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Realistic but not pessimistic: Finnish translation students' perceptions of translator status

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ABSTRACT

Research on translator status, or prestige, has only been studied empirically within the last decade and mainly from the perspective of professional translators. Less attention has been paid to future translators: translation students. This article explores Finnish translation students' perceptions of translator status and its parameters, discussing implications for the future of the profession. The data consist of 277 responses from five universities, collected in 2013–2014 by an electronic survey adapted from Dam and Zethsen's translator questionnaires. Quantitative analyses indicate that the students' perceptions are partly very similar to professional translators': they rank translator status as middling or low and believe that translators' expertise is insufficiently recognised outside the profession. On the other hand, the respondents also perceive translators' influence as higher than in previous research. The study also illustrates the complexity of translatorial (in)visibility and power. On the whole, while aware of problematic aspects of the profession, the respondents are fairly committed to their field and confident that translators can influence their working conditions and translator status, a combination that seems promising for the future of the profession.

KEYWORDS

Translator status, occupational prestige, translation students, power, professional autonomy, translation sociology.

1. Introduction

Within translation research, translators' low status, accompanied by notions of invisibility and subservience, was long taken for granted rather than considered a research topic in its own right (see survey of literature in Dam and Zethsen 2008: 73). As a result, empirical research on translator status, or the perceptions of prestige and respect attached to translation as a profession, only consists of a handful of major projects and a dozen publications produced within the last decade (see survey of literature in Ruokonen 2013). Nevertheless, the research has produced thought-provoking results, from translators' status perceptions (e.g. Dam and Zethsen 2008, 2011; Katan 2009) and parameters that may influence them (e.g. Dam and Zethsen 2009) to examples of status-enhancing strategies (e.g. Sela-Sheffy 2010; Dam 2013).

Studying status perceptions is important because our beliefs affect the way we think and act. A recent survey by the American Psychological Association found that employees who did not feel valued at work were less satisfied and motivated, and more likely to consider changing jobs (APA 2012). There are similar examples of disillusioned translators leaving the industry (Abdallah 2010: 39), but also of translators working together with other agents to improve their situation (e.g. Koskinen 2009;

Ruokonen 2013: 335-336). Studying status perceptions, parameters and strategies can thus illuminate translators' role and actions in society.

Previous research has focused on professional translators' status perceptions (e.g. Dam and Zethsen 2011, 2012) and rarely addressed those of translation students (exceptions include Sela-Sheffy 2008 and Katan 2009). Yet students are future professionals, and their perceptions will contribute to determining what translation as a profession will look like in the 21st century.

This article reports on a survey of Finnish translation students' perceptions of translator status. The data were collected by means of an electronic questionnaire adapted from Dam and Zethsen's questionnaires for Danish professional translators. The article begins with a review of previous status research (Section 2) and then describes the method and material of the study (Section 3). The results of the statistical analysis are presented in Section 4, and Section 5 discusses the results, relating them to previous research and suggesting implications for the future of the profession.

2. Previous research

In translation research, the word *status* has been used in at least three senses, to refer to (1) occupational prestige; (2) professionalisation, or whether an occupation has reached the status of a recognised profession or not; and (3) the position of an individual professional as negotiated in a particular situation (Wadensjö 2011; Ruokonen 2013: 328). Researchers often address both prestige and professionalisation (e.g. Katan 2009, 2011; Setton and Guo Liangliang 2011), but the present article focuses on occupational prestige, or the perceptions of value, respect and appreciation attached to an occupation (Treiman 2001: 299; Volti 2008: 171-172). Even then, status can be measured in many ways, as Section 2.1. below will show.

The following review of empirical status research begins with status rankings (2.1.) and then covers four parameters that can correlate with status perceptions:

- Income
- Expertise
- Visibility
- Power

The parameters come from Dam and Zethsen's work (e.g. 2008, 2009, 2011) but also occur in other status studies; particularly visibility and power have been approached in various ways. The *strategies* used by different agents to influence translator status would be another relevant

perspective (cf. Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2008; Sela-Sheffy this volume), but they lie beyond the scope of the present article.

2.1. Status rankings

Before translation research, translator status was studied within sociology, alongside the status of other occupations. The best-known example is probably SIOPS or the Standard International Occupational Prestige Scales, based on status rankings collected from respondents in 60 countries (Treiman 1977: 29–42). The 1977 SIOPS scored translators at 54 points, or slightly above the average, which was 43.4 (Treiman 1977: 172, 241). Traditional expert professions scored considerably higher, with doctors at 78 and lawyers at 73 (Treiman 1977: 237, 239). Later SIOPS revisions no longer list translators separately (e.g. Ganzeboom and Treiman 2003: 179).

Translation research has mainly focused on translators' perceptions of their status. In some studies, the respondents have been asked to relate their status to that of other professions (Katan 2009: 127-128; Setton and Guo Liangliang 2011: 104-105), but the studies more relevant to the present research are those where (a) status has been measured on some kind of a scale (Dam and Zethsen, e.g. 2008, 2011, 2012; Katan 2009: 126) and/or (b) the respondents include students (Katan 2009; Sela-Sheffy 2008).

Dam and Zethsen studied Danish business translators working in different positions, from freelancers to EU translators, with a total of 307 respondents. The studies are also fairly representative (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 981-982; 2012: 216-217). When assessing translator status, the respondents were asked to choose from five alternatives ("very high", "high", etc.), which in the analysis were converted into a scale of 1 to 5, the top score being 5. The average status rankings varied from 2.53 to 2.87, with the lowest score going to freelance translators and the highest to 'company translators', or in-house translators in companies not operating in the field of translation (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 984). Surprisingly, the EU translators' mean score was as low as 2.56 (Dam and Zethsen 2012: 220).

Katan's (2009) Internet survey targeted both professionals and the academia (teachers and students of translation). The survey was completed by 890 respondents, mainly from the Western world (Katan 2009: 115-116). As the countries with the largest numbers of respondents were Italy and Finland, the survey is hardly representative, but extensive nevertheless, with over 540 translator respondents (Katan 2009: 116). Quite a few of the translation teachers (80%) and students (55%) also worked as translators or interpreters (Katan 2009: 118). Katan's respondents ranked translator status by three alternatives, "high", "middling" and "low". The results were similar to the Danish rankings:

59% of the respondents characterised translator status as “middling” and 31% as “low” (Katan 2009: 126). The responses were virtually identical among professionals, teachers and students (*ibid.*), perhaps because of the mixing of roles mentioned above. Otherwise, the student responses were only partly analysed separately, which is interesting as Katan (2009: 147), based on his 25 years of teaching experience, believes that students have an “extremely idealised” view of their future profession.

