

Among the core employees, the relation between age and perception of translator status is shown in Figure 3 below:



**Figure 3. Percentage of core employees in the different age groups with low- and high-status answers.**

As we can see, the proportion of low-status answers tends to be relatively stable over the different age groups of core employees, with the exception of the oldest group, (between 17 and 20%), but the high-status answers tend to decrease with age as was the case with the translators. This again may indicate that the perception that translation is not a high-status occupation is reinforced with age and therefore possibly with increasing socialisation and immersion into professional life. In other words, the social and/or professional context of Danish company translators probably stimulates a view of them as anything but high-status professionals.

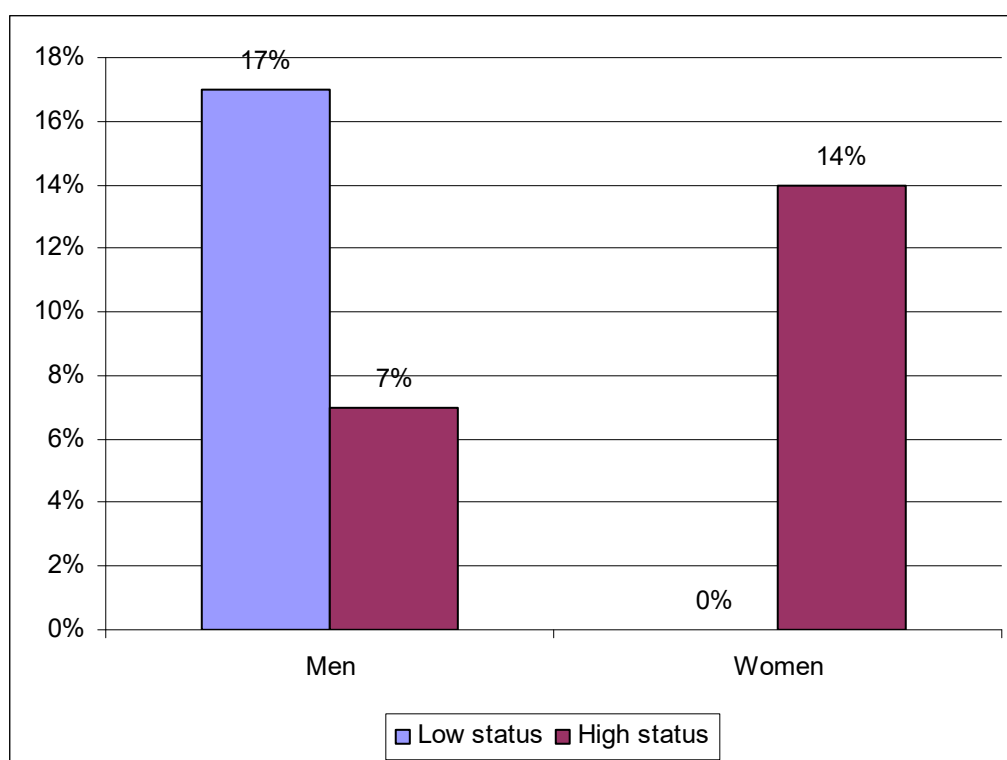
### 3.2 Gender

Both the translators and the core employees in the analysed sample were asked about their gender. Perhaps not surprisingly, the translators were mainly female (13% were men and 87% were women), whereas the core employees were mostly male (86% were men and 14% were women). The present section examines the possible correlation between low- and high-status answers and the gender of the respondents in question.

With respect to the translators, no conclusions can be drawn, as only female translators rated translation as either low or high status; the male translators exclusively used the middle category (3) for their status ratings, ie. they rated their work as translators as connected with only "a certain degree" of status. We may wonder why the male translators take no clear stance with respect to the status of their profession, but on the basis of the present data we cannot



even venture a guess. The core employees, on the other hand, seem to exhibit a gender-based pattern, as shown in Figure 4 below:



**Figure 4. Percentage of male and female core employees with low- and high-status answers.**

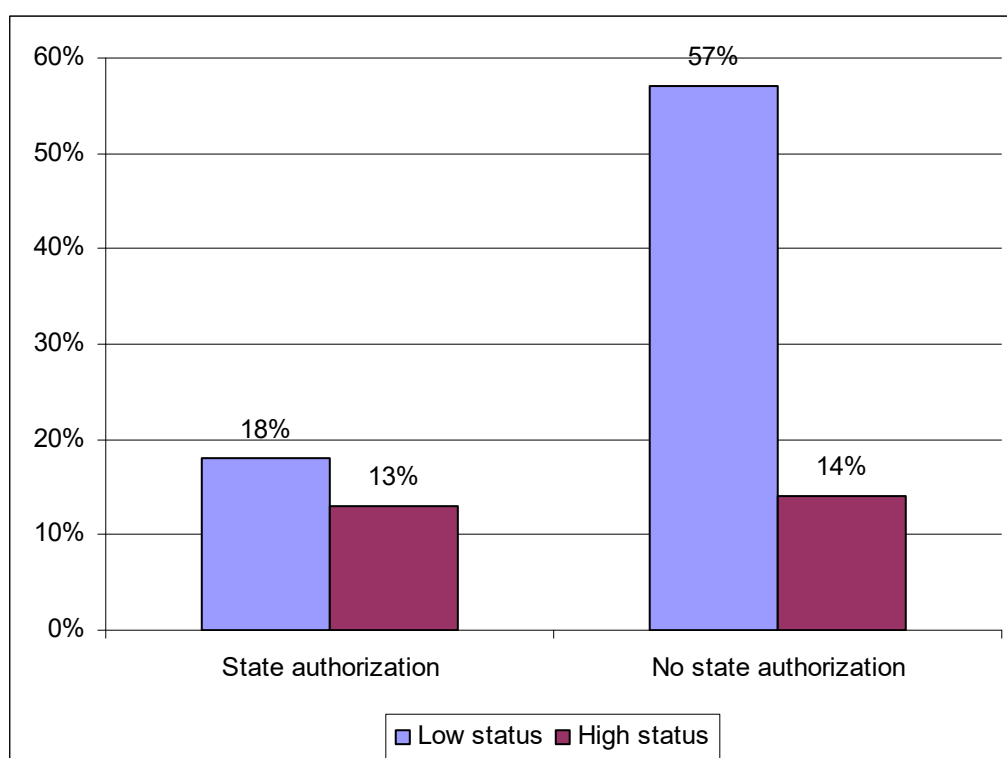
As the figure shows, the male core employees rate translation as a low-status profession more often than as a high-status job, whereas among the women the pattern is the reverse: no female core employee connects translation directly with low status, but 14% rate it as a high-status occupation. The number of female respondents is not large, but the general response pattern is clear: the male and female core employees in our sample have different status perceptions of translation. This gender difference is clearly interesting, especially from a feminist translation studies perspective, and the issue of gender and translator status certainly deserves further investigation.

### 3.3 State authorisation

Many translation scholars lament the lack of efficient accreditation systems for translators in most countries, as it is widely believed that such systems could enhance translators' professional status (e.g. Chesterman and Wagner 2002, 37). Since the 1960s, an MA in specialised translation which gives direct access to state authorisation has been in existence in Denmark. All the translators who participated in our study hold such a degree and are therefore qualified to become authorised translators on the strength of their educational backgrounds. However, the state authorisation is optional and not all of our respondents have chosen to take out one, even if they are formally qualified.

Out of the 47 translator respondents in our sample, 40 (85%) are state-authorized translators, whereas 7 (15%) are not.

The present data do not allow us to investigate the possible effects of the Danish system of state authorisation on external views on the translation profession, but we are able to examine whether holding a state authorisation (or not) affects the translators' own perception of their status. The relation between state authorisation and low- and high-status answers among the translators in this study can be derived from Figure 5 below:



**Figure 5. Percentage of authorised and non-authorised translators with low- and high-status answers.**

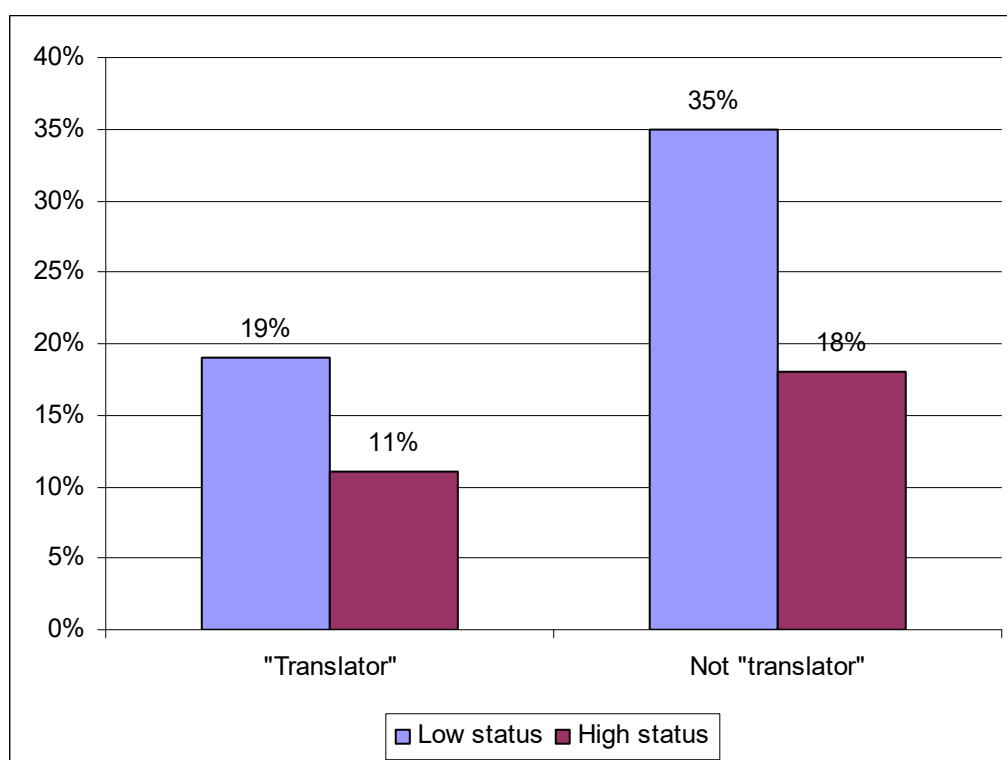
As we can see, there is no real difference between the proportion of high-status answers in the group of state-authorized translators (13%) and in the group of non-authorized translators (14%). A high-status perception of translation therefore does not seem to correlate with holding a state authorisation. On the other hand, the state-authorized translators rate their profession as directly low status much less often than non-authorized translators do (18% vs. 57%). We may therefore tentatively venture the hypothesis that, although state authorisation does not directly facilitate a high-status perception of translation, it may reduce the tendency in translators to see it as a low-status profession. Clearly, we cannot know what comes first. It may be that translators who think of translation as endowed with low status tend not to take out an authorisation in order to distance themselves from the profession, whereas translators with a more positive view of translation are more prone to becoming authorised translators. Or it may be that an

authorisation induces higher self-esteem in the translators. In other words, although there seems to be a correlation between low-status answers and state authorisation, we cannot tell which parameter is the cause and which is the effect on the basis of the present data. The correlation between these two parameters therefore needs to be examined further in future, preferably qualitative, investigations.

