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Elite and non-elite translator manpower: The non-professionalised culture in the translation field in Israel

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ABSTRACT

In occupational fields, centre-periphery relations are contingent on a process of professionalisation, which is a symptom of status struggles, with expert elites claiming privileges by monopolising knowledge and skills. In the translatorial occupations, despite recently increasing efforts toward professionalisation, this process still seems to be suspended, with elite literary translators cultivating a counter-professionalisation ethos to secure their status. Taking the situation in Israel as an extreme example, I use findings from a first comprehensive interview-based study of its kind in Israel to discuss the permeation of a counter-professionalisation trend in the field of translatorial occupations at large. I examine the effect of an anti-professionalisation ethos on the self-perception of non-elite practitioners in the different branches of this occupation (commercial and technical translators, non-elite literary translators, subtitlers, conference and community interpreters). I argue that this ethos, with its artisation-oriented nature, determines the prestige scale in this occupational field, and thus has crucial impact on shaping the relations between elite and non-elite manpower in it. While top literary translators draw on it for their sense of distinction and privileges, for the largest population of non-elite translators, lacking a sense of personal agency and cultural role, this ethos serves as a buffer to capitalising on alternative resources that are usually attached to professionalism.

KEYWORDS

Non-elite translators and interpreters, status dynamics, suspended professionalisation, counter-professionalisation, professional ethos, translatorial occupations.

1. Introduction

All fields of cultural production are hierarchised, revealing an uneven distribution of prestige and a tension between dominant and marginal repertoires. However, in some fields it is not always clear where the centre lies and what is at issue in creating such hierarchies. Translation is typically one such field, given the fuzziness of its boundaries and the intersection between its different sub-fields, and the weak standardisation of its production (Sela-Sheffy 2005). This state of affairs is inevitably consequential for the social status of translators and interpreters, as is often lamented by translation scholars and critics. While the interplay and shifts between central and peripheral repertoires have been discussed at length with reference to *literary* translation, our understanding of the stratification dynamics in other branches of the translatorial occupations is quite vague. My contention is that a status structure is traceable from the working *ethos* and *self-perception* of the practitioners in the different branches of the translatorial occupation. Based on my ongoing research on translators and interpreters in Israel (2005, 2008, 2010, and elsewhere, Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2008), I argue that the seeming lack of a centre is contingent on the state of professionalisation of this

field. Specifically, it hinges on a counter-professionalisation ethos that prevails in it, regardless of practical advantages that are usually associated with professionalisation, such as pay or formal education. Using material from the Israeli case, in this article, I discuss the suspended professionalisation of the translatorial occupations and its impact on the formation of status relations between the different groups of practitioners in this field of cultural production.

1.1. Professionalisation as a strategy of canonisation and hierarchy formation

In occupational fields, hierarchical relations are usually formed through a process of professionalisation. This process is a symptom of status struggles within an occupational space, where groups of experts claim superiority and privileges by establishing systematic knowledge, skills and methods, and by monopolising them through organisations and state institutions (Abott 1988, Evetts 2003, Freidson 1994, Gargan 1993, Larson 1977, MacDonald 1995, Muzio 2011, Torstendahl and Burrage 1990). This process guarantees not only boundaries vis-à-vis other occupations, but also an inner demarcation within one and the same field, between small-scale cores of top specialists and a broader, fuzzier space of non-elite manpower, including less qualified or amateur practitioners. This dynamics is typical of prosperous occupations, such as, notably, medicine, law, or accountancy, which accumulate capital to the point that they transform into fully-fledged autonomous professions (thus serving as paradigmatic cases in the study of professions).

Apparently, professionalisation processes have been recently accelerating in translation in many countries around the world. This is increasingly attested by the research on translation as a profession within TS (e.g., Archibald 1997, Arocha and Joyce 2013, Chan 2009, Choi and Lim 2002, Dam and Zethsen 2010, 2011, Ferreira-Alves 2011, Grbić 2011, Goudec 2007, Katan 2011, Kinnunen and Koskinen (eds) 2010, Monzó 2011, Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (eds) 2011, Setton and Lianglang 2011, Volland 2014; Wadensjo *et al.* (eds) 2007). All these and other studies reveal, however, that professionalisation in the different translatorial domains is still belated and partial. The Israeli case provides an extreme example: there, notwithstanding the global trend toward professionalising translation, this process has never gained momentum. Despite a growing demand for all forms of inter-lingual and inter-cultural mediation in this country in every aspect of public life, practicing translation and interpreting is not regularised by professional bodies, nor are these practices recognised as officially registered professions. Apart from small niches (notably conference interpreting), the market is flooded by non-qualified manpower, in the absence of compulsory training and certification. Translators usually work as freelancers and their translation careers are often fragmentary, part-time or secondary. During the recent two decades, attempts have been made by some dozens of committed