Sela-Sheffy’s student survey seems to have been fairly informal; to my knowledge, she only discusses it briefly in the introduction of an article on translators’ self-images (2008). The survey covered 117 Israeli students of translation vs. culture research from 1999 through 2004 (Sela-Sheffy 2008: 610). Apparently in response to an open question, over 40% of the students described translators in terms signalling invisibility and low status (Sela-Sheffy 2008: 610-611). Possible differences between the students of translation vs. culture research are not mentioned.

2.2. Income

Income was one of the first factors linked to prestige by sociologists (Treiman 2001: 300). It may also partly correlate with translators’ status perceptions: at least Danish company translators with low incomes also ranked their status low (Dam and Zethsen 2009: 15).

On the other hand, the status rankings of freelance translators and EU translators did not reflect their high income level (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 986; 2012: 221-222). As interpreted by Dam and Zethsen (2011: 986; 2012: 222), a certain level of remuneration is perhaps a necessary but not a sufficient condition for perceived high status.

2.3. Expertise

The expertise required to translate is well acknowledged by translators themselves. In Katan’s (2009: 123) survey, specialised skills and expertise were the top reason for why translation is a profession; knowledge and education came in second. Similarly, the Danish translators in Dam and Zethsen’s studies assessed translation to require a very high degree of expertise, with mean scores from 4.09 to 4.69 out of 5 (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 987; 2012: 223).

However, translators apparently also believe that their expertise is not recognised outside the field. This became apparent in some open comments (Katan 2009: 125; Dam and Zethsen 2010: 201-202); moreover, when Danish freelancers and in-house translators at translation agencies were asked what degree of expertise people outside the profession would assign to translation, their mean ratings of outsiders’ views were 2.74 and 2.52 respectively, considerably lower than their own views of their expertise (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 988-989). Such

assessments also appear justified in the light of the responses from Danish ‘core employees’ (economists, lawyers, etc.) at companies employing in-house translators. The core employees tended to underestimate the length of translator training and partly viewed translators’ tasks as secretarial (Dam and Zethsen 2008: 86–88).¹

2.4. Visibility

While invisibility is a characteristic often linked to translators (Dam and Zethsen 2008: 73), it is not always taken into account that (in)visibility can assume many forms. The following have been collected from Dam and Zethsen’s studies (2011: 989-991; 2012: 226-228):

- Degree of professional contact
- Nature of professional contact: with other translators, clients, etc.
- Physical location
- Proximity to decision-making (in the case of EU translators)
- General visibility as a professional group

The variety suggests that it is important to specify which form(s) of visibility are investigated. This is also illustrated by Katan’s survey, where the respondents were asked to evaluate the statement “Ideally a translator/interpreter should be invisible.” Of the translator respondents, ca. 60% “mainly” or “definitely” agreed that a translator should be invisible, with only 5% “definitely” disagreeing (Katan 2009: 140-141). In contrast, over 15% of the student respondents “definitely” disagreed with the statement (ibid.). The article does not mention if the difference between the professionals’ vs. students’ views is statistically significant, but at any rate we cannot be certain how the respondents understood invisibility.

In Dam and Zethsen’s studies, visibility mostly appears a positive influence. Among company translators, higher degrees of *professional contact* were accompanied by more high-status answers (Dam and Zethsen 2009: 22). In contrast, freelancers, who perceived their *general visibility* as a professional group as low (mean 2.05), had the lowest status rankings (mean 2.53; Dam and Zethsen 2011: 984, 991).

Furthermore, different forms of visibility may be relevant to translators in different positions. For example, Danish translators working within the EU institutions estimated their degree of professional contact as high, but their *visibility with clients* as low, and their status rankings were lower than expected (Dam and Zethsen 2012: 226-228). Koskinen’s case study of Finnish EU translators working at the local representation in Helsinki further suggests that *increased professional contacts and visibility with interest groups* such as journalists enhanced the translators’ self-esteem (Koskinen 2009: 104-106). While Koskinen did not study status

perceptions, the comments quoted in the article suggest that the translators' perceptions of their status may have improved as well.

2.5. Power

Like visibility, power and influence can be approached from various angles. Dam and Zethsen's studies have mostly focused on rather traditional aspects. All the Danish translators were asked to what degree their work involved *influence*; company, agency and EU translators were also asked about their *chances of being promoted* (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 992-993; 2012: 224-225). The respondents were uninclined to regard themselves as influential, with mean scores varying from freelancers' 1.87 to company translators' 2.57; even the EU translators only scored at 2.06 out of 5 (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 992; 2012: 224-225). The chances of being promoted were the highest for the EU translators but hardly very high, with a mean of 2.79 (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 993; 2012: 225).

Another form of power is *professional autonomy*, or the licence to make "work-related decisions on the basis of [one's] professional knowledge and values" (Weiss-Gal and Welbourne 2008: 284). Such decisions may involve different levels of one's work, from the end-product to the process and working conditions. In Katan's survey, for example, the respondents were asked about the degree of control they have over their output (i.e. *end-product*). Of the professional translators, some 50% believed that they exercise a high, "managerial" control over finalised translations, and 40% described their control as "middling" or "technical" (Katan 2009: 135). Further aspects of professional autonomy were illustrated in translators' weblogs analysed by Dam (2013: 29-30), which highlighted the bloggers' power to turn down unsatisfactory commissions and to control their working conditions. Thus, while translators appear reluctant to see themselves as influential in the traditional sense, professional autonomy may offer more insight into how they perceive their power.

Autonomy can also be linked to how committed translators are to their field and whether they have considered leaving their occupation. At least some of the Finnish translators interviewed by Abdallah (2010: 37-40) seem to have felt that exiting the field was the only option they had left if they wanted to exercise their professional autonomy and avoid compromising their principles. In the case of translator students, it is relevant to inquire into their commitment because it has implications for the future of the profession.