### 3.4 Job denomination

The translators in the present study were asked to state the name of their position in the company. Among the 44 translators who did so, 27 (61%) were referred to as 'translators', whereas 17 (39%) stated a different term, such as 'language specialists' or 'documentation specialists.' Job denomination is related to the parameter dealt with in section 3.3 above – state authorisation – in so far as it may tell us something about the respondents' professional identity or self-perception as translators: it may reveal how much they identify themselves as translators. A person who refers to her-/himself as a 'translator' is likely to identify her-/himself as such (most translators in Denmark are likely to have a certain influence on their job titles). And vice versa: if a person does *not* refer to her-/himself as a 'translator,' she/he is likely to see her-/himself less as one and possibly even attempts to distance her-/himself from the role as a translator through a different job denomination.

The relation between job denomination (translator or not) and low- and high-status answers in this study can be derived from Figure 6 below:



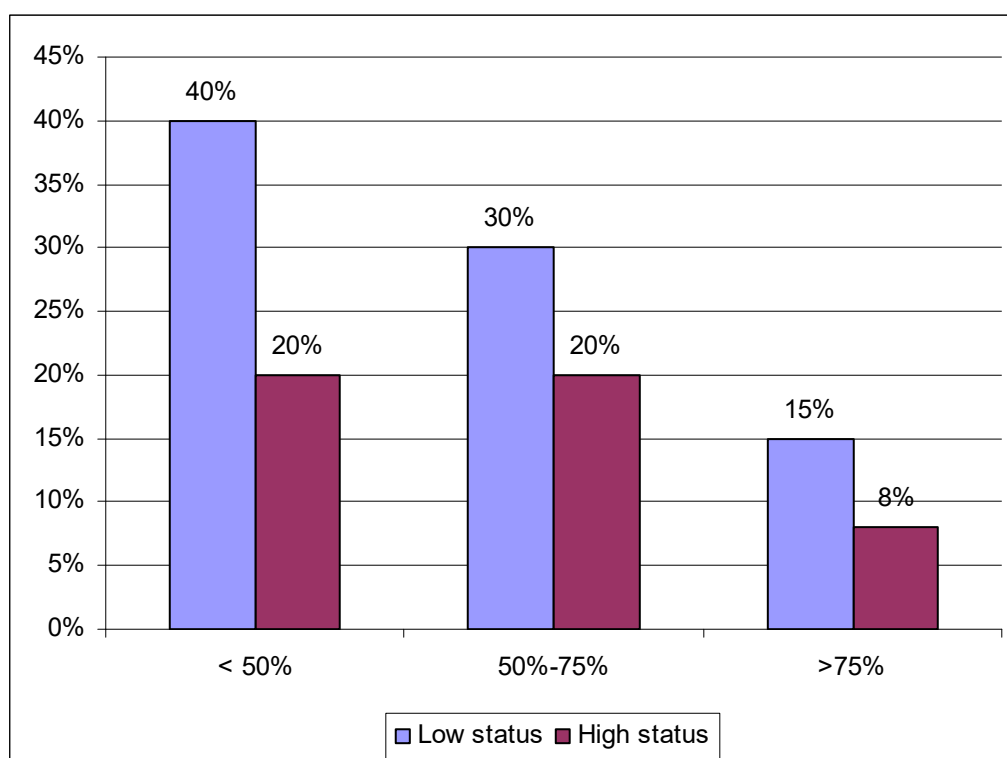
**Figure 6. Percentage of translator respondents whose job denomination is 'translator' and translator respondents whose job denomination is *not* 'translator' with low- and high-status answers.**

As we can see, the pattern of answers is rather blurred, with few clear tendencies. However, the distribution of answers is remarkably similar to the one found in Figure 5 above regarding state authorisation, and it therefore corroborates the observation that state authorisation and job denomination are two sides of the same coin. Thus, the respondents referred to as translators rather surprisingly rate their profession as low status more often than as high status (19% vs. 11%), and a high-status perception of translation therefore does not seem to correlate with the title 'translator.' On the other hand, the respondents referred to as translators rate their profession as directly low status only half as often as do those *not* referred to as translators (19% vs. 35%). We may therefore tentatively venture the hypothesis that, although a job denomination as 'translator' does not facilitate a high-status perception of translation as such, it may reduce the tendency to see it as a low-status profession. However, the opposite relation may also apply: perhaps translators who think of translation as endowed with low status tend not to refer to themselves as translators in order to distance themselves from the profession. As was the case with the results in section 3.3, this issue needs to be investigated further through qualitative studies.

### **3.5 Time dedicated to translation**

The translators who participated in our study were asked how much of their working time they dedicated to translation and translation-related activities (i.e. activities such as terminology work and revision of translated texts). We assume that the amount of time spent translating – just like the parameters of state authorisation and job denomination – is likely to contribute to shaping the self-perception and professional identity of the translators, as translators.

Among the 46 translators who answered this question, 10 (22%) indicated that they spent less than 50% of their time translating, another 10 (22%) stated between 50% and 75%, whereas 26 (57%) answered that they dedicated more than 75% of their working time to translation and translation-related activities. The relation between time spent translating and low- and high-status answers are shown in Figure 7 below:



**Figure 7. Amount of translators' working time dedicated to translation as correlated with percentage of low- and high-status answers.**

As we can see, there is a clear relation between time spent translating and low-status answers: the more of their working time the translators dedicate to translation, the fewer their low-status ratings, and vice versa: the less time they spend translating, the more they rate translation as a low-status activity. However, there is no clear or logical pattern with respect to the high-status answers. The two groups who have fewest translation activities have the same percentage of high-status responses (20%) and it is higher than that of the group who dedicate most time to translation (8%). Thus, whereas we cannot exactly claim that the translators who dedicate most of their time to translating hold a high-status view of translation (quite the contrary), it seems quite clear that the more they translate, the less they tend to see translation as a low-status activity.

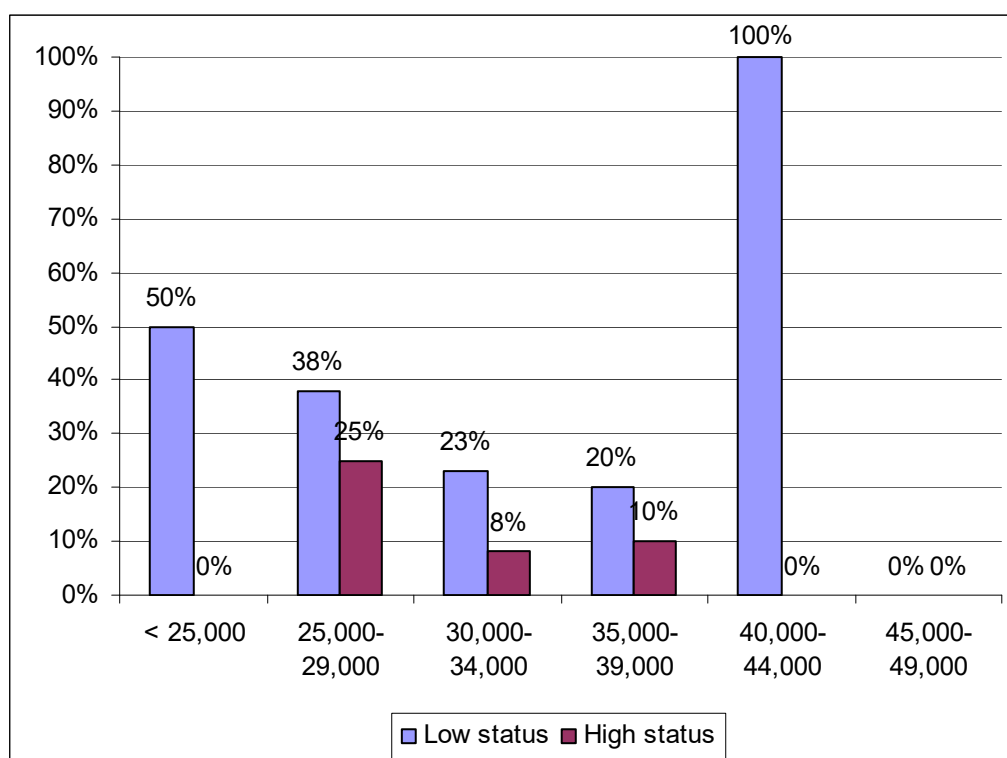
All in all, the findings in sections 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5 show that a strong professional profile correlates with relatively few low-status ratings, as the translators with the strongest professional identities or profiles as translators – those with state authorisation, those whose job denomination is 'translator,' and those who dedicate most of their working time to translation – tend to describe translation as a low-status profession less often than other groups of translators. Although the high-status ratings in Figures 5-7 exhibit a blurred picture with no clear tendencies and we therefore cannot claim that a strong professional profile facilitates a high-status perception of translation, such a profile may reduce the tendency to see it as a low-status profession. The clearly complex issue of which are causes and which are effects has already been discussed above.