(non-literary) translators to grant power to *The Israeli Translator Association* by proposing means of self-regulation and control. Others have taken initiatives to establish associations for specific sectors, such as subtitling and sign-language interpreting. However, to date, these attempts have hardly changed the situation on the translation market.

By all parameters, translation and interpreting in Israel today are under-professionalised occupations. They lie on the twilight zone between recognised professions and loosely defined crafts, where working competence is mainly acquired through social learning (Lave and Wanger 1991) and which may often be practiced *ad hoc* — not very differently from other text-production jobs, journalism or customer servicing, as well as cooking, gardening, childcare, etc. (e.g., Fournier 1999, Hammond and Czyszczon 2014, Noordegraaf 2007). What translation has in common with all these and many other ambiguous or emerging occupations is the fuzziness of boundaries, inexplicit rules and lack of obligatory supervision. Rather than a diploma, what qualifies one to pursue these occupations are personal abilities and reputation.

Thus, while standards and control are taken to constitute an indispensable phase in the construction of well-established professions, in many occupations*,* including prosperous ones*,* this phase is often suspended or fails entirely. The reasons for this dynamics may be various. Obviously, whether or not an occupation undergoes professionalisation depends on market incentives and the interest of corporate or governmental bodies to control the given cultural production. However, the major impetus for this process comes from the practitioners themselves, who strive to capitalise on their specific abilities and monopolise them as their own exclusive assets. To justify their claim to monopoly, they have to demonstrate their ultimate competence and moral fitness to do the job (Goffman 1959). Developing a professional discourse is therefore crucial in constructing and propagating a professional status (Fournier 1999). The strategies of achieving this status naturally depend on the working codes and attitudes of the relevant groups of practitioners in their specific environments. My contention is therefore that more than institutional tools, what facilitates professionalisation or de-professionalisation trends in a given occupational field is the cultivation and distribution of a working ethos in it.

It follows that beyond making institutions, professionalism entails the formation of an *identity*, that is, a sense of the kind of person that fits a job (see also Whitchurch 2008). Such a 'professional self' comprises both *personal dispositions* and the undertaking of certain *social roles* (Sela-Sheffy 2014). Beyond formal measures, this sense of identity is what provides the filtering criteria for the eligible members of a profession and determines their success and reputation. Professional identity is consequently a powerful resource in every occupation, one that helps define its boundaries and maintain hierarchies within it, in ways that either encourage or impede professionalisation. From this perspective,

exploring the identity dynamics in the field of translation and interpreting sheds light on cases of *suspended* professionalisation.

Let me summarise my argument in advance: I argue that at least in the Israeli case, which may be analogous to other cultural settings, the status structure in the field of translation and interpreting is shaped by a prevailing counter-professionalisation ethos, and that this ethos is nurtured by a restricted circle of elite literary translators. This means that the occupational identity and sense of personal agency cultivated by this small sector is what prevents the construction of institutional tools and determines the hierarchy in the field at large. This further means that despite the loose structure of the field and its division into different branches, it is governed by a more or less 'unified symbolic market', to use Bourdieu's terminology (1995), in which literary translators are those who set the symbolic prices.

