

Penet, JC (2024). *Working as a professional translator*. London/New York: Routledge, pp. 244, £30.39. ISBN: 978 1032115573.

As a researcher in Translation Studies, I often find myself returning to a deceptively simple question: what does it mean (and take) to work as a ‘professional’ translator today? Is it about developing linguistic competence, cultivating cultural knowledge, and/or building technological adaptability? Translator-training programmes, now with a history of several decades, aim to equip their students with a broad range of skills, including language, culture, technology, and specific field knowledge. This notwithstanding, when their graduates step into the translation market, they quickly discover that success depends on “the ability to present oneself and act as a professional” (ix), as clearly expressed by Tyulenev in his *Introduction* to Penet’s monograph — an aspect which has generally been underrepresented in translation programmes at higher education institutions. Against this backdrop, JC Penet’s *Working as a Professional Translator*, published as part of the *Routledge Introductions to Translation and Interpreting*, offers a comprehensive investigation into how translators build and sustain their careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Importantly, the book does not theorise professionalism; rather, it grounds it in the practical realities of the profession. The author sets out to help translation students and, in his own words “budding translators”, to join the profession, maintain a professional career in translation, and pursue continuous professional development. The book is structured into three main parts, each corresponding to one of these key stages in a translator’s career, and comprises nine chapters in total, making it a particularly practical resource for students and emerging professionals.

Part I, *Joining the profession*, offers practical guidance for entering the translation market, from the qualifications needed to work as a professional to the advantages and drawbacks of alternative career paths, from strategies for networking to job-hunting hacks for beginners. By practical guidance, I mean hands-on information, such as how many words a translator can realistically translate in a day, the financial benefits and challenges of freelancing, or ethical conduct — e.g., the importance of not approaching clients of a translation agency where you work to offer your own services. This part also provides useful tips, for instance, on keywords for online searches about legal options for freelancers, and a realistic perspective which emphasises factors such as the role of chance in shaping a career, presenting an approach that avoids idealising the notion of a ‘perfect’ professional life. I found it especially useful that Penet integrates the scholarly functionalist approach in Translation Studies into the translation profession, drawing attention to the actors in the translation process and to the networking needs of translators in a way that connects theory to practice, and useful conceptual tools to the realities of being a professional.

Although the topics covered in Part II, *On the job*, are relevant for all future or emerging translators, they are of particular interest for freelancers who are in need of finding their way in the market. Penet begins this part with client management, emphasising that it is not only important to find clients but also to understand who they are in order to respond effectively to their expectations. He then goes on with ‘translation project management’, which is frequently part of a freelancer’s job. In this chapter, real-life scenarios are used to introduce readers to this concept and its significance in professional life. The author also guides readers through the entire translation project,

covering the pre- and post-production phases, as well as the production stage. Additionally, the author proposes a translation service provision model, which is “a quick checklist for translation project management” (104). A section on quoting serves as a step-by-step guide for freelancers to assess the feasibility of a project. The discussion on translation quality is particularly robust, offering a highly relevant comparison between translation quality assessment models proposed by researchers and quality standards adopted in the industry. The connection with the scholarly functionalist approach here allows translators “to infer the right quality level for a project based on the intended purpose (or function) of the target text” (136). This approach enables future translators to distance themselves from idealised, abstract expectations and become familiar with industry standards. This part is also where Penet discusses ‘quality’ in relation to machine translation, highlighting the benefits of its use and the dilemmas this poses. This is a timely contribution given that “[t]he impact of automation will continue redefining what it means to be a professional translator” (149). Part III, *Continuing to grow as a professional translator*, stands out with its focus on marketing and sustainability, both particularly pertinent to the translation profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The opening chapter reads almost like an introductory marketing course, covering key concepts such as ‘entrepreneurship’, ‘business-to-business’ and ‘business-to-customer models’, the ‘5Ps of marketing’, ‘marketing channels’, and ‘personal branding’. These concepts are gaining relevance as the translation market becomes increasingly diversified and global. ‘Sustainability’ has also emerged as a defining concept of our century, first in discussions about the planet and then expanding to how professionals such as translators sustain their careers, their communities, and their own mental and physical well-being. The chapter on sustainability first provides ways of continuous professional development in order for translators to adapt to ever-changing professional demands. It also emphasises the significance of self-care, addressing issues that are often overlooked but have a considerable impact on translators’ professional lives, such as physical, cognitive, and organisational ergonomics, the negative emotions that may accompany translation work, and even the increasing dehumanisation of the profession. Most translators, including myself, have experienced the frustration of working with poorly written source texts or the boredom caused by spending long hours in front of a screen. By acknowledging these realities, the book not only validates practitioners’ real-life experiences but also calls for further reflection on the ‘human’ dimension of translators’ work. Seeing this recognition in print is also heartening for readers, as it shows that their feelings and experiences are valued.