The above five sections deal with the relation between high- and low-status answers, on the one hand, and the characteristics of the respondents in terms of their demographic profile and professional identity, on the other. In the following sections we shall analyse if and possibly how the high- and low-status answers correlate with the answers to a selection of questions relating to each of the four parameters identified in our previous study (Dam and Zethsen 2008) as particularly relevant for determining status, the so-called status parameters: salary, education/expertise, visibility and power/influence. The main difference between the results reported in our previous work and those presented here is that in the former article we simply assumed the existence of a relation between the four status parameters and the respondents' perception of occupational status, whereas here we investigate whether such a relation in fact exists.

### 3.6 Salary

Salary is often claimed to be an important status parameter, not least in the translation literature (e.g. Chan 2005). However, some translation scholars also note that translation remains a low-status occupation *in spite of* high remuneration (Hermans and Lambert 1998, 123; Koskinen 2000, 61). Thus, although salary is probably a good indicator of status, it is not necessarily the decisive factor. This section examines if and possibly how the low- and high-status answers in the present sample correlate with translator salary.

The translators who participated in the study were asked to mark their monthly salary level by ticking off one of the possibilities indicated in Figure 8 below, plus one category which nobody in the sample marked: 55,000 DKK<sup>2</sup> or more. The salary levels ticked off by the respondents were: below DKK 25,000 a month (6%), 25,000-29,000 (23%), 30,000-34,000 (37%), 35,000-39,000 (29%), 40,000-44,000 (3%) and 45,000-49,000 (3%). On average, these salaries represent a reasonably high level of remuneration (compared to the educational background of the translators, see Dam & Zethsen 2008), but they are still slightly lower than comparable salary levels in the Danish context. The relation between the level of the translators' salaries and low- and high-status answers can be derived from Figure 8, which shows the percentage of translators in each salary group who assessed translator status to be clearly low or clearly high:

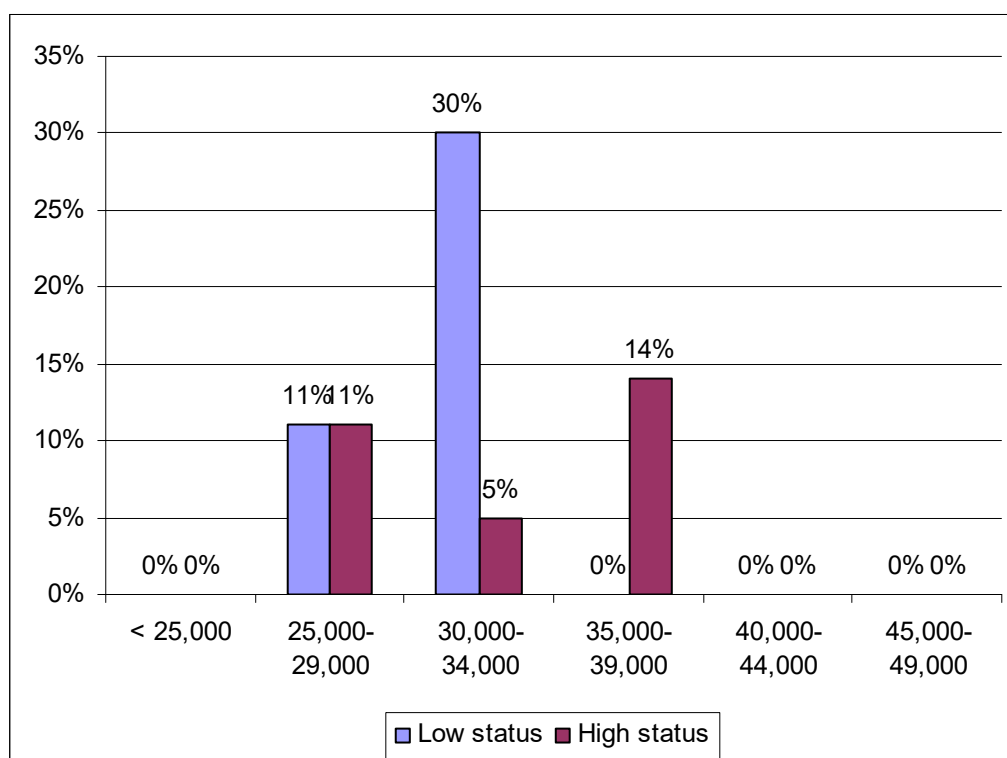


**Figure 8. Proportion of translators in the different salary groups with low- and high-status answers; the salary levels indicated represent monthly salaries in DKK (Danish Kroner).**

As we can see, the relation between salary level and low-status answers is quite clear, insofar as the proportion of low-status answers tends to decrease with increasing salary levels and vice versa, the only exception being the (few) translators who make the second highest salary (40,000-44,000). Thus, as a general pattern, the less money the translators make, the more they tend to perceive translation as a low-status occupation; and vice versa, the more money they make, the less they tend to see it as a low-status occupation. For the high-status answers, on the other hand, no—similar or different—pattern is discernible. Thus, there is no evidence that a high-status perception of translation is facilitated (or hindered) by high (or low) salaries, but it appears that high salaries may reduce the tendency in translators to see theirs as a low-status profession – and vice versa, that low salaries may increase their tendency to perceive translation as a low-status job. In other words, a certain level of remuneration appears to be necessary to ensure a certain status perception, but it does not lead to high status *per se*. Expressed differently, salary may be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for occupational prestige.

The core employees in the study were also asked about the translators' salaries, although they were asked to mark what they *thought* the average monthly pay of the company's translators was. They were given the same answering possibilities as the translators, and it turned out that the translators' answers and the core employees' estimates coincided to a large extent. The salary levels marked by the core employees were as follows: below DKK

25,000 a month (2%), 25,000-29,000 (20%), 30,000-34,000 (43%), 35,000-39,000 (30%), 40,000-44,000 (2%) and 45,000-49,000 (2%). The relation between the translator salary estimates made by the core employees and their low- and high-status ratings can be derived from Figure 9 below:



**Figure 9. Proportion of core employees with low- and high-status answers in the different groups of translator salary estimates; the salary levels indicated represent monthly salaries in DKK (Danish Kroner)**

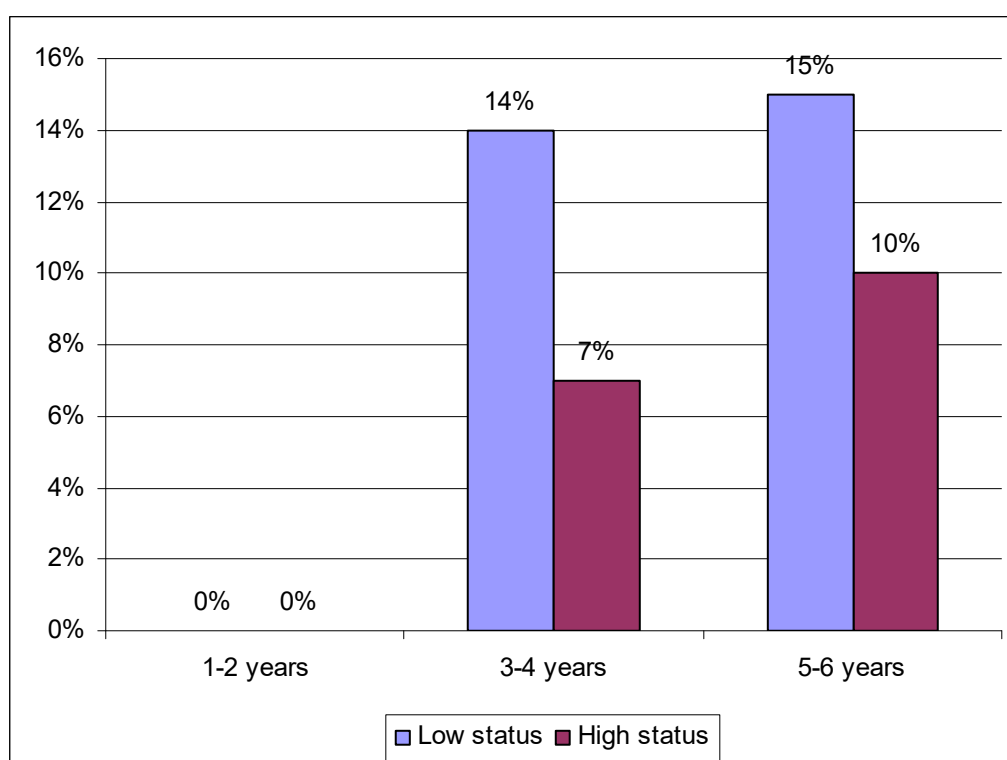
As we can see, there is no clear relation between the core employees' salary estimates and their high- and low-status answers. For example, those who make one of the lowest salary estimates (25,000-29,000) tend to rate translator status both as low less often and as high more often than some of those with higher estimates (30,000-34,000). Also, those with the lowest salary estimates (less than 25,000) do not mark translation as either low status or high status, and the same goes for those with the highest salary estimates. Thus, no relation can be found between (estimated) level of remuneration and perceived translator status in these data.

### 3.7 Education/expertise

The respondents in the study further answered a series of questions relating to a parameter which is also considered an important status indicator, both generally and specifically in a Danish context and in the translation literature, namely education/expertise.