2. The identity discourse of top literary translators — a strong sense of agency

Sociologists of professions agree that professionalisation is a means of achieving autonomy of an occupation, in which an ever-growing inner competition accelerates closure. However, as Bourdieu (1985) has emphasised, there are other, no less effective forms of autonomisation. Unlike the cases of the allegedly non-codified fields, such as the art and the intellectual ones that lie at Bourdieu's focus of interest, in highly professionalised settings this dynamics culminates in increased formalisation of the 'rules of the game'. However, negotiations of implicit codes and rival ethoses are widespread even in institutionalised professions. Foley (2005), for instance, describes an ongoing struggle between two competing professional identities of midwives — that of officially certified medical midwives vs. that of the 'natural' ones who draw mainly on tradition and experience — as means of claiming professional legitimacy and supremacy in their occupation. Similarly, studies on medical settings reveal implicit status struggles between certified biomedical physicians and alternative therapists (e.g. Barnes 2003, Shuval and Mizrachi 2002). In these and many other fields professionalism is championed by expert elites as means of establishing the autonomy of their trade and securing their own higher position and privileges vis-à-vis other, lower-ranked sectors that vie for recognition. In contrast to such professionally-oriented domains, however, in translation, elite practitioners are precisely the ones who strive to maintain the autonomy of their trade and secure their own higher position by *preventing* professionalisation. Moreover, it appears that the prevailing anti-professionalisation attitude of these elite translators encounters no serious defiance on the part of thousands of anonymous non-elite translators and interpreters.

As I have contended elsewhere (Sela-Sheffy 2008), my former study on Israeli translators revealed that, despite the common humble image of translators as underrated and invisible, a small circle of literary translators have established for themselves a prominent cultural position. My materials, which amounted to some hundreds of items from the media, bore evidence to a highly aspiring discourse of around thirty acclaimed literary translators, who demonstrated a firm occupational identity. These translators have no formal criteria by which they can claim outstanding professional achievements. They resort to neither privileged educational background nor institutional affiliation or membership in exclusive associations. As they usually have additional literary-related careers, for instance as editors, critics or academics, their reputation is based entirely on a strong sense of personal agency and self-promotion abilities in the general field of literary production.

The point is that while these literary translators specialise in one single translation type — they translate nothing but canonical literature – and are very conscious of their exclusive standing, they totally reject all other features of professionalism. As I have elaborated on previously, they play by what Bourdieu calls 'the rules of art' (1996[1992]). This entails twofold important elements, which I will sketch here briefly (see details in Sela-Sheffy 2008, 2010):

(1) For one thing, they demonstrate an 'interest of disinterestedness' (Bourdieu 1983), denying all forms of economic gratifications as factors in their translation careers. Even if they earn their living by translation, they treat their job as a pure *vocation* (see Estola *et al.* 2003), one that demands unconditioned commitment, "whether they pay [them] or not" (Kaspi in Seidman 1988: 21; all translations from the Hebrew are mine). Rather than practical considerations, they highlight their artistic license and total devotion to their work for its own sake: "[T]he reader is not really on my mind […I translate] for [the sake of] the corpus of Hebrew" (Mirsky in Melamed 1989: 33).

(2) Consequently, formalised standards are inconceivable in their discourse, which revolves around creativity and intuition as their only evaluation measures. Their vision of the ultimate translator is that of a free spirit, a virtuoso, whose practice equals that of artists. "In translation I repeat the process of creation" (Litvin in Snir 1988: 18) is a typical assertion. Professional skills and methods thus remain obscure and formal training remains absolutely rejected. According to them, the ability to translate is based entirely on 'natural resources', which entail above all an exceptional *personality:* "Translation is an obscure profession, and the translator is an obscure person [of whom] a special blend of qualities is required" (Ron in Lanir 1987: 5). Talent, inspiration, intellectual sensibilities and passion are qualities that count. All this is reflected in their narratives of becoming translators, which usually

comprise an inner urge and sense of self-distinction from childhood, and lifelong attraction and devotion.

Another natural resource that literary translators aspire to is a *social role* as cultural custodians. They demonstrate their aspirations to this role either as cultural gatekeepers or as cultural brokers. In the former case, they strive to capitalise on their superb knowledge of the domestic language and cultural lore, taking up an orthodox educational mission: "[I]n each and every [Hebrew] letter I write […I am] filled with a sense of duty" (e.g. Porath 2002: 5/2). In the latter case, they underline their cosmopolitan habitus that qualifies them to serve as "ambassadors of cultures" (Arad in *Moznayim* 1983: 26), to salvage the domestic culture from provincialism and set new trends: "[…] Translators pave the way for what will come next" (Litvin in Snir 1988: 19).

