



Book Review

Sela-Sheffy, R. and Shlesinger, M. (Eds.) (2011). *Identity and status in the translational professions.*

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Translation may be an ancient function, essential to survival wherever different cultures impinge on each other (see Herodotus), but there is still some question as to whether it is a ‘real’ profession. Scholarly interest in this question with no binary answer is increasing at the same time as practitioners’ efforts to demonstrate that language mediation is indeed a profession, and not just something that a few people can do through an accident of birth. Scholars in Translation Studies are observing and analyzing these efforts from many angles, such as, for instance, the image translators and interpreters (T/I) have of themselves or experience in the view of others. A new collection of articles, entitled *Identity and Status in the Translational Professions* and edited by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy and Miriam Shlesinger, presents a mosaic of concerns and reactions emerging from this emphasis.

As described by the editors, the volume is a hardback edition of the two back-to-back special issues of *Translation and Interpreting Studies (TIS)* issue 4(2), 2009 and issue 5(1), 2010) which they co-edited. The articles are revised versions of papers presented at the international workshop organized by the editors and held in Tel Aviv in March 2009 under the auspices of the Israel Science Foundation. The larger interest of the group gathered on this occasion was the study of identity in the framework of occupational fields in general and the focal case was that of translators and interpreters.

Ever since Neubert emphasized the distinction between translation product and process, the discipline of Translation Studies has involved more than dealing with specific texts and examining them with the tools of philology and linguistics. The articles in the collection are, to a great extent, sociological studies with a large admixture of psychology, pragmatic accounts of working conditions, and meditations on working in an atmosphere of challenge that affects the disposition of the translator. They cover a wide range of countries – authors write about Spain, Israel, Austria, Belgium, the Chinese-speaking countries, England, Turkey, Japan – and of topics: translation, interpreting, statutory relationships with other professions, literary translation, certification, education and the habitus of translators. Although they seem somewhat disparate as listed in the table of contents, these papers do in fact hang together, the collection ‘works’, because together and separately, they generate, and partially answer, the same set of questions about whether translators and interpreters are professionals and how this can be determined or achieved.

There seems to be agreement among the authors that educational level, method of quality measurement and legal status are among the essential parameters determining professionalism, but in addition, subjective categories such as self-image and status are frequently the focus. Taken as a whole, the novel contribution of the volume is that it suggests multidisciplinary directions for further research into the working process of T/Is that may prove to supplement and enrich current approaches. Some of these are the contrast between role perception and practice for both translators and interpreters, the effect that working in a sometimes-hostile multilingual society may have on the translator, the necessary transformation of children in immigrant families into competent interpreters, the effect on interpreters of functioning as though invisible, and the role of cultural competence in T/I. The twelve papers that constitute this volume are listed and characterized in the editors' Preface, so that the reader can plot a course among them, but none should be missed. Any one of them could be singled out as strong enough to make a particular point about the overall practice of translation and interpreting and the academic study of these activities. For instance, there is the article entitled "Occupation or profession" by David Katan.

Perhaps the most provocative contribution to the collection, Katan's article reports on the results of an on-line survey of T/Is with close to one thousand responses. Responses in all categories seem to indicate attitudes that are far from insistent about the need for professionalization, as they rate formal academic training as less important than lifelong learning by experience and point out that certification is not a *sine qua non* for a successful T/I. Some results are not sharply distinct because of differing definitions of *profession* and *professional* in the minds of the respondents, but there is certainly not a landslide response of "We are, or we ought to be professionals." The author of this article concludes from his research that currently, T/I does not have all the traits of a profession and that a new structure of career path, combined with closer contact between the academic and practical worlds, might be considered if professionalization is desired.

Identity and Status in the Translational Professions is a collection of great interest for teachers, practitioners and users of translation. It is also an informative introduction to sociological approaches in Translation Studies. One small addition would have been desirable: two or three sentences about each contributor indicating, among other things, academic or other affiliation.