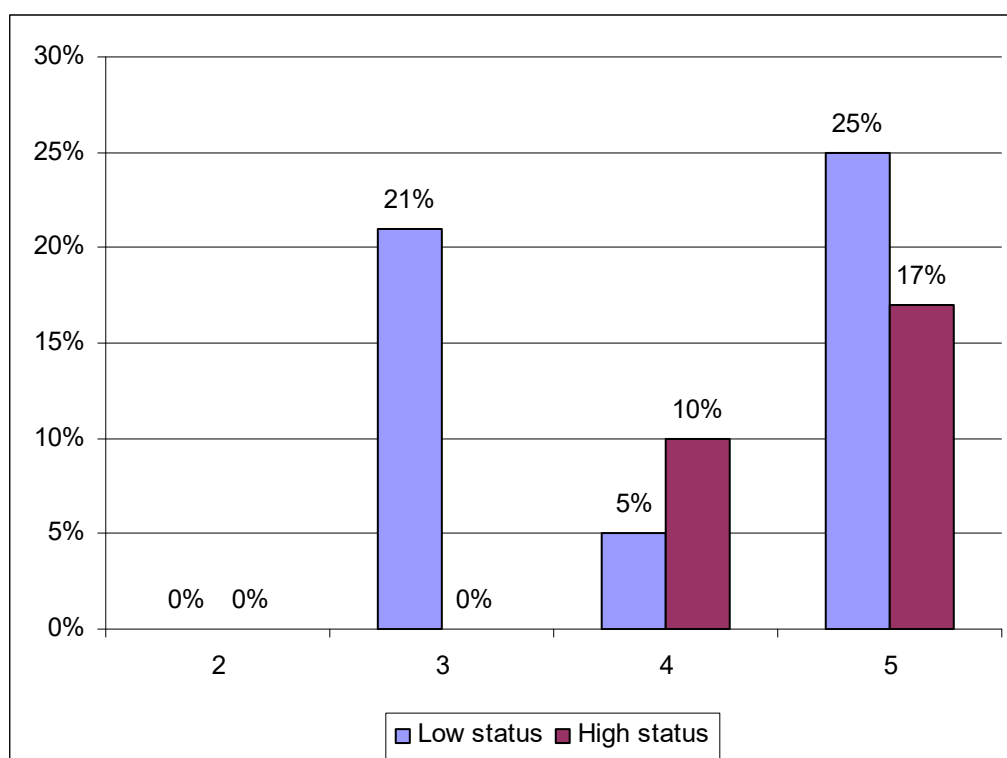
As the level of education of the translator respondents was given (always an MA in specialised translation), we did not ask the translators about their educational background, but the core employees were asked how many *years of education* after high school they thought it would take to become an authorised translator. They were asked to choose from three possible answers: 1-2 years, 3-4 years and 5-6 years, the latter being the correct response as the requirement is a degree at MA-level. It turned out that the majority of the core employees thought it took less time to become a translator than it actually does: 2% of them assessed the length of translator education to be 1-2 years, 57% believed the duration to be 3-4 years (corresponding to BA-level), whereas only 41% thought or knew that an MA (5-6 years) was required. Figure 10 below illustrates the relationship between the core employees' assessments of the duration of translator education and their low- and high-status ratings:



**Figure 10. The core employees' assessments of the duration of translator education as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

As we can see, there is no clear relation between the core employees' assessments of the length of translator education and their evaluations of translator status. Though the proportion of high-status ratings tends to increase slightly as the assessed length of education increases, the same actually applies to the relation between assessed length of education and low-status ratings, which go from 0% over 14% to 15%. Figure 10 therefore does not lend evidence to the intuitively plausible idea that the core employees' perception of translator status is influenced by the (assessed) level of translator education.

However, as we shall see, some of the results of our study do indicate that the core employees' perception of translator status is in fact affected if not exactly by how they perceive translators' level of education, then by how they perceive their level of expertise. In the study, both the core employees and the translators were asked how much *expertise* was required to translate, and both groups generally gave this parameter a high rating: with the exception of two (core employee) respondents, they all rated translator expertise between 3 and 5 on a scale from 1 to 5. The relation between the core employees' perception of translator expertise and their high- and low-status answers can be derived from Figure 11 below:

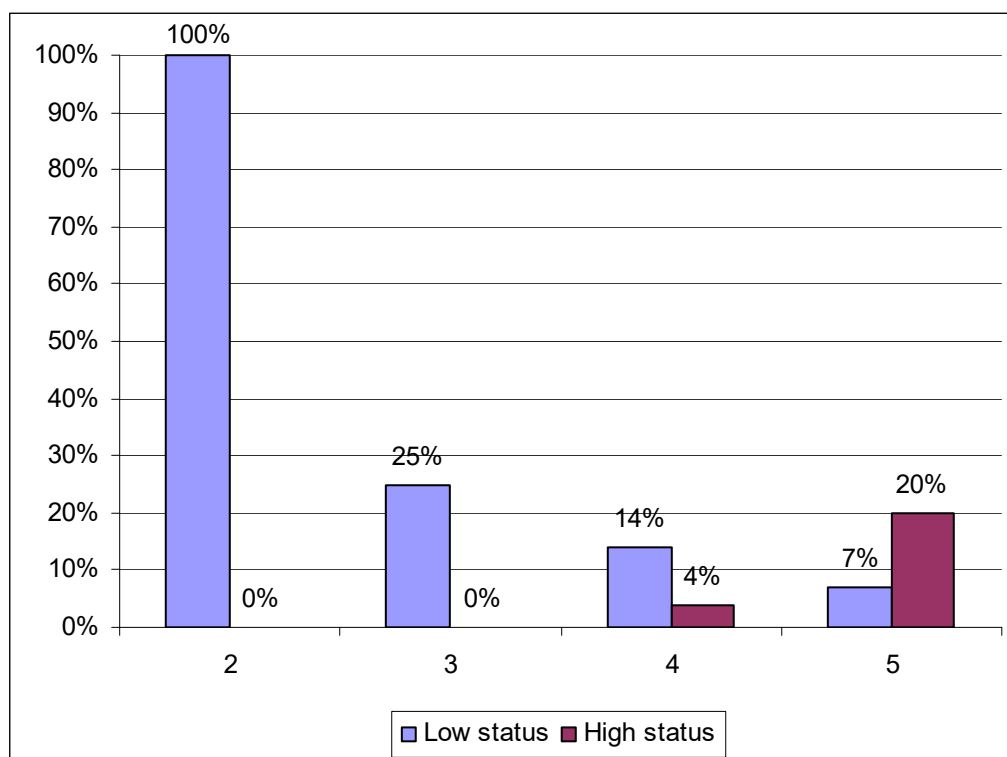


**Figure 11. The core employees' assessments of the degree of expertise required to translate as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

Although there is no clear correlation between the core employees' low-status answers and the degree of expertise they attribute to translating, Figure 11 indicates that the higher they consider the degree of expertise involved in translation to be, the larger the proportion of high-status answers. Therefore, although the core employees do not seem to be preoccupied with the level of translator education *per se* (Figure 10), they do seem to be at least somewhat concerned with the translators' level of expertise, which seems rather contradictory, as expertise clearly presupposes education.

We also asked the core employees about translator expertise in a more roundabout manner, namely by inquiring into their *confidence in the quality of the translators' work*. Generally, their confidence in the translators turned out

to be high: 31% of them stated that they had “a very high degree” of confidence in the quality of the translators’ work, 58% professed “a high degree” of confidence, 8% “a certain degree”, only 2% stated “a low degree”, and nobody marked the category “a very low degree or none at all.” In this context, the interesting question is whether the core employees’ confidence in the translators correlates with their perceptions of translator status. This will appear from Figure 12 below:

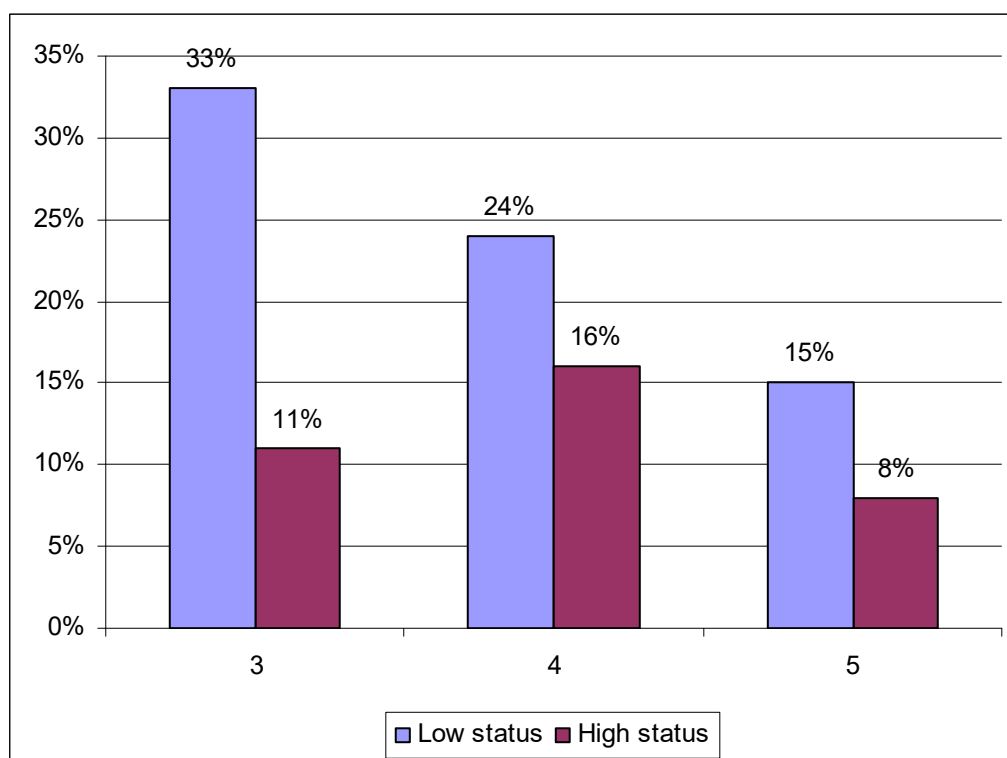


**Figure 12. Degree of the core employees’ confidence in the quality of the translators’ work as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category (based on responses from the core employees).**

As we can see from Figure 12, there is a very clear correlation. As the core employees’ confidence in the quality of the translators’ work increases, the percentage of low-status markings decreases, whereas the percentage of high-status ratings increases. This finding is intriguing as confidence in others’ work does not come out of nowhere, but is established through repeated interaction by means of which the party who eventually gains the confidence of the other demonstrates her/his professional trustworthiness through skills that must inevitable be acquired through i.a. education and training and be based on expertise. Thus, even if the importance that the core employees attribute to translator expertise *per se* seems relatively limited, and even if the significance of the most tangible parameter of expertise, length of education, seems even more limited, these parameters cannot be dismissed as unimportant for others’ perception of translator status, as the apparently important parameter of confidence in translators’ work embraces both education and expertise. Incidentally we may note that, as confidence is established over time through repeated interaction, the possible importance of this parameter holds little

promise for translators with few regular customers, as is the case for some freelance translators and translation agencies.