To summarise, while there are some data of translation students' status perceptions, more research is needed to discover if students' views are so similar to professional translators' as previous research suggests. The complexity of status parameters, notably visibility and power, should also receive more attention. The present study addresses both these gaps.

3. Method and material

This section first explains how the Finnish questionnaire was created and the data analysed and then contextualises the data by describing the Finnish translator training, translation market and the respondents' backgrounds.

3.1. Questionnaire and analysis method

The data were gathered by an electronic questionnaire based on Dam and Zethsen's questionnaires for Danish translators, provided for my use by the authors. The questionnaires were translated from Danish into Finnish by an experienced professional translator and combined into a single draft questionnaire. Items targeted at professional translators were adapted to the students' context (an example concerning income will follow in Section 4.2. below). To acquire a more in-depth view of the status parameters and the future of the profession, I inserted items on, for example, translators' influence on their working conditions and students' commitment to their field of study. Open questions on status-influencing factors and strategies were also included but fall beyond the scope of this article.

The draft questionnaire was checked by two external readers to ensure that the items were unambiguous and easy to understand. In the process, some additional items were reformulated, notably "What is the status of translators in Denmark", which was rephrased as "To what degree is the translator's occupation valued in Finland". The new formulation is customary in Finnish surveys on occupational status (e.g. Lappalainen 2010) and avoids the Finnish word for status (*asema*), which has six denotations (*Kielitoimiston sanakirja* 2014: s.v. asema) and which the external readers found confusing. Apart from such necessary changes, every care was taken to retain comparability with the Danish questionnaires.

After further testing, the electronic questionnaire, with 34 items, was advertised first to translation students at the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Turku in October 2013 and then to the students at the universities of Vaasa (February 2014) and of Tampere and Helsinki (April 2014). All the data were thus gathered during one academic year. Together, the five universities cover all the translator training programmes in Finland.

This article presents a statistical analysis of the data, focusing on the aspects covered in Section 2. The items analysed mainly rely on a Likert scale of five verbal alternatives, as in Dam and Zethsen's questionnaires.

For the analysis, these alternatives were converted into figures 1 to 5 as follows:

- 1 = To a very low degree or not at all
- 2 = To a low degree
- 3 = To a certain degree
- 4 = To a high degree
- 5 = To a very high degree.

Following Dam and Zethsen's strategy (2008: 78), the questionnaire gave the alternatives in the reverse order so that the respondents would not be too tempted to choose the lowest ranking.

The analysis involved calculating frequencies, means, medians and modes, as well as statistical correlations and significance. All the calculations were performed by the author with Microsoft Excel and reviewed by Dr Jukka Mäkisalo, an expert in statistics. The responsibility for the accuracy of the figures naturally rests with the author.

3.2. The respondents' context and backgrounds

Translator training in Finland is well established: it was institutionalised in the 1960s and became university-based in the 1980s. Since then, there have been five universities offering translator training: Eastern Finland, Helsinki, Tampere, Turku and Vaasa, all of which are included in this study². The training prepares the students for work as business translators (employees or entrepreneurs), but also includes courses on, for example, literary and audiovisual translation. The training has solid links to the professional world (Koskinen 2015). Guest lectures by professionals are common, and students are virtually guaranteed to be exposed to professional translators' experiences during their studies.

Two further features of the Finnish context are relevant to the students' views of translator status. Firstly, the respondents are unlikely to be familiar with research on the topic. When I gave guest lectures on translator status at the universities (after the students had filled in the questionnaire), I got the impression that the topic was new and not previously addressed. Similarly, at least the open comments from the universities of Eastern Finland and Turku (analysed in Ruokonen 2014) included no references to previous research.

Secondly, the respondents have probably been exposed to the turmoil in the Finnish translation market, either at guest lectures or via the media. While business translators can still expect to earn 2500 euros or more per month (Joutsenniemi 2011: 5; Wivolin and Niskanen 2012), literary and audiovisual translators' situation is becoming unbearable. A full-time literary translator's income may be less than 1000 euros per month; the fees have decreased in recent years, and commissions may be difficult to

obtain (Yle 2011, SKTL 2014). The subtitling market has witnessed mass outsourcings and meagre fees since 2010 (Ihander and Sorsa 2010; Arola 2014), and subtitlers' protests have received extensive media coverage; news and press releases are listed on the website of Finnish audiovisual translators, www.av-kaantajat.fi. Particularly references to subtitlers' plight came up in the open comments from the universities of Eastern Finland and Turku (Ruokonen 2014: 46), which indicates that the students are aware of the situation.

To move on to the respondents' specific backgrounds, the respondents number a total of 277 and are distributed among the universities as shown in Table 1:

	n	%
Helsinki	64	23
Tampere	55	20
Turku	61	22
Eastern Finland	63	23
Vaasa	34	12
Total	277	100

Table 1. Respondents by university

The enrolment data requested from the universities indicate that the universities are fairly evenly represented, possibly with a slight overrepresentation of Eastern Finland and Vaasa (Vaasa has fewer translation students than the other four universities; details explained in Ruokonen 2014: 40-41). All in all, the respondents represent approximately a fifth of the enrolled translation students. Considering its subject and length, the questionnaire may have appealed particularly to students who take an interest in the future of the profession and follow contemporary developments (ibid.). This gives their views special weight.

Table 2 below shows that most of the respondents are 20 to 30 years old, which is in line with the age of Finnish university students in general (Statistics Finland 2012). However, there are surprisingly many 35+ respondents (12%).

	N	%
Under 20	6	2
20–24	131	47
25–29	91	33
30–34	15	5
35 or more	34	12

Total	277	100
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Table 2: Respondents by age

If older students may be overrepresented, male students are slightly underrepresented: 88 percent of the respondents are female and 12 percent male, although the enrolment data suggest that the proportion of male students should be closer to 20% (Ruokonen 2014: 41).

The students were also asked if they had worked as translators or completed translation commissions independently from their studies. Table 3 below shows that half of the respondents have no such experience. The next largest group is that of students with a week's experience or less (27%).

	n	%
No experience	141	51
A week (40 hours) or less	76	27
2 to 4 weeks	9	3
1 to 2 months	17	6
3 to 4 months	9	3
5 months or more	25	9
	277	100

Table 3: Respondents' work experience

As almost 80% of the respondents have little or no personal experience of translation work, their perceptions of translator status probably stem from other sources, such as the training, guest lectures by professionals and the media. The following section will show what these perceptions are like.