One of the merits of this book is the way it brings together hands-on knowledge about the translation market with insights drawn from academic and market research on the professional aspects of translation. For example, in Part I, Penet shows how resources such as Bowker’s 2004 study, which used job advertisements for translation-related jobs, or market research reports can serve as good starting points for a job search. The discussion of freelancing, with its advantages and disadvantages supported by research data, further shows this practical-academic balance. In addition to offering hands-on, evidence-based guidance for newcomers to the profession, this approach also feeds into bridging the notorious (or should I say the ‘so-called’?) gap between academia and the market — a gap that is often considered to be insurmountable but which is shown here as an opportunity for mutually beneficial dialogue. Further reading or even listening suggestions (see, for instance, p. 173) also contribute to this purpose,

making readers familiar with academic resources that they can refer to in their professional journey.

Especially valuable are the questions, scenarios, topics for discussion, and assignments within and at the end of each section. The questions encourage readers to brainstorm and take concrete steps toward planning their future professional careers. The assignments are designed in a cumulative way, which allows them to build on the knowledge gained in previous tasks, and gradually develop a more comprehensive understanding of the profession. Instead of providing ready-made solutions to all profession-related issues, the author raises thought-provoking questions that future or emerging professionals must engage with, and encourages them to reflect in order to develop context- or culture-specific answers before or during their practice. These components of the book also make it well-suited for use in translator-training classrooms, where theory may risk being detached from practice. By prompting students to think about real-life scenarios, the book offers a learning experience that extends beyond the classroom into the challenges of professional practice. These exercises and materials can be incorporated into the classroom by trainers who teach aspects related to the translation profession.

Penet's accessible and engaging language and style in this book ensures that complex issues about the translation profession are presented in a way that is approachable for students and newcomers, without oversimplifying the challenges faced by translators. The clarity of expression makes it easy for readers who may not yet be familiar with the translation industry to follow the discussion, while the details offered in the activities and the description of scenarios enable practitioners already employed in the market to find the content stimulating too. This balance of accessibility and sophistication enhances the book's usability across different readerships, from translation students to experienced professionals reflecting on their careers, and to scholars engaged in research into translation *qua* profession.

While translator-training programmes and textbooks tend to focus on developing linguistic, cultural, and technological competences, they often neglect the 'softer' but equally crucial dimensions of professionalism — such as client relations, marketing, personal branding, soft skills, and long-term career development. Penet's book directly addresses this blind spot by systematically offering insights into a wide range of realities faced by translators when entering and sustaining a professional career in the profession. In doing so, it serves as a much-needed complement to existing resources that concentrate primarily on translation theory and practice, and offers a comprehensive and real-world exploration of what it means to become and remain a professional translator.

So, coming back to our initial question, according to the book, what does it mean and what does it take to work as a 'professional' translator today? As the introduction points out, professionalism is more than just mastering language, culture, or technology. With AI, digital work platforms, and unstable working conditions changing the field, Penet's focus on professional identity is especially relevant. His book shows that being a professional translator also involves self-presentation, ethical awareness, and adaptability — areas that formal training often overlooks. By highlighting these points, *Working as a Professional Translator* adds to the skills taught in translator-training

programmes. This approach creates a valuable space for dialogue on becoming a professional in translation and addressing the challenges of maintaining a solid professional identity, which is useful for translation students, emerging professionals, translator trainers, and researchers alike.

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