As mentioned above, the translators themselves were also asked about the degree of expertise required to translate, and the relation between their assessments of their expertise and their high- and low-status answers can be derived from Figure 13 below:



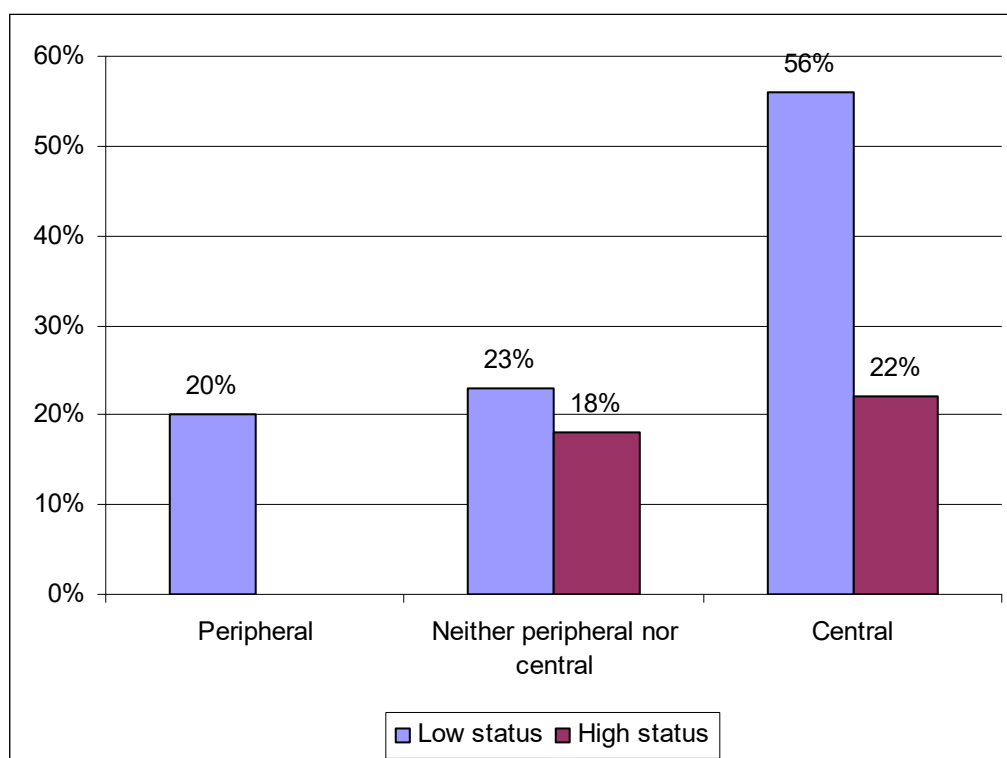
**Figure 13. The translators' assessments of the degree of expertise required to translate as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

As we can see in Figure 13, the proportion of low-status answers tends to decrease as the perceived level of expertise increases, and vice versa. The pattern of the high-status answers is less clear, as the highest level of expertise is linked with the lowest proportion of high-status answers (8%). Clearly, there are generally more low-status than high-status ratings independent of the level of expertise marked, but the higher the translators consider their level of expertise to be, the less they tend to think of translation as a low-status profession. This may again mean that a high level of expertise is perhaps a necessary condition for the translators not to view the status of their profession as low, but it is not by itself sufficient to ensure a high-status perception of their job.

### 3.8 Visibility

Another parameter which is often associated with occupational prestige is visibility. In the translation literature, the lack of translator visibility is often deplored (e.g. Venuti 1995), and translators are frequently described as physically and professionally isolated (Hermans and Lambert 1998, 123; Risku 2004, 190).

The translators in our sample were asked where in the company their office or workplace was situated (*physical position*), and 41% of them answered "in a central position," 11% said "in a peripheral position," and 48% stated that it was situated "neither in a central nor in a peripheral position." That is, generally the translators in this sample were not physically isolated in the company, but were placed in central or at least in "neutral" locations. Figure 14 below shows the relationship between the translators' status perceptions and the physical position of their workplaces:

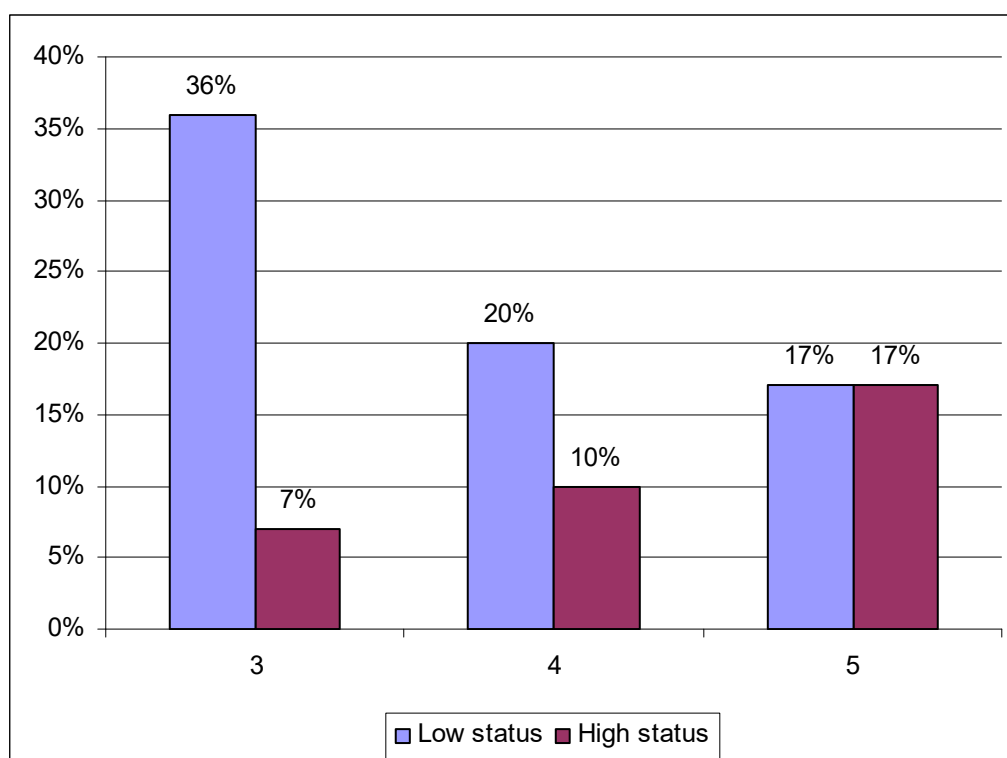


**Figure 14. The physical position of the translators' workplaces in the company as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category (based on responses from the translators).**

As we can see, no clear or logical correlation between translator status and physical position can be derived from Figure 14 where the proportion of both low- and high-status responses increases as the position of the translators' workplaces becomes increasingly central – and vice versa. Thus, these data show no effect of the physical position of translators' workplaces on their job-status ratings, but only indicate that those translators who have a clear opinion

of their occupational status (high or low) are those whose workplaces are placed most centrally.

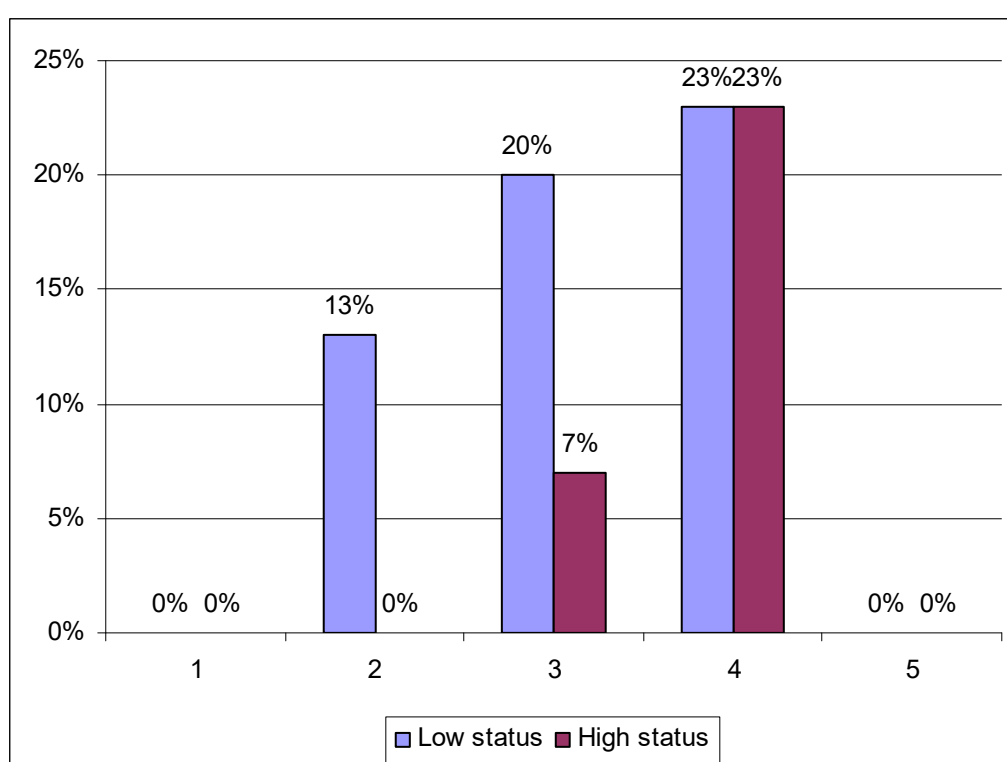
However, the translators' *professional contact* within the company did seem to affect their status perceptions. When asked to rate the degree of their professional contact with other company employees, all the translators ticked one of the three highest degrees (49% marked "a very high degree" of professional contact, 21% stated "a high degree," and 30% "a certain degree"). The relationship between the degree of professional contact or isolation and perceptions of translator status turned out to be very clear, as can be derived from Figure 15 below:



**Figure 15. Degree of the translators' professional contact with other company employees as correlated with percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category (based on responses from the translators).**

As we can see, an increasing degree of professional contact correlates with both a decreasing amount of low-status responses and an increasing amount of high-status answers—and vice versa. In contrast with the results in Figure 14 regarding physical position, this pattern is quite consistent: the more professional contact, the fewer low-status markings and the more high-status ratings; and the less professional contact (or the more professional isolation), the more low-status markings and the fewer high-status ratings. The results in Figures 14 and 15 thus indicate that translators' physical position/isolation is of less importance to their assessments of status than the degree of professional contact/isolation they experience. In other words, it does not appear to be a question of where translators sit, but whom and/or how many they are in contact with.