4. Results

This section first reports on the respondents' status perceptions and then on the findings related to income, expertise, visibility, power and commitment. Brief comparisons with previous research are made when relevant.

4.1 Status

When the respondents were asked to what degree the translator's occupation is valued in Finland, the answers cluster around 2 ("to a low degree") and 3 ("to a certain degree"), as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

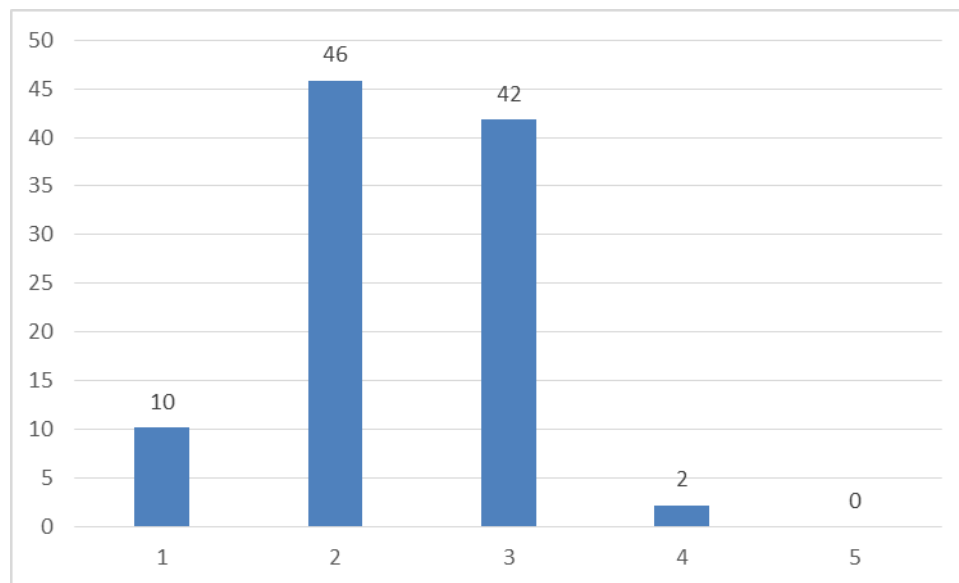


Figure 1: Students' perceptions (%) of translator status in Finland

The mean is 2.36 or below the middle point; the median is 2 ("to a low degree") and so is the mode. The data show little variation based on the respondents' backgrounds. The mean rankings by university vary between 2.21 and 2.51, but this is not statistically significant (Chi Square, $p=.249$). There are also no significant differences based on gender (Chi Square, $p=.433$) or age (Chi Square, $p=.408$), and, perhaps surprisingly, the status rankings do not correlate with the respondents' work experience ($r^2=.006$).

The respondent's views are thus very uniform and close to previous results. The Danish translators' mean status rankings were higher but still middling, from 2.53 to 2.87 (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 984; 2012: 220). Similarly, most of Katan's respondents characterised translator status as "middling" (2009: 126).

4.2. Income

In Dam and Zethsen's studies, individual translators' status rankings were correlated with their incomes. The student respondents were instead asked to describe Finnish translators' average income in comparison to other occupations with the same level of education. As Figure 2 shows, an overwhelming majority of over 70% characterised translators' income as 'low'.

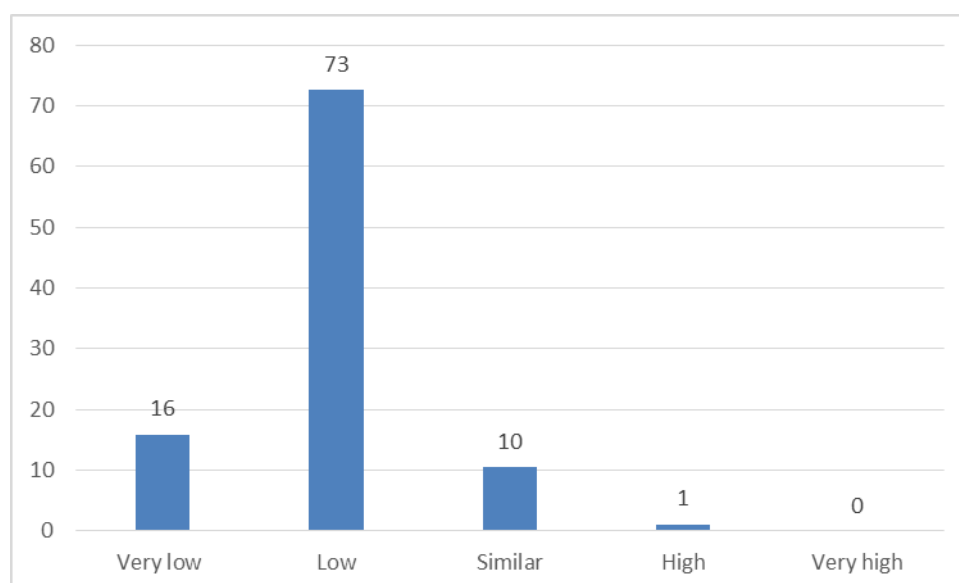


Figure 2: Students' perceptions (%) of translators' income in comparison with other occupations requiring the same level of education

The responses scarcely correlate with the students' rankings of translator status ($r^2=.071$). This is similar to previous results (see Section 2.2.): although Dam and Zethsen found some correlations between status and income, they did conclude that income alone does not produce a high status perception.