In conclusion, this identity discourse, perpetuated by acclaimed translators, ultimately constructs their uncompromised *artisation* tendency and their strong sense of *personal agency as individuals*. All this undermines the potential view of translation as a rationally organised and bureaucratised field of practice. Moreover, this powerful image-making discourse serves as a symbolic asset by which top literary translators indicate their supremacy and distance themselves from all the other translators, whom they call "mere technicians of words" (Litvin in Karpel 1994). Their sense of distinction, which eventually translates into concrete privileges, provides the logic for the divide in the field of translation that actually sets this small elitist sector as a field apart, embedded in the *literary* field and corresponding with other literary-related jobs more than with any of the other sectors in the field of translation and interpreting.

3. The identity discourse of non-elite translators and interpreters — a weak sense of agency

Proceeding from these findings, I set out to expand the scope of study to encompass the larger, more heterogeneous community of non-elite anonymous translators in Israel. Together with my late colleague, Miriam Shlesinger, I embarked on a large-scale interview-based project, the first of its kind in Israel[1]. Between 2006 and 2009 we interviewed 95 practicing translators and interpreters in various sectors, in an attempt to grasp how these practitioners make sense of their work and claim occupational status.

3.1. Material and method

Since no official data exist regarding active translators and interpreters in Israel, their number is only approximate. During the time the research was conducted a report in a business magazine, for instance, provided the estimated number of 1,500 translators, of whom 530 were registered members of Israel Translators Association (Heruti-Sover 2008). However,

given the unstructured nature of this occupational field, it stands to reason that the actual number of people who are engaged one way or the other in translation and interpreting jobs is many times higher than any given estimation. For lack of an established database, we had to resort to a variety of indirect methods for recruiting our interviewees. These included contacting translation agencies as well as large corporations that employ in-house translators; searching the Yellow Pages; conducting internet searches of membership lists of such professional organisations as the *Israel Translators Association* and the Israel section of the *International Association of Conference Interpreters*, and tapping numerous other sources of information on a word-of-mouth basis. Our guidelines in creating our list of interviewees was that their target language was Hebrew (however, without confining ourselves to English as a source language)[2] and that they had at least several years of uninterrupted working experience. Clearly, information was more available for some subgroups than for others. In the case of literary translators and subtitlers, for example, credit is generally given alongside their output, and the names are more readily apparent. The work of commercial translators or interpreters, on the other hand, is usually anonymous, and the task of tracking down individual translators or interpreters is more elusive.

Based on these miscellaneous sources, we compiled a list of over 800 potential interviewees, most of them in the categories of written translation, taking into account such parameters as geographical distribution, source languages, educational backgrounds, nature of employment (self-employed or salaried), etc. We then used brief, preliminary telephone interviews and an electronically distributed questionnaire, to select our interviewees[3].

The initial plan was to interview representatives of five different translatorial subgroups — 20 people in each — as follows: commercial/technical translators (i.e. I use this term for those who perform written translation that is neither literature nor subtitling; this is apparently the largest branch of translators in Israel); non-elite literary translators; subtitlers; conference interpreters; and community interpreters (the latter also include court and sign-language interpreters). However, this grouping soon proved to be ineffective. Beyond the problem of the uneven distribution of job types (e.g. there are far more commercial translators than subtitlers, far more written translators than oral interpreters, and more conference interpreters than community interpreters), it turned out that almost half of our sample (41 interviewees) have been engaged in more than one translation job type at the same time. As can be derived from Table 1 (3rd column), only 54 practitioners in our sample specialise in a single translatorial job. 36 of them are engaged in 2 job types, and another 5 are doing 3 job types simultaneously. This fact confirms our assumption concerning the

structural flexibility and mobility within the translation professions (as well as between these and closely related ones).

Job type	Number of practitioners doing a given job type	Number of practitioners specialized in a single job type	Intersection of job types				
			Commercial/ Technical translation	Literary translation	Subtitles	Conference interpreting	Community interpreting
Commercial/ Technical translation	47	**17**	■	**12** [4 + conference interpreting]	**5** [1 + conference interpreting]	**16** [4 + literary translation] [1 + subtitles]	**1**
Literary translation	32	**12**	**12** [4 + conference interpreting]	■	**5** [1 + commercial translation]	**4** + commercial translation	----
Subtitles	16	**5**	**5** [1 + conference interpreting]	**5**	■	**1** + commercial translation	----
Conference interpreting	30	**9**	**16** [2 + subtitles]	**4**	**1** + commercial translation	■	**5**
Community interpreting (including sign-language interpreting)	16	**11**	**1**	----	----	**5**	■

Table 1: **Interviewee sample according to the distribution and intersection of job types.**

The interviews were unstructured and long (90–120 minutes each), and documented by interview protocols. They were carefully transcribed (with each transcript covering 35–45 pages), in an attempt to incorporate into the transcription as many features as possible of actual speech, to allow a meticulous discourse analysis. Our aim was to get maximal access to the speakers' viewpoints using their own words and frames of mind.