To shed light on translator visibility from the point of view of the core employees, they were asked two questions, one about their use of the company's translators and one about their knowledge of the company's translators. When asked how often the core employees made *use of the company's translators*, 15% answered "never," 17% responded "at least once a year," 31% "at least once a month," 27% "at least once a week," and 10% marked "on a daily basis." This means that some two thirds of the core employees were regular and/or frequent users of the company's translators. Figure 16 below shows the relationship between the core employees' low- and high-status ratings and the frequency with which they use the company's translators:

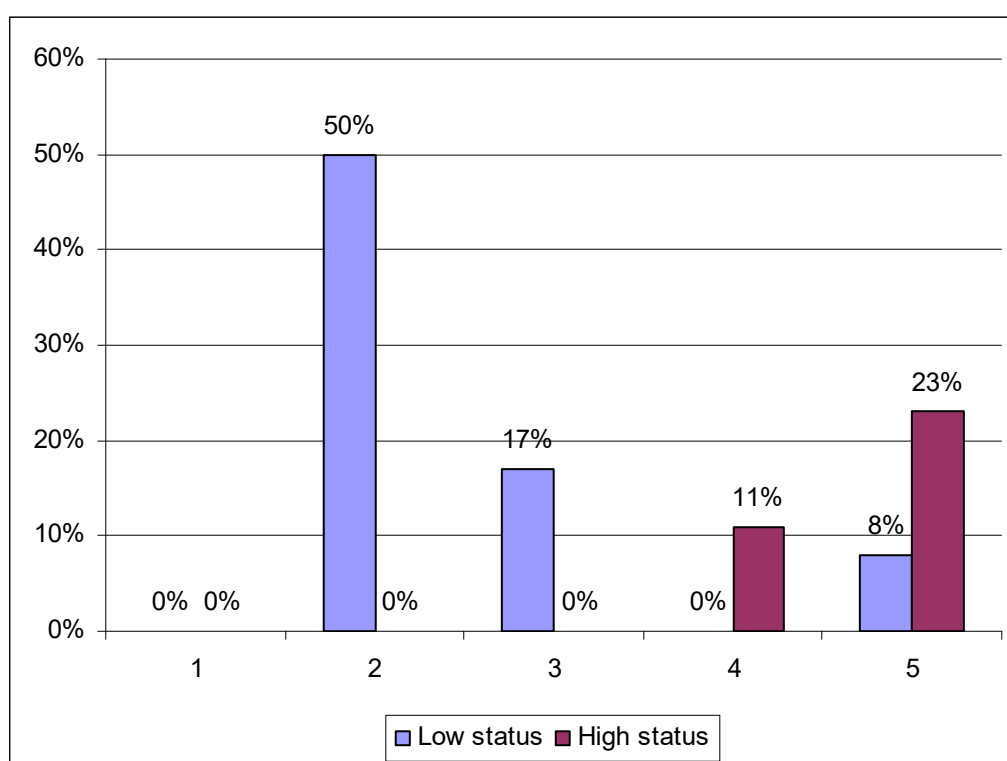


**Figure 16. The frequency with which the core employees use the company's translators as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category (based on responses from the core employees).**

As we can see, there is no clear or logical correlation. The proportions of both low- and high-status responses generally increase (with the exception of the highest category) as the frequency of use increases—and vice versa. Thus, these data show no effect of the use of translators on assessed translator status, but only indicate that those respondents who have a clear opinion of translator status (high *or* low) are those who are frequent users of translation (again, except for the highest category to the right).

Interestingly enough, *knowledge of the company's translators* seems to be a much more important factor in the core employees' assessments of translator

status, as we shall see in Figure 17 below. To elicit responses regarding the question of knowledge, the core employees were asked how many of the company's translators they knew by name or by appearance. Again, their knowledge was quite high: 13% responded "none," 17% answered "few," 25% ticked "quite a lot," 19% replied "most," and 27% stated that they knew "all" of them. Figure 17 shows the relationship between knowledge of the translators and their assessed job status:



**Figure 17. Degree of the core employees' knowledge of the company's translators as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category (based on responses from the core employees).**

A noteworthy feature of the results in Figure 17 is the fact that all the high-status answers are concentrated in the two categories that represent the highest degrees of knowledge of the company's translators, with clearly most high-status ratings (23%) among those respondents who know absolutely all the translators by name and/or appearance. Likewise, the low-status ratings generally become fewer, the better the core employees know the translators and vice versa up to 50% low-status answers if the core employees only know a few of the translators. A unique feature is the fact that in the two categories representing the highest degrees of knowledge, there are for once actually more high-status than low-status answers (11% vs. 0, and 23% vs. 8%). Judging from these data, knowledge of the translators thus seems to be highly important for the evaluation of translator status, and much more so than the mere use of translators.



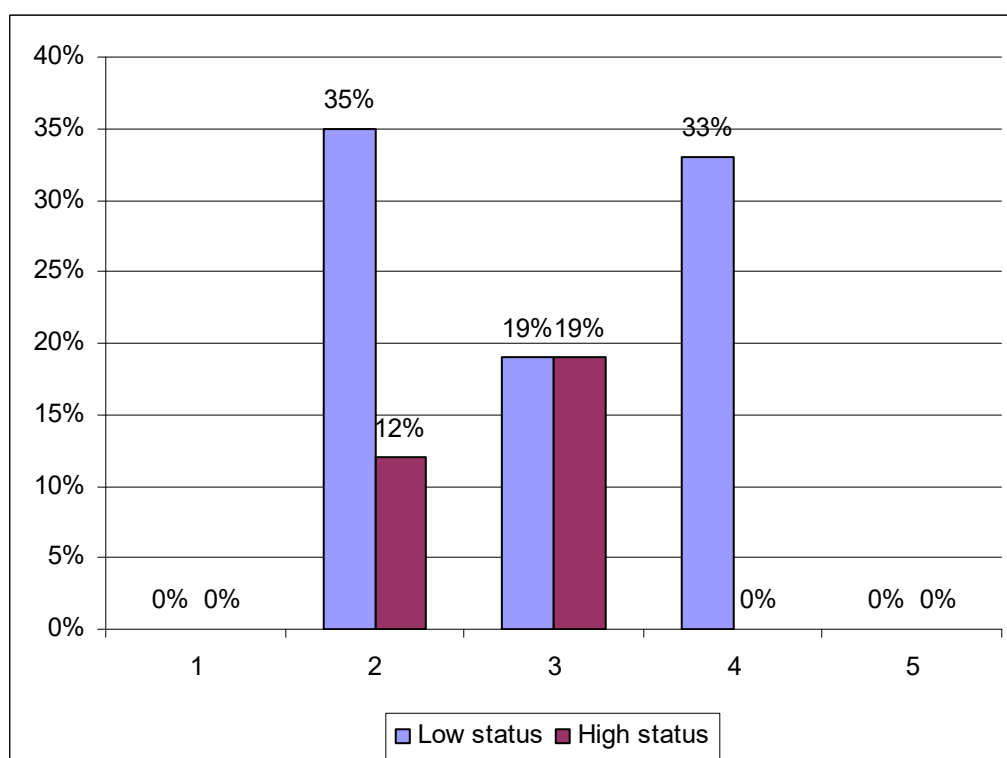
We may note that the parameter of knowledge seems closely related to the parameter of confidence dealt with in Section 3.7 as the latter generally presupposes the former. The results of the analyses of both parameters turned out not only to be exceptionally clear but also to exhibit identical patterns pointing in the same direction: both parameters seem very important for the core employees' perception of translator status. As was the case with the parameter of confidence discussed above, the apparent importance of the knowledge factor is not encouraging for those freelance translators and translation agencies who have few regular customers.

All in all, the results and discussions of the present section point to the importance of professional contact over physical position for translators' assessment of their job prestige and to the significance of actual knowledge of over mere use of translators for core employees' assessment of translator status.

### **3.9 Power/influence**

Influence, or even power, is also a parameter which is often associated with occupational prestige and which translators are often said to lack (e.g. Venuti 1995, 131; Snell-Hornby 2006, 172).