4.3. Expertise

The respondents were asked about expertise through two pairs of items replicated from the Danish questionnaires. Firstly, the respondents were asked (a) to what degree they think that it requires *special skills* to translate, and (b) to what degree they think that people outside the profession believe that it requires special skills to translate. These items produced a clear pattern illustrated in Figure 3:

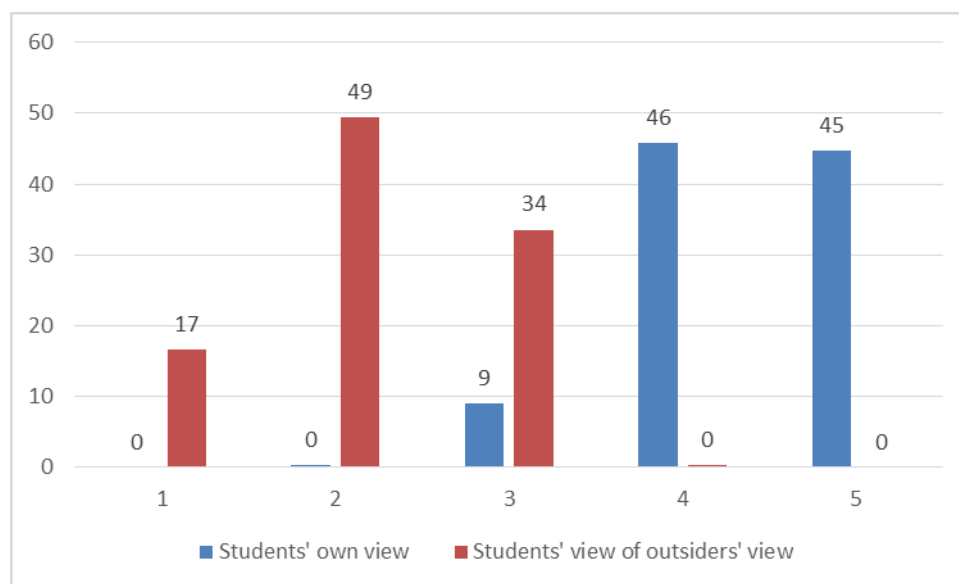


Figure 3: Students' views (%) of (a) to what degree it requires special skills to translate vs. (b) to what degree people outside the profession think so

The students thus strongly believe that translating requires a “high” or “very high” degree of special skills (mean 4.35, mode/median 4). Equally strongly, they believe that outsiders fail to grasp this (mean 2.18, mode/median 2). The difference is statistically significant (Chi Square, $p < .001$).

The items on whether the students regard translation as an *expert function* and whether they believe outsiders to do so produce virtually identical responses. In the students' own opinion, translation is clearly an expert function (mean 4.48, mode/median 5), but they expect people outside the profession to think so only to a low degree (mean 2.25, mode/median 2). Again, the difference is statistically significant (Chi Square, $p < .001$).

This gap between students' own views and perceived outsiders' views is very similar to previous results (see Section 2.3. above). The data further indicate that the notion of outsiders' ignorance is absorbed quite early, possibly even before admission. There were 30 respondents who had begun their studies in autumn 2013 and thus had not even completed their first year at university when participating in the survey. Yet there are no significant differences between these first-year students' vs. older students' responses to the items on outsiders' views (Chi Square, special skills: $p = .451$; expert function: $p = .250$). Both first-year and older students also believe that translation requires special skills, with no statistically significant difference between their responses (Chi Square, $p = .155$), although the first-year students are less certain than older students about translation being an expert function (Chi Square, $p = .021$). On the whole, however, even the first-year students have internalised a mind-set similar to that of practicing translators.

4.4. Visibility

When asked about translators' visibility in society, the students' estimates were on the low side as Figure 4 below shows. The mean was 2.22 and the median/mode was 2.

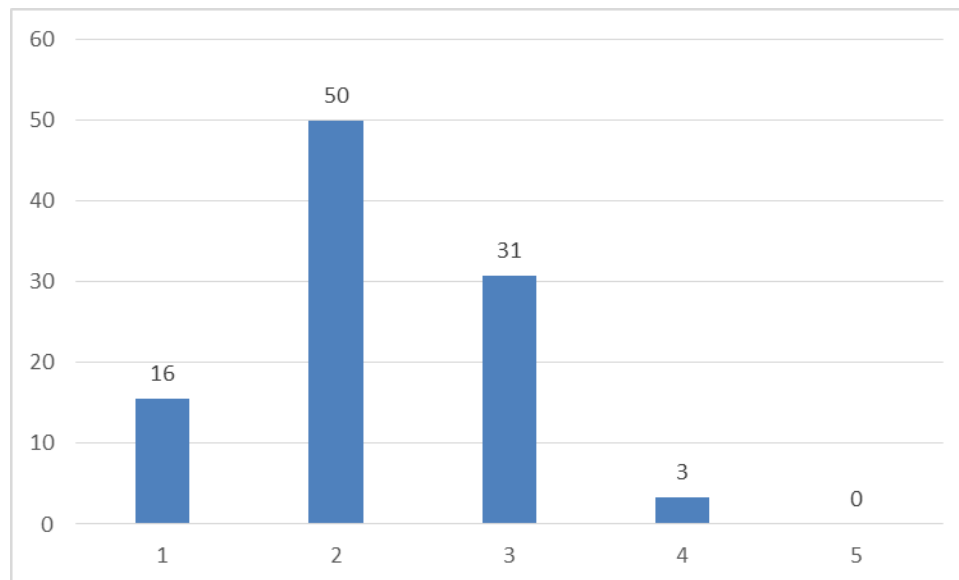


Figure 4: Students' views (%) of translators' visibility in society

The Danish freelancers, who were asked about their general visibility as a professional group, had a visibility ranking very close to this one, with a mean of 2.05; agency and company translators' mean visibility rankings were higher, but they were estimating their personal visibility at work or with clients (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 991).

Previous research further indicated various correlations between the forms of (in)visibility and status perceptions. In the student data, however, the respondents' estimates of visibility hardly correlate with their rankings of translator status ($r^2=.115$). I return to possible reasons for this lack of correlation in Section 5.

4.5. Power

The concepts of power and influence were addressed in four items: two items replicating the Danish questionnaires, concerning influence, and two new items addressing professional autonomy and agents' influence on translator status.

The items concerning translators' *influence* show a similar pattern as with expertise: the respondents believe translators to have some "economic, political and social influence" (mean 3.42; median/mode 3), but estimate that people outside the profession perceive this influence as low (mean

1.81; median/mode 2). The responses are illustrated in Figure 5 below; the difference is statistically significant (Chi Square, $p < .001$).