3.2. Findings

In the following, I shall present my main observations based on the interviews.

Lack of vocational ethos

The picture that emerges from the hundreds of recorded conversation hours is profoundly ambivalent. On the one hand, as expected, most of the interviewees treat their translation work as a job for earning a living, and talk openly about their practical concerns. For instance, describing this job as an earning opportunity for young mothers or for introvert people is quite common, for example:

> […] it suits me very much, very much. Including working from home […] eh… both on account of the baby and me, my nature, it is convenient. […] convenient for me! That [is,] people don't bother me, I am working, I do something that is of interest to me, and at the same time they don't… hassle me. (Interview with L, commercial translator, conference interpreter and subtitler).

This lack of mystification in conceiving of their job is often reflected in the way the interviewees narrate how they became translators. Unlike stories of elite literary translators, theirs are usually fragmentary stories of 'one thing has led to another', lacking the vocational aspirations of the former and without hiding hesitance and ambivalence that stem from their pragmatic considerations. For many of them, doing translation appears as nothing but an accessible earning opportunity, one among other occupations that fit their education (which is for the most part a basic academic graduation in the Humanities or the Social Sciences). As one of them recounts, for instance, she ended up doing translation because it was a reasonable compromise, given her education, on the one hand, and her position as a married woman and a secondary provider in the family, on the other: "I did not know exactly what I was going to do [after graduating in literature]" she says,

> I thought… maybe in the direction of teaching… but eh… finally no, it was not exciting enough […] Eh… by then I already had some experience in translation, simply eh… […] | it's simply not something that you can make a living of […] So I looked for something close […] <chuckle> if my husband hadn't earned as much as he does I probably wouldn't have… taken this direction [at all] (Interview with C, commercial translator)

And yet, notwithstanding this pragmatic attitude, for the most part, these translators express no interest in formal measures of professionalism and show no signs that they find this option attractive as an added value to their occupational status.

Lack of specialisation and regulation

For one thing, as emerges from Table 1, specialisation, which is an essential aspect of professionalism, is actually not required for these translators' career, nor does it emerge as desirable from their accounts. Moreover, while these translators are concerned about their conditions and fees, they resent regulation measures and supervision that could have secured these conditions. Most of them are either not members of *The Israeli Translator Association* or they are unaware of its existence, and overall avoid taking a clear stance on this matter. Along the same lines, they can hardly specify their job qualifications or required training. Most of them have some academic education, but less than one third of them have graduated in Translation Studies, while another third have followed different translation programs and courses, including extra-academic workshops. Regardless of whether they have or have not taken any of these types of study, they usually cannot say why it might be required and what kind of expertise it provides. They often become hesitant and uncertain whenever this issue is brought up. The following segment is typical:

> I [do] think that… a professional should do the translation, but it never happens [this way]. Really, [in practice] everybody translates, apparently. […] I don't mean specifically people who… studied translation in particular, but […] Oh, I don't know what it takes [to be a translator] … <chuckles> […] you need… knowledge of languages… I think that… I think it certainly wouldn't harm if you study… the profession, because there are things that… [but] maybe with the years… you can also achieve them anyway (Interview with L, commercial translator, conference interpreter and subtitler).

Moreover, even those who completed diploma studies rarely elaborate on it as a formative experience in their training course, nor as an important goal in its own right. Since a diploma is not a precondition for practicing translation, it is often treated as nothing more than an 'enrichment experience,' or a sidetrack selected almost by chance, or after doing occasional translation jobs. One translator tells, for instance:

> This was really at the end of [my] psychology schooling, and somehow I was distracted, […I] started eh… diploma studies in communication… simultaneously…I realised [this program] was absolutely bad, […] and I started looking, and I said "wait a minute!", [it was] like [I could have] turned my side work into something more central in my life <laughs> and that's it, […] so it was a rather… intuitive decision, terribly spontaneous, […] it was the end of the year, and I wanted to find out if I was still able to enrol to translation [program], and it was an idea [that struck me], and they said…"the test is next week"…[…] I found myself in translation [studies]. (Interview with R, commercial and literary translator).