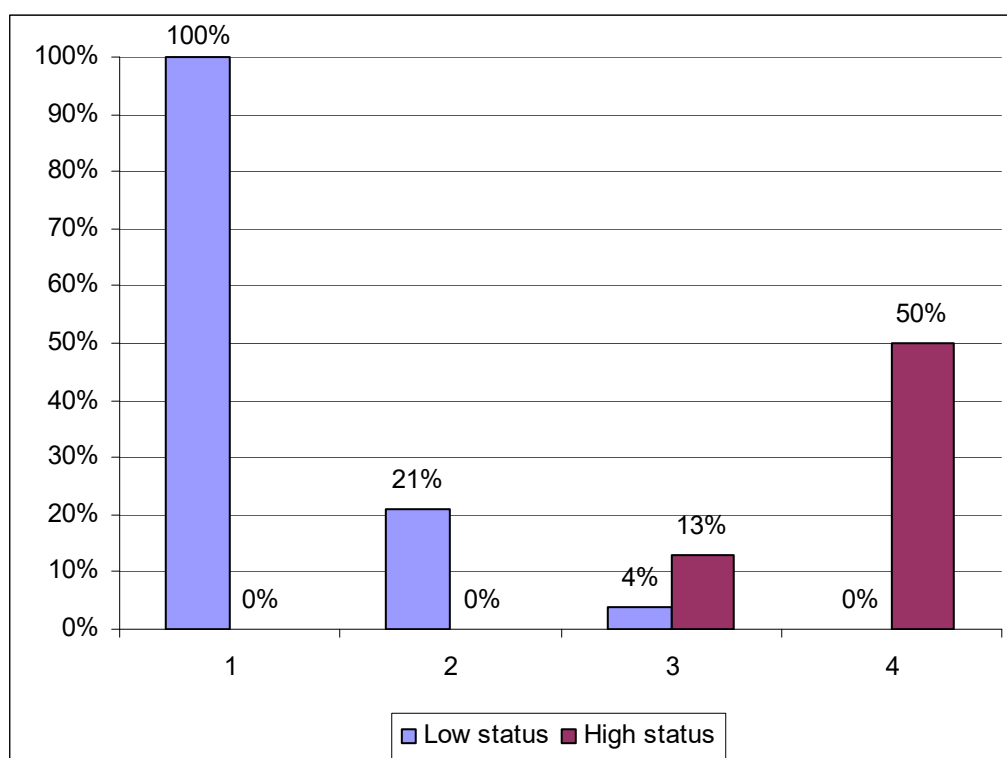
The first question relating to this parameter was a general one concerning the perceived degree of the translators' influence in the company. It was addressed to both groups of respondents, and their responses unanimously showed that they found the translators' influence to be limited. The translators' and core employees' answers were distributed as follows (the core employees' responses are indicated in brackets): 9% (4%) marked the response category "a very low degree or none at all," 37% (41%) ticked "a low degree," 46% (50%) stated "a certain degree," 7% (4%) "a high degree," and 2% (0%) marked the category "a very high degree". Figure 18 below shows the relationship between the translators' own status perceptions and their assessments of their influence in the companies:



**Figure 18. The translators' assessments of the degree of their influence in the company as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

As can be derived from Figure 18, there is no relation between the translators' status perceptions and their influence in the company. Contrary to what could be expected, there are no high-status ratings at all among the allegedly most influential translators (in the two rightmost categories); rather all the high-status markings are made by translators with influence rated as "a low degree" (12%) or "a certain degree" (19%) (categories 2 and 3, respectively). On the other hand, 33% among the relatively influential translators (category 4) rate translation as low status, which is almost as many as those in category 2, among whom 35% see translation as a low-status occupation. Thus, for translators' perception of their occupational status, influence appears not to be nearly as important as is often assumed. This observation is corroborated by the fact that among the few translators in the sample who state that they hold an executive office or managerial position (4%) nobody actually rates their occupation as one of high status (nor as one of low status, we may add). Rather, all the high-status ratings in the sample are made by the many translators who do not hold a management position (96%).

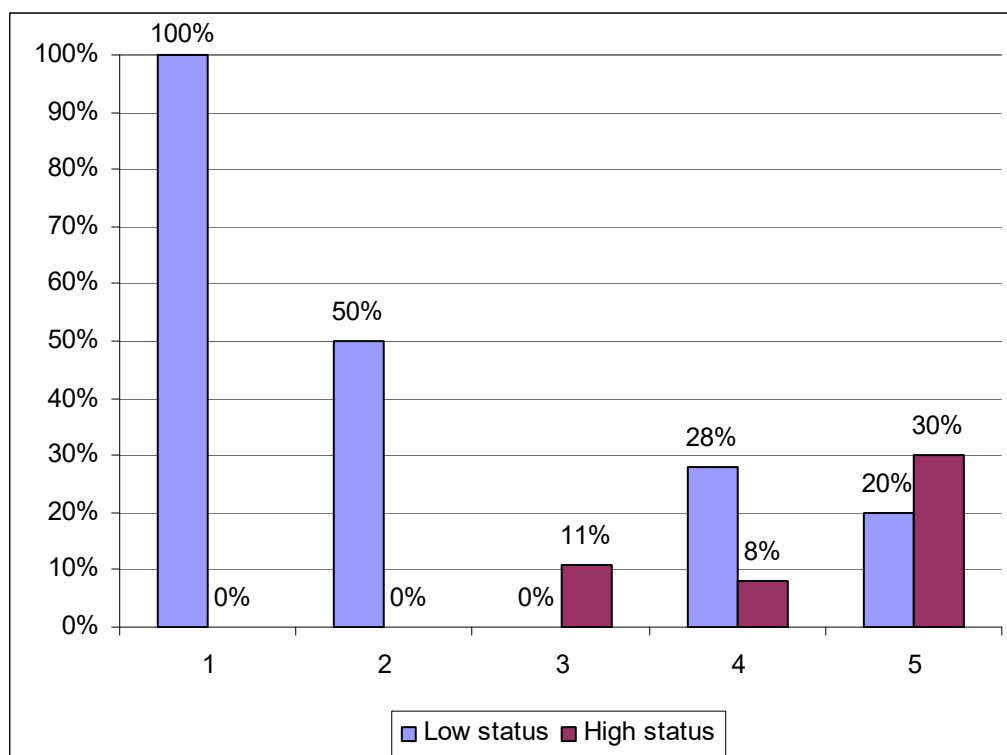
We shall revert to this discussion later, but first we shall look at the relationship between the core employees' status perceptions and their assessments of the translators' influence in the companies, cf. Figure 19 below:



**Figure 19. The core employees' assessments of the degree of the translators' influence in the company as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

Figure 19 shows a very clear relationship between the core employees' assessments of translator influence and their perception of translator status: no or low degrees of influence correlate strongly with low-status ratings, whereas high degrees of influence are linked with high-status ratings. To the core employees in this sample, there is therefore little doubt that influence is a strong indicator of status, which is in stark contrast with the results obtained for the translators, to whom influence is apparently of little importance to how they perceive their job prestige.

Another interesting observation is that, whereas influence seems to be of little importance to the translators, the related concept of *responsibility* appears to be rather important for the amount of prestige they attach to their profession, as we shall see below. Although we have never seen responsibility described as a status parameter in the literature, we intuitively felt it would be important for many translators and perhaps even psychologically more 'acceptable' than the more aggressive concept of influence, as the latter concept focuses on (external) rights or privileges whereas the former focuses more on (internal) obligations. We therefore asked the translators how much responsibility was involved in their jobs as translators. Their answers were distributed as follows: 2% answered "a very low degree or none at all," 4% marked "a low degree," 19% stated "a certain degree," 53% "a high degree," and 21% described their jobs as involving "a very high degree" of responsibility. So generally the translators find that their jobs involve much responsibility. Figure 20 below shows the relationship between the translators' low- and high-status ratings and the degree of responsibility involved in their jobs:



**Figure 20. The translators' assessments of the degree of responsibility involved in translating as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

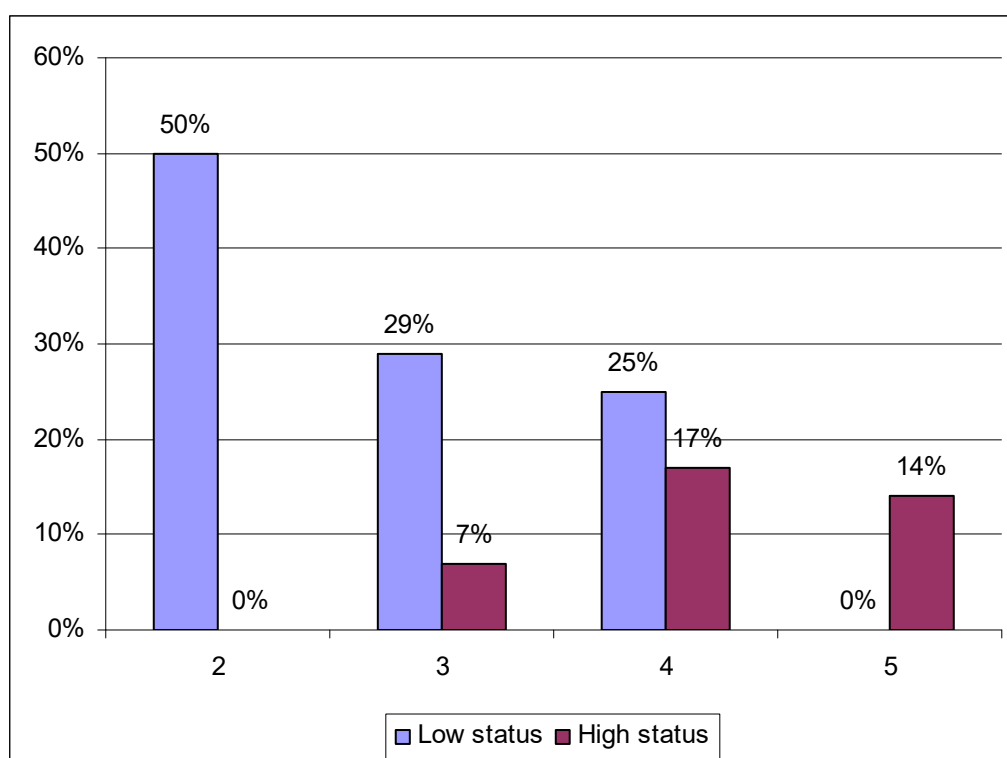
Figure 20 shows that, while there is not necessarily a one-to-one relation between responsibility and status perception, most low-status responses are clearly connected with low degrees of responsibility, whereas most high-status answers are linked with high degrees of responsibility. For example, all the respondents (100%) who state that their responsibility is "very low or none at all" (1) rate their job as low status, and 50% of those who rate their responsibility as "very low" (2) consider translation a low-status job, whereas nobody in these two groups rates it as high-status. On the other hand, the group of translators with most high-status ratings (30%) are those who describe their responsibility as "very high." Thus, the more obligation-oriented—and some would say feminine—concept of responsibility appears to be of higher importance for translators when it comes to determining the status of their profession than the more right-oriented—and some would say masculine—concept of influence.