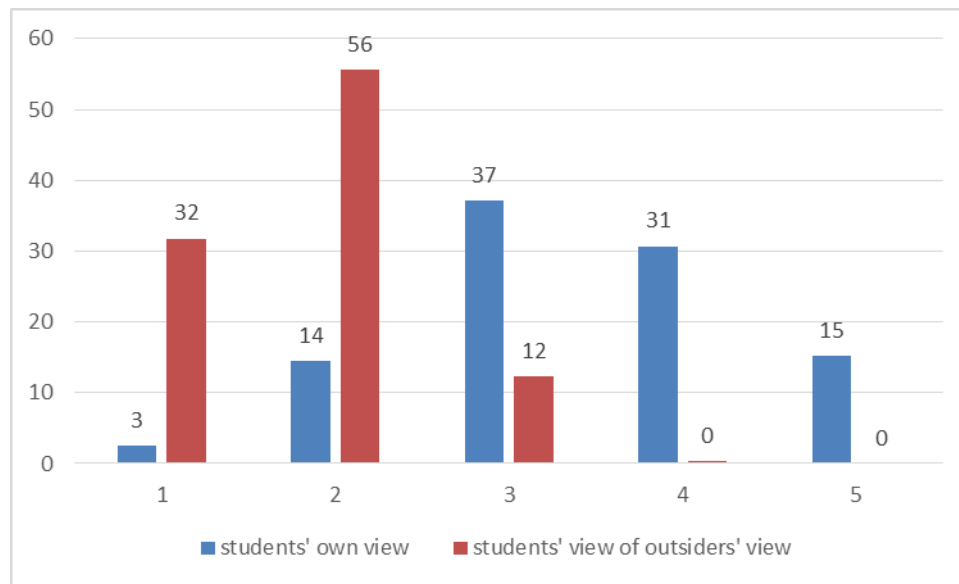


Figure 5: Students' perceptions (%) of (a) translators' influence vs. (b) outsiders' view of translators' influence

In contrast, Danish translators, when asked about the influence connected with their job, estimated it as low or middling, with averages from 1.87 (freelancers) to 2.57 (company translators) (Dam and Zethsen 2011: 992; 2012: 225). I return to the difference between the student and translator responses in Section 5 below.

Secondly, the student questionnaire included a new item linked to professional autonomy, namely *translators' influence on aspects of their work*. The respondents were asked to estimate on a scale of 1 to 5 to what degree translators can influence their clientele, translation fees, deadlines, the quality of the final translation and the commissioner's expectations about quality. The mean scores are given in Figure 6 below.

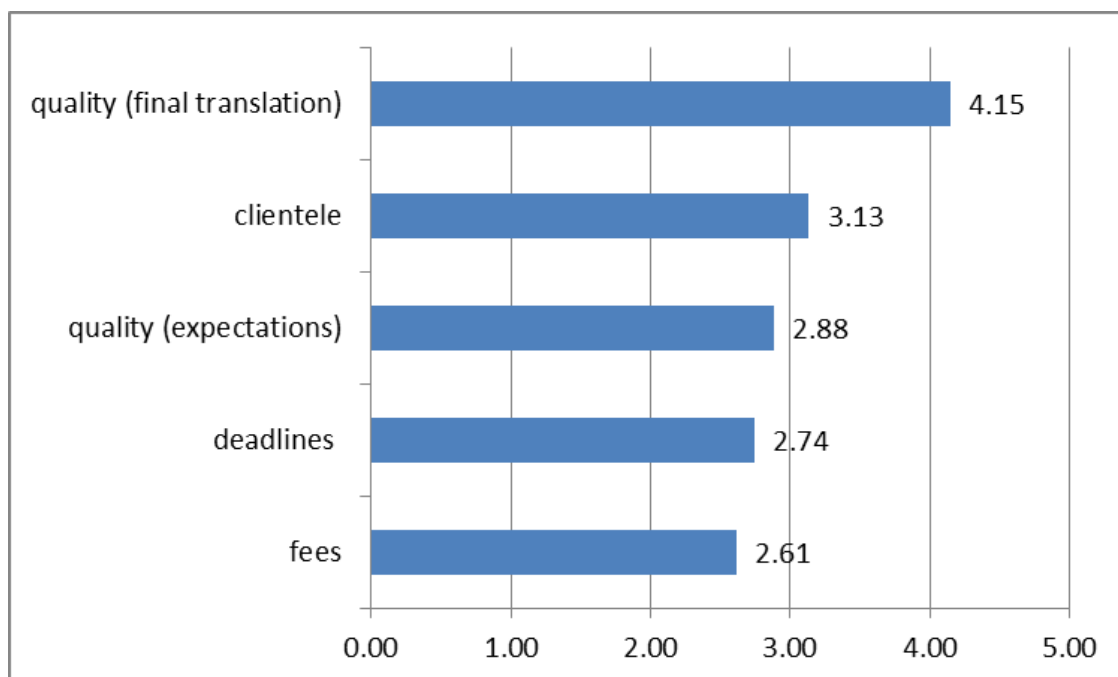


Figure 6: Students' mean scores of the perceived degree to which translators can influence aspects of their work

In the students' view, translators thus have a high degree of influence on the quality of the finished translation (mean 4.15; median/mode 4). The difference between the quality of final translation and the other four aspects is statistically significant (Chi Square, $p < .001$). The respondents also believe translators to have more influence on their clientele than on expectations of quality, deadlines and fees, with statistically significant differences between clientele and each of the three aspects (Chi Square, $p \leq .016$). The influence on expectations is considered higher than influence on fees, with a statistically significant difference (Chi Square, $p < .001$). In contrast, influence on fees is thought to be similar to influence on deadlines, with no statistically significant difference (Chi Square, $p = .327$).

The high score of the quality of the finished translation may reflect the fact that finalising a translation is that aspect of translators' work the students become the most familiar with during their studies. It could also signal confidence: the students trust that, as professional translators, they will be able to control the quality of their output. In this respect, the results are similar to those of Katan's survey (2009: 135), where some 50% of the translator respondents believed they have a high degree of control over the final product.

The student respondents also believe translators to have some influence on the other four aspects of their work, from clientele to fees: the medians/modes are 3, even for fees. The responses appear cautious but

not pessimistic. Considering Finnish audiovisual and literary translators' situation, particularly the score for fees could have been lower.