Undefined expertise

As a result of the above, most of these translators are unable to define their expert knowledge and proficiency, and where their forte as professionals lies. While some of them mention writing skills, technological literacy, punctuality or reliability, they most commonly emphasise their fascination with and command of foreign languages as their major personal resource. "It comes from a natural gift for languages",

> […] from my attraction to languages, even today I have enormous interest in languages […] I can pick up languages very easily, I can chat in… Italian, German, in… Spanish, without even having ever learned them in my life […] When I was a child, by the way, I learned French at one point […] my dream was to learn French. If… if my parents had money then I would have told them to send me also to… I wanted French lessons so badly (Interview with I, commercial and literary translator).

At the same time, however, they are also conscious that knowledge of languages alone is insufficient for defining their exclusive competence or providing them with professional pride. This is particularly true with reference to knowledge of English or Russian, the two most commonly spoken and written languages in Israel other than Hebrew and Arabic. Israeli translators are very much aware that being fluent in these languages may appear trivial, and are at pains to rebut implied competition on the part of non-qualified common speakers. Stories revealing this concern are rife. One interviewee tells, for instance, about her interaction with a client, a small factory, where:

> […] the girl <chuckles> who makes the orders speaks Russian, she is a secretary there, and usually she tells me that … eh… she does the translations ordinarily… [but since] she's just 'overloaded with work' <mockingly> […] so I do it. Because it's not [just] the languages, [as] people see it… […] there are all kinds of clients, but there are some people who say 'are you crazy?!' you know how many people speak Russian?!' […] they simply say that 'what, what are you talking about, it's such simple languages!' […] I think there're people that really neve::r… […]… people that never had any experience… […] well, I didn't check how she translated and what she did, and what she meant [when she said] she translated, she may have… meant that… she did e-mail correspondence, I don't know, I didn't go <chuckles> into details with her […] what, what can I say? can I argue? me, 'the professional woman'?! <a long laugh> (Interview with L, commercial translator, conference interpreter and subtitler).

Nevertheless, as much as they try, these translators fail to build their professional esteem on more than language skills. They often seem caught by surprise when confronted with a direct question and are unable to provide a coherent idea of what it takes to be a qualified translator beyond language expertise:

> […] well <chuckles> a good translator, it is first and foremost someone who… has a perfect command of the languages with which they work… and… it's not scientific… after all I am not in the position to determine, but, as far as I can tell… […] actually [they] should be languages that you think with… not just languages that you know very well…. so not the range of languages [is what counts]… […] of course also being in command, not just command of the language, but also of its grammatical rules, of the tongue… eh… and eh, a sort of literary sensitivity… a way, an ability to express yourself… not just to translate, like a dictionary, [but rather] to feel the language (Interview with P, commercial and literary translator).

Disavowal of cultural agency

Finally, there is no doubt that commercial and technical translators, including subtitlers, reach a much wider audience than top literary translators, and their production bears by far greater and more direct consequences for commerce and everyday life than that of literary translators. And yet, by contrast to the latter, despite their indispensable services, these anonymous translators lack a sense of personal agency and hesitate to claim a role as culture mediators. To be sure, the ideal of translators as influential cultural brokers is not alien to many of them. However, they hardly express aspirations to assume this role. If asked to comment on it, they often acknowledge this powerful image, but avoid attributing it explicitly to their own experience. The following comment is typical:

> […] ah, certainly… the ideology thing, really, the issue of culture transmission, eh… that is, to.to. to give the broad audience the ability to get to know other cultures, of course it has enormous ideological significance… [yet] I personally eh… am not so much into it, so from my viewpoint it's not so eh…. (Interview with A, subtitler and literary translator).

Some of them, who are more conscious of keeping distance from the higher league of literary translators, deny such aspirations explicitly: "I don't have a kind of… a notion perhaps to translate some book <chuckles> and 'introduce it to the Hebrew reader' <mocking> don't have a kind of… such ambitions" (interview with L, commercial translator, conference interpreter and subtitler).