### 3.10 Appreciation: also a status parameter?

Like responsibility, the concept of appreciation is not separately mentioned as a status parameter in the sociological literature on occupational prestige. However, the translation literature which comes closest to examining translator status frequently describes translators and their work as unappreciated (e.g. Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1995/2000, 92) or with close synonyms such as thankless (Risku 2004: 185) or not recognised (Venuti 1995: 17).

Consequently, we chose to include a question on appreciation in our study. The translators were asked to what extent their work was appreciated by others, and their responses were distributed as follows: 4% stated that their work was appreciated only "to a low degree," 30% answered "to a certain degree," 51% "to a high degree," and 15% marked "to a very high degree." Nobody ticked the lowest ranking category "a very low degree or none at all." Thus, all in all, the translators generally felt that their work was appreciated, although a fair number of them were not too enthusiastic.

Figure 21 below shows the relationship between the translators' low- and high-status ratings and the degree of perceived appreciation of their work:



**Figure 21. The translators' assessments of the degree of appreciation of their work as correlated with the percentage of low- and high-status answers in each category.**

As shown in Figure 21, the relationship between perceived status and appreciation is quite clear: the more appreciated the translators feel, the fewer low-status and the more high-status ratings they give, with the exception of the slightly lower percentage of high-status answers in the category representing the highest degree of appreciation (14%) than in the second highest category of appreciation (17%). The inverse description is of course also valid: the less appreciated the translators feel, the more low-status and the fewer high-status ratings they generally give. From whatever angle the data is analysed, the correlation between translators' status perceptions and their feelings of appreciation emanates clearly from this sample. It is quite noteworthy that such a 'soft' parameter as appreciation seems to be so influential when it comes to rating job status. In fact, it seems more important

for the translators' status ratings than some of the traditional, hard-core status parameters, including money and power. We shall revert to this discussion in the conclusion below.

#### 4. Conclusion

A variety of different parameters have been examined in this paper, and the study has made it possible to make a series of observations each of which contributes in its own way to shedding light on the issue of translator status, if at this point only framed as hypotheses which are to be tested against larger samples of data in later studies both of a qualitative and a quantitative nature. In the following, we shall summarise our main findings with a view to highlighting some of the factors which seem to affect the perception of translator status—in both translators and core employees.

In terms of demographic parameters, we found *age* to be of some importance to both translators' and core employees' assessments of translator status. For the translators, the perception of translation as a high-status profession was predominantly linked with young age and low-status views with more advanced age. This possibly reflects a relatively high self-esteem in young company translators, fresh out of university, which gradually decreases as they become immersed into professional life—a process we tentatively described as progressive disillusion (though we offered a possible alternative explanation, namely that translator status may have changed over the years and the more mature translators may have started working at a time when the status was lower than now). We also saw how the core employees' high-status perceptions tended to decrease with age, an observation that supports the idea that it is the realities of professional life, rather than for example the educational system, which stimulate the view of company translators as anything but high-status professionals.

With respect to *gender*, we found no correlations between status perceptions and gender among the translators, but interestingly enough, we found that the male core employees see translation mainly as a low-status profession, whereas their female counterparts tend to see translator status as high. We know that translation is a profession mainly populated by women, that it somehow appeals more to women than to men, but it is perhaps new that women (outside the profession) possibly also attribute higher status to translation than men do.

In terms of *professional identity*, we analysed the correlations between translator status evaluations and the parameters of *state authorisation*, *job denomination* and *time dedicated to translation*. We found that the translators with the strongest professional identities or profiles as translators—those with state authorisation, those whose job denomination is 'translator,' and those who dedicate most of their working time to translation—tended to describe translation as a low-status profession less often than other groups of

translators. However, we did not find any correlations between high-status perceptions and professional identity. Thus, although there is no evidence that a strong professional profile facilitates a high-status perception of translation, such a profile may reduce the tendency to see it as a low-status profession.

The first of the four so-called status parameters we analysed with respect to their impact on low- and high-status assessments was that of *salary*. Also in this context we found that translators with relatively high salaries tended to describe translation as a low-status profession less frequently than translators with lower salaries, and vice versa, whereas no correlation between high-status assessments and salary levels was found. Thus, there is no evidence that a high-status perception of translation is facilitated by high salaries, but it appears that high salaries may reduce the tendency in translators to see theirs as a low-status profession—and vice versa, that low salaries may increase their tendency to perceive translation as a low-status job. In other words, a high level of remuneration may be a *necessary* condition for the translators not to view the status of their profession as low, but it may not by itself be *sufficient* to ensure a high-status perception.

The second status parameter we analysed was that of *education/expertise*. First, the core employees' assessments of translator education/expertise were matched with their translator-status assessments. We found that the core employees attributed no apparent importance to the level of translator education in their status assessments, but that they attached some—although not much—importance to translator expertise. However, what turned out to be really important for them was how much confidence they had in the quality of the translators' work, something which clearly presupposes both education and expertise on the part of the translators. Education and expertise therefore apparently play a more important role than is explicitly acknowledged by the core employees. Second, the translators' assessments of the degree of expertise involved in translating were matched with their status perceptions, and although we found no correlation between high-status answers and expertise, we did find that the higher the translators consider their level of expertise to be, the less they tend to think of translation as a low-status profession.

The third status parameter, *visibility*, was analysed from the point of view of the translators' physical position in the company and their professional contact with other employees in the company. We found that the translators' status assessments were not affected by the position of their workplaces, whether central or peripheral, but that they attribute major importance to the degree of professional contact or isolation they experience: the more professional contact, the fewer low-status responses and the more high-status ratings, and vice versa as regards professional isolation. With respect to the core employees, it was interesting to find that the frequency with which they use the company's translators did not in itself influence their status ratings, whereas actual knowledge of the company's translators (by name and/or appearance) clearly meant both more high-status and fewer low-status ratings.

With respect to the fourth status parameter, we found that *power/influence* was of no importance to the translators' own perceptions of their job prestige, whereas with the core employees we found a strong correlation between low-status ratings and low degrees of influence and between high-status ratings and high degrees of influence. It is interesting to see how a particular parameter—in this case *power/influence*—can apparently be completely unimportant to the practising professionals in question, in this case the translators, whereas it remains an important indicator of status to people outside the profession, in this case the core employees. Another interesting finding in the analyses of *power/influence* was the strong correlation between the translators' assessments of their professional status and the degree of responsibility they reported having in their jobs. Thus, whereas *influence* turned out to have no apparent effect on translators' status ratings, work that involves responsibility did seem to play a non-trivial role.

Finally, as a wildcard of sorts, we analysed the parameter of *appreciation* and its importance to the translators' evaluation of their job prestige. The correlation turned out to be immensely clear: the more appreciated the translators felt, the fewer low-status and the more high-status ratings they gave.

As our readers have probably noticed, many of the parameters we have analysed in this article seem to have only a rather weak influence on the respondents' status views, insofar as they only correlate with their low-status ratings, while they apparently do not affect their high-status ratings (e.g. salary from the point of view of the translators). Such parameters seem to be able to reduce the widespread perception of translation as a low-status occupation, but they do not in themselves bring about a high-status view. We suggest referring to such parameters as *weak status parameters*, as opposed to *strong status parameters*, which would then be parameters that seem not only to reduce low-status views, but also to enhance high-status ratings. The status of parameters as weak or strong is of course relative, as one parameter may be weak in the eyes of one population and strong in the eyes of another.

Especially in the analyses of the translators' responses we found quite a number of so-called weak parameters. This applies to all the variables indicating professional identity (state authorisation, job denomination, time dedicated to translation) as well as to salary and expertise. It is quite interesting that salary, which is normally considered one of the most powerful status parameters, seems to be only a weak parameter from the point of view of our translator respondents. What turned out to be strong status parameters to the translators were (apart from age) professional contact, responsibility and appreciation, i.e. factors that are only distantly related, if at all, to the status parameters traditionally considered most important: salary, expertise, visibility and *power/influence*. Professional contact was analysed as an aspect of the parameter of visibility and responsibility was treated as related to *influence*, but like appreciation these two variables seem to represent 'softer'



—perhaps more feminine?—values than the more hard-core parameters of for example money and power.

The pattern of the core employees' responses differed somewhat from those of the translators' on specific parameters, but they exhibited the same overall tendency of adhering not only to the traditional status parameters. Though the parameter of power/influence was clearly a strong factor in the core employees' assessments of translator status, it was in fact the only traditional status parameter of significance to them. Gender appeared to have a strong influence on how core employees perceive status and the same applies to knowledge of the translators and confidence in the quality of their work. These latter variables cannot exactly be characterised as hard-core parameters, even if they were treated as aspects of visibility and education/expertise, respectively, in the analyses. Thus, among the core employees we encountered a similar tendency as among the translators also to attribute importance to relatively 'soft' aspects of professional life.

We may note that most of the strong parameters—including professional contact, appreciation, knowledge of the translators and confidence in the quality of their work—require close links and regular interaction between translators and their customers and colleagues. As pointed out earlier, this finding is far from encouraging for those freelance translators and translation agencies who have few regular customers, and it invites for pessimism in view of the trend we are currently witnessing in the translation industry in many countries, including Denmark, where many both small and large companies outsource more and more translations to freelancers and translation agencies.

The data and the analyses of the present article have allowed us to generate many interesting hypotheses about translator status and the reasons for low status. Hypotheses which we look forward to testing at a larger scale as well as studying in greater detail with the help of qualitative methods.

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## Biographies

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<sup>1</sup> The statements were originally in Danish - as were all other parts of the questionnaires. We have translated them into English here, as directly as possible. The original Danish versions of the five answering possibilities were: (1) *i meget høj grad*, (2) *i høj grad*, (3) *i nogen grad*, (4) *i ringe grad*, (5) *i meget ringe grad eller slet ikke*.

<sup>2</sup> One Euro corresponds to approximately 7.5 DKK (Danish Kroner).