Thirdly, the students were asked about *different agents' influence on translator status*. This item proved challenging and eventually required reformulation. Originally, the item offered the respondents a five-point Likert scale, asking them to estimate how much influence translators, commissioners etc. have on translator status. None of the readers or the respondents commented on the item as confusing, but when the responses from Turku, Eastern Finland and Vaasa were processed, it became evident that the question needed to be rephrased: the mean scores for each agent varied between 3.68 and 4.01, and the medians/modes were 4. In other words, the respondents either could not decide which agent(s) have the most influence on status or they believed that *all* the agents have a high degree of influence.

For the questionnaires distributed at Helsinki and Tampere, this item was reformulated: the respondents were asked to select those one or two agents whom they believed to have the most influence on translator status. The reformulated item produced a total of 233 'ticks', or approximately 1.96 per respondent (there were 119 respondents for this rephrased item: 64 from Helsinki and 55 from Tampere). These responses in Figure 7 below show differences among agents' perceived influence.

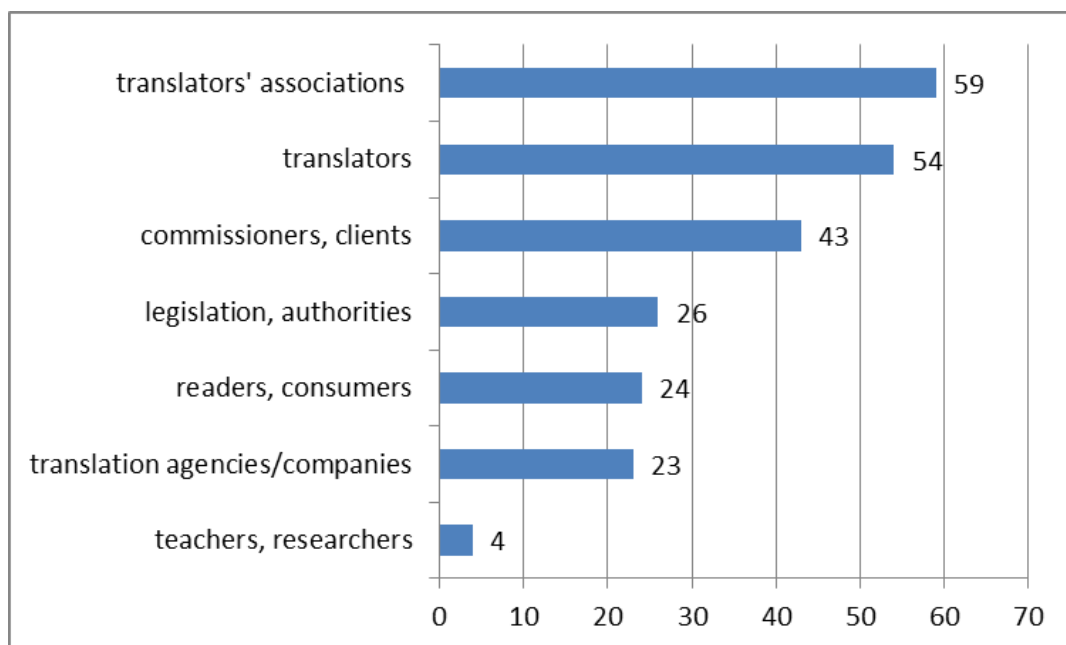


Figure 7: Students' views (n) of which agents have the most influence on translator status (Helsinki and Tampere)

The data forms three groups where the *inter*-group differences between figures are statistically significant according to the Chi Square test but the *intra*-group differences are not:

- 1) Translators' associations, translators and commissioners/clients;
- 2) Legislation/authorities, readers/consumers and translation agencies/companies;
- 3) Teachers and researchers.

At least the respondents from the universities of Helsinki and Tampere thus believe that translators' associations, translators and clients have the most influence on translator status. If translator associations and translators are considered a joint agent, they stand out even further, with 113 'ticks'. Considering that the responses from the different universities are otherwise fairly similar (cf. Section 4.1. above and Section 4.6. below), two inferences can be drawn. On the one hand, the students apparently believe that all the agents can in principle exercise considerable influence on translator status (hence the agents' very similar mean scores in the data from Eastern Finland, Turku and Vaasa). On the other hand, if asked to choose the agents with the most influence, the students opt for translators and translator associations.

What also stands out is the negligible number of 'ticks' assigned to teachers and researchers (n=4). Moreover, when the questionnaire was distributed at Turku, Eastern Finland and Vaasa, teachers and researchers were actually missing from this item — a fact that neither the author nor her external readers noticed. Is teachers and researchers' influence really this marginal, or is it not recognised? The matter would merit further investigation.

4.6. Commitment

The responses above have indicated that Finnish translator students hardly have an overly rosy picture of their future as translators, particularly as far as their perceptions of translators' income level (4.2.) or of outsiders' views (4.3.) are concerned. This brings us to a question that is very relevant to the future of the profession: whether the respondents have considered changing their field of study and whether the low status of the profession is reflected in such considerations.

The students' responses in Figure 8 below indicate a certain degree of commitment to translation. Almost 40% had not considered changing their field of study at all during the past year, and an additional quarter had done so once or twice.

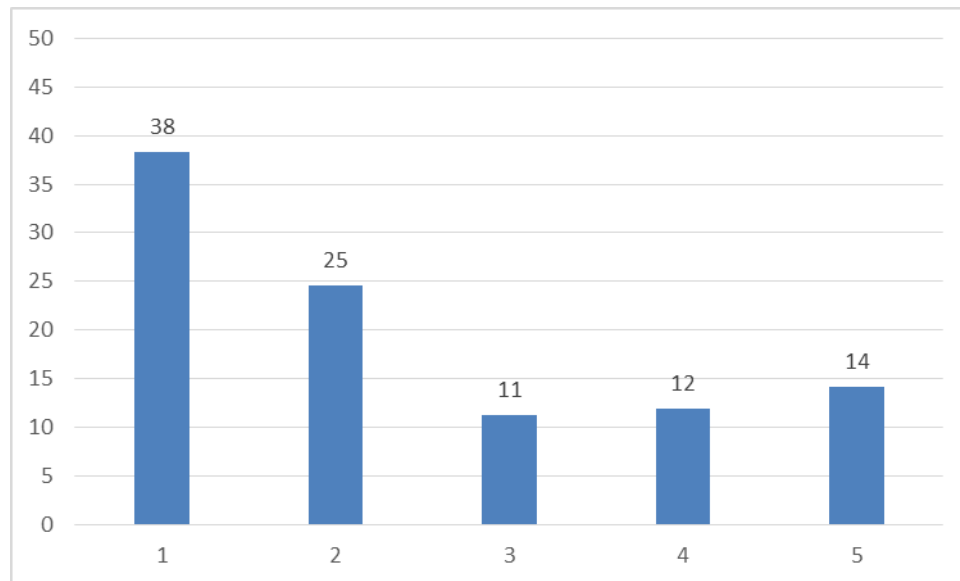


Figure 8: Students' responses (%) to whether they had considered changing their field of study during the past year. 1=Not at all; 2=Once or twice; 3=Three or four times; 4=Every month; 5=Every week.