4. What the two identity discourses tell about the status structure in the field of translation and interpreting

The bulk of interviews at hand reveal that, by contrast to the highly aspiring occupational identity nurtured by top literary translators, the majority of non-elite translators in our sample have neither clear vision of their personal qualifications and trajectories, nor claims to fulfilling specific cultural roles. The two identity discourses analysed here thus imply a status balance, with an accelerating elitism on the part of a small circle of acclaimed literary translators and a majority of commercial and technical translators, subtitlers and interpreters accepting their lower position in the occupational scale. While top literary translators usually discredit all other translators, calling them their lower-ranked peers, the latter do not dispute the preeminence of the former. Engaged in multitasking translatorial jobs, they are aware not to step on the territory of elite translators and not to claim shares in the symbolic capital of the latter. At the same time, they avoid mobilising a competing identity model to gain professional recognition and security.

This kind of identity compliance applies in particular to two interesting sectors of this occupation, namely: (1) non-elite literary translators and (2) community interpreters.

(1) Non-elite literary translators are those who do literary translation for livelihood (Sela-Sheffy 2010). Unlike their renowned peers, they seldom have the privilege of specialising in certain literary genres, nor can many of them afford concentrating exclusively on literary translation at all (in our sample, 20 out of 32 translators who practice literary translation do it in addition to other translation jobs). They are usually the ones who complain the most about being underpaid and mistreated by the publishing companies. In short, these are the 'invisible' literary translators, who have some intellectual aspirations, yet no prospects of joining the club of top translators. Nevertheless, despite — or precisely because of — their humble situation, these lower-ranked literary translators are inclined to embrace, however moderately, the latter's vocational ethos to maintain professional dignity. For instance, they often portray themselves as not 'a business-oriented kind of a person' and clarify that making money is not their strongest motivation:

> If I had the [appropriate] character, [I] would have been able today to make money of … all the [enormous] 'trivial' knowledge stored in my mind. Listen, I know the translator who got a million sheqels, I know him! […] Don't get me wrong, it is not impossible to make money of these things, [it's] just that I don't have the right personality… (Interview with A, subtitler and literary translator).

While they never betray expectations to be recognised as artistic literary translators, some of them dare talk about their poetical inclinations, presenting highbrow literary translation as their *phantasy* or leisure pursuit, although they draw a line between it and their business-oriented translation practice: "I don't work for free, no way […]," one of them asserts, "and to translate is my profession. I'm sorry, don't do unpaid work […] unless it is poetry translation which I do for fun for myself" (Interview with N, technical translator and subtitler). Many of them imply that creativity is required for performing all kinds of translation, elaborating on their own natural sensibilities and thrill of working with texts, even while translating non-literary material. Some of them even use the vocabulary of art-literary translators explicitly, insisting, however less frequently, that "[translation] is a kind of creation" (Interview with A, subtitler and literary translator): "[…] of course [it] is a kind of creation, otherwise why would I have insisted that my voice will be preserved [in the output] and bother so much to polish up every detail?" (ibid.).

Given that these lower-rank literary translators are often the same people who also make a living by commercial and technical translation, subtitling, or conference interpreting, this undifferentiated cadre of practitioners

serve, albeit with ambivalence, as transmitters of the *artisation* ethos in the non-elite layers of this field.

(2) In contrast to non-elite literary translators, at the most remote periphery of this occupational space we find the 'natural', *ad hoc* translators. These may often be students or internet enthusiasts who occasionally do non-professional translation jobs, either for additional income or voluntarily for ideological reasons, as well as employees of business firms and industrial corporations, who occasionally take care of translating as part of their job duties. Given that the volume of this undefined translation manpower is enormous, tracking down these ad hoc translators was beyond the scope of the current study. However, in our sample, this category is represented by community interpreters. As is often the case in many cultural settings other than the Israeli one, these are people who at a certain point in their life become more engaged in interpreting for non-Hebrew speakers in daily-life interactions with officials, in health clinics, banks, social welfare services, etc. They do it mostly by virtue of being relatives of the clients, or as employees of the relevant institutions, without the slightest aspiration to a career in interpreting or translation. Often community interpreters are the more educated young members of a deprived community, who aspire to ascent by pursuing higher ranked professions. Obviously, in line with emerging processes of professionalising interpreting in other countries (e.g. Angelelli 2004, Cambridge (ed.) 2010, Wadensjö *et al.* (eds) 2007, Vargas-Urpi 2012), initiatives have been taken recently to advance professional training in some sectors of community interpreting in Israel (notably, Miriam Shlesinger's project on *Translators for new immigrants/foreigners at hospitals*[4]; Shuster 2009; see also Shemer (ed.) 2013). Notwithstanding these efforts, findings from our interviews with community interpreters show that for these practitioners interpreting remains overall a temporary and secondary activity rather than a profession, one which is performed as a matter of necessity or goodwill:

> This is something I used to do anyhow […] that is, I meet people on the street, [they say] can you come with me to the clinic, or… to the post office… or the bank, and it's like, [please] do.do us a favour. So I do, happily (Interview with B, community interpreter).