However, when mirrored against a recent survey of Finnish university students that covered all fields of study (Saari and Kettunen 2013), the results appear less than encouraging. In this general survey, 57% had no plans of changing their field of study (*ibid.*: 33, 35). Translation students have thus thought about leaving their field more frequently than Finnish university students in general.

Possible reasons for translation students' doubts about their field did not become apparent by statistical analysis. There were no statistically significant differences among the five universities (Chi Square, $p=.454$). There was also no direct link to the status of the profession. The respondents' considerations of changing their field of study do not correlate with their status rankings ($r^2=.062$), with their estimates of translators' income level ($r^2=.023$), visibility ($r^2=.005$), influence ($r^2=.0004$), or with their perceptions of outsiders' views of whether translation requires special skills ($r^2=.012$) or is considered an expert function ($r^2=.022$). An analysis of the respondents' open comments on the topic is thus needed.

5. Discussion

The results of the present study bear some notable similarities to previous research. Above all, the Finnish translation students' status rankings appear very close to professional translators' perceptions. The students have also internalised a mind-set similar to that of practicing translators: they show strong awareness of the expertise required to translate but, at the same time, believe that outsiders do not acknowledge it.

On the other hand, there were also two interesting differences. Firstly, when asked about influence, the student respondents believed translators to have more influence than translators themselves do. The difference may stem from the formulation of the items: the students were probably reflecting on translators' general societal and cultural influence throughout history whereas the Danish translators were thinking of their personal situations. Then again, this may also be a sign of the students' wishful thinking.

Secondly, unlike in previous research, visibility did not emerge as a straightforward positive influence on status. The lack of correlation between the students' estimates of visibility and status is perhaps explained by the open comments made by the respondents from the universities of Eastern Finland and Turku (Ruokonen 2014). In those comments, visibility is a two-edged sword: while the respondents do believe invisibility to be detrimental to translator status, they also describe the *negative visibility* produced by low-quality translations as harmful (Ruokonen 2014: 50). This highlights the importance of studying visibility through both specific and open questions, and of paying attention to how various forms of (in)visibility may interact or counteract with each other.

Apart from similarities and differences to previous research, what is also interesting is the *realism* reflected in the students' responses. In my view, there are no signs of an "extremely idealised" view of the profession here (cf. Katan 2009: 147). Although the students perceive translators as more influential than translators themselves, they also correctly characterise translators' income as low. The students also share practicing translators' notion that outsiders fail to appreciate the skills required to translate. This is hardly an overly rosy view of one's future profession.

Like translators themselves, the students also trust translators to enjoy high professional autonomy in finalising the translation. Whether the students are overly optimistic about translators' influence on other aspects of their working conditions cannot be determined until we have comparable data on translators' views. Similarly, it will be interesting to see if the students' optimism concerning various agents' influence on translator status is shared by professionals: in other words, whether translators also believe that it is the translators' associations and individual translators who can change translator status.

Considering the turmoil in the Finnish translation market, it is hardly any wonder that the translation students have considered changing their field of study more frequently than Finnish university students in general. In fact, that the respondents have done so appears another sign of realism. All in all, translation students seem fairly committed to a field that promises neither high status nor high income. This could suggest an underlying naïveté, but there may also be something about translation that compensates for the downsides of the profession: after all, some

70% of Katan's respondents were "pretty" or "extremely" satisfied with their work (Katan 2009: 148); see also Dam and Zethsen in this issue (2016).

6. Conclusion

The present article has analysed Finnish translation students' perceptions of translator status and its parameters. The students' views are in many respects very similar to previous research: notably, like practicing translators, the students regard translator status as middling and believe that outsiders fail to appreciate the expertise required to translate.

The results further indicate that the students' views of their future profession are hardly very idealistic. In addition to the notions that they share with professional translators, the translation students also correctly characterise translators' income as low. They have also experienced more doubts about their field of study than Finnish university students in general. Nevertheless, they are still fairly committed and even optimistic in the sense that they believe in the power of translators and translator associations to change translator status.

The statistical analysis reported in this article naturally needs to be complemented by an investigation of the respondents' open comments. Nonetheless, the combination of realism and commitment that emerges from the quantitative data seems promising for the future of the profession. As long as the students continue to believe that translators and translator associations can change translator status and influence their working conditions, and act accordingly when they become professional translators themselves, the profession should be at less risk of losing its solidity and devolving into a transitory occupation.

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Biography

Dr **Minna Ruokonen** is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of English Language and Translation at the University of Eastern Finland. In her doctoral dissertation (2010), she analysed the translation of allusions in the Finland of the 1940s and 1980s. Her current research interests include translator status and the factors, agents and measures affecting it. She continues to analyse the data from the student survey discussed here and from a 2014 survey with 450 Finnish translator respondents.
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Notes

¹ As Katan (2009: 128-129) points out, translators and secretaries were also linked in a recent EU-level classification: NACE 1.1 from 2002 included a class titled "74.85 Secretarial and translational activities" (Eurostat 2008a). However, unlike claimed by Katan (*ibid.*), the revised 2008 classification (NACE 2) has remedied the situation: "74.3 Translation and interpreting activities" are now in the main category "M - Professional, scientific and technical activities", whereas "82 Office administrative, office support and other business support activities" fall under "N - Administrative and support service activities" (Eurostat 2008b).

² The University of Eastern Finland was established in 2010 by merging the universities of Joensuu and Kuopio. Before the merger, translators were trained at the University of Joensuu (Savonlinna Campus). The content of the training was not affected by the merger.