Paradoxically, in refuting measures of professionalism and disavowing professional identity as translators, community interpreters parallel the detached position of elite literary translators. They, too, albeit for different reasons, confine themselves to one type of translation practice and never engage in multiple translation tasks as most of the other agents in the field do. Similar to elite translators, moreover, they are also sceptical regarding the worth of formal training:

> I can't say that [the interpreting course] was not effective… but eh… they taught us things which we actually knew already, because the

> level of the course is very basic… […] I always receive the ricochets that there are [interpreters] who did not take the training course and they are much better [doing the job] than those who [did] (interview with T, community interpreter).

Instead, similar to top literary translators, these interpreters, too, rely entirely on 'natural resources', that is, on demonstrating an *apt personality* and claiming a significant *social role* as *cultural mediators*. In their case, apt personality entails above all compassion and a gift for human communication ("one should speak with the heart," Interview with E, a non-professional welfare-service worker occasionally engaged in interpreting). Whereas acting as culture mediators means, in their case, wavering between advocating and giving a voice to their own communities, on the one hand, and representing faithfully the service institutions where they serve as employees, on the other.

5. By way of conclusion

In the absence of formal criteria and institutional boundaries, the cleavage between the different translational branches, notably between the field apart of top literary translators and all the other translators, relies on the practitioners' identity work. This has major consequences on the fact that professionalisation of translation and interpreting is suspended. Top literary translators construct a firm occupational identity by disallowing properties that are conducive to professionalisation, whereas in the broader field, the professional identity of translators and interpreters who engage in multitasking jobs is vague or not existent. The point is that, despite their occupational insecurity, anonymous non-elite practitioners, too, are mostly indifferent, if not hostile, to attempts toward professionalising their trade. Moreover, drawing, like acclaimed literary translators do, mainly on experience and personal attributes for occupational reputation, non-elite translators promote no alternative model of a professional identity. We may say that this field is continuously being dominated by the ethos of inspired amateurs.

The two archetypes that fuel the counter-professionalisation dynamics in the field of translatorial occupations, the artist and the natural translator, are promoted by the two sectors most remote from each other and from the mainstream of active translators and interpreters — high-status literary translators, on the one hand, and lower-ranked community interpreters, on the other. Yet unlike the latter, top literary translators have a sound vision of their role and privileges. Therefore, their authority as the producers and regulators of the symbolic capital of this occupation is not challenged. This also means, however, that the *artisation* ethos — what in the eyes of top literary translators distinguishes them from the majority of non-elite translators — actually permeates the field at large beyond their own circle.

Finally, it should be born in mind that similar identity dynamics are usually the order of the day in many other occupations, including the highly professionalised ones, where they often intensify — or create an alternative to — formal institutional hierarchies. However, in the domain of translation practices, as in other semi-professional fields, this identity dynamics appears to be the *only* means of creating hierarchies, one that provides the actors with an occupational dignity without committing them to the rigorous measures of institutional professionalism.

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Biography

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Notes

[1] "Strategies of Image-Making and Status Advancement of a Marginal Occupational Group: Translators and Interpreters in Israel as a Case in Point" (ISF project no. 619); see Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (2008, 2011).

[2] This holds particularly in the case of literary translators. We have interviewed translators from Russian, Spanish, French, Arabic, German, Swedish and Japanese.

[3] The brief interviews and questionnaire included such parameters as gender, age, place of residence, native language, country of origin, number of years in Israel, education, translational training, working languages, circumstances of entering the profession, self-employed or salaried, principal or ancillary source of income, other occupations, and means of self-promotion.

[4] http://www1.biu.ac.il/indexE.php?id=1022&pt=1&pid=1012&level=4&cPath=44,1012,1022.