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Towards Theorising Translation as an Occupation

Abstract

The article considers the applicability of the notion of profession to translation. After discussing the state of the art in the sociology of professions, the author critically considers the discussion of translation as a profession in present-day Translation Studies. It is shown that translation either remains undefined as a profession, or defined on a purely commonsense basis. The studies of translation are also largely ethnomethodological in nature. The paper attempts to put the discussion of the occupational status of translation on a clearer theoretical foundation. In his discussion the author borrows Abraham Flexner's definition of the term 'profession' and his criteria, based on which an occupation can be viewed as qualifying as a profession or failing to do so. It is argued that based on Flexner's criteria, translation is an occupation in the process of professionalising.

Key words: translation; sociology of professions; sociology of occupations; Abraham Flexner; Eliot Freidson

1. Problems with Theorising Translation as a Profession

The beginning of theorising professions from the sociological point of view can be traced back to the earliest days of what is known today as sociology. Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim and later Talcott Parsons considered the professional and occupational aspects of social life. Since the 1960s, however, the sociology of professions has been experiencing a crisis and it is felt that little progress has been made. However this does not mean that there has been no research at all; on the contrary the literature is quite rich, although one immediately notices a lack of consensus. Therefore, there have been attempts to analyse the epistemological basis of the sociology of professions and suggest ways of moving forwards.

Eliot Freidson (2014 [1983]) has come to the conclusion that the very

theoretical foundation is lacking. Notably, the historicity of the notion of profession has not been adequately taken into consideration: the concept has varied from period to period, has been used mainly in the Anglo-American social context and associated with only a few occupations (usually law, medicine and religion). Freidson is sceptical about the possibility of using the term 'profession' as the main term in the branch of sociology that deals with professions and occupations. The term 'sociology of occupations' seems to him a better option. Freidson suggests broadening the purview of the sociology of occupations to embrace both the traditional professions and those occupations which so far have fallen short of qualifying for the status of profession (according to whatever criteria), such as social worker, librarian, schoolteacher etc.

Yet, although there has been little clarity as to how to define the concept of profession, Freidson disagrees with those who suggest abandoning attempts to define the term 'profession' because

> [i]n order to think clearly and systematically about anything, one must delimit the subject-matter to be addressed by empirical and intellectual analysis. We cannot develop theory if we are not certain what we are talking about. (2014: section entitled 'The Problem of Definition')

Instead, he insists, every time and in every discussion, the definition should be made clear and explicit. This is necessary, for even if it does not make it possible to arrive at a consensus, it will at least exclude misunderstandings and preclude "covertly advancing an implicit and unsatisfactorily vague definition of a profession as an occupation that has gained professional status" (ibid.). Therefore, Freidson called for a continuation of the research into occupations on reformulated theoretical grounds and on a case-to-case basis, which later, it is to be hoped, will allow generalisations to be made. Perhaps it is important to clarify that by case studies Freidson means not so much individual research projects within the study of one profession (which are but ancillary means to achieving a generalised description of an occupation), but the individual professions themselves.

Taking a cue from Freidson, this paper is an attempt (1) to make the discussion of the occupational status of 'translator' as concrete as possible by drawing on an explicit definition of the term 'profession'; (2) based on that definition, to make an attempt to generalise the discussion of translation as an occupation. (It should be noted that in this paper, once again following Freidson, the term 'occupation' is understood as having a wider scope than the term 'profession'.)

It is these goals that prompted the choice of the theoretical essay. It is one of the foundational essays in the sociology of professions – Abraham Flexner's paper "Is Social Work a Profession?" (1915). An important advantage of Flexner's discussion is the set of criteria which he applied to different occupations in order to see whether and to what extent each one of them can be considered a profession. This feature makes Flexner's discussion more rigorous than some other publications on the same topic, as the latter either avoid or fail to define more or less strictly what makes an occupation a profession. Yet another benefit in drawing on Flexner's paper is that not only did he apply his definition of profession to those occupations which either do qualify as professions as he defined the term, or to those that do not; rather, he focused on an occupation which lies between these two points of the occupational continuum – social work. This is important because translation seems to be an occupation of a similar kind; hence, one of the recent and most comprehensive

publications on the professional status of those who work in the field of translation uses the term 'semi-professional' to describe translators and interpreters (Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger, 2011, vii).

The issues with theorising professions as diagnosed by Freidson and summarised above can be readily identified in the major publications on translation as a profession in Translation Studies. There are two major trends in theorising translation. Some publications rely on a commonsensical or implicit understanding of translation; others look to sociologists for help but find no consensus, and therefore see only one way out – to concentrate on how translators themselves view their status.

For instance, in his discussion of the translator's professionalism, Douglas Robinson implies, rather than defines, what is to be understood by the translator's 'professionalism'. He points to the features that make up the translator's 'professionalism': it is "the best synonym for the translator's reliability", the translator's behaviour should be "ethical professional", that is, "meet[ing] users' expectations" and ranging from the ability to admit his/her ignorance to demonstrating his/her professional pride, integrity, self-esteem; professionalism means a high degree of the internalisation of the particular skills necessary for plying the trade of translation (1997, 14, 22, 29, 94, 103, 197). Gouadec (2007) also discusses translation as a profession (or rather "many different *translation professions*", pp. xvii–xviii; emphasis in original) by describing a set of practical skills, ethical requirements etc.

The above-mentioned publications are meant to provide practical guidance for translation students and early-career translators, and entering into sociologically rigorous discussions of translation as a profession is not among their immediate goals. Yet in order to theorise translation as a profession, one needs to move on – beyond the implicit – if one hopes to understand the nature of translation as an occupation. This is also important because with a more robust sociological approach, one may hope to shed more light on the social status of translation.

"Deepening and expanding our theoretical and empirical understanding of identity and status processes in *semi-professional settings*" is the goal of Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (2011, vii; emphasis in original). Their edited collection of essays is well grounded in the sociological theory of professions, and the case studies in it are important contributions to the study of translation as an occupation, its practitioners and the process of professionalising the occupation. Yet the majority of the contributions are essentially ethnomethodological. In one of them, the reader is expressly given the reason why:

> Those who study the sociology of professions appear to agree on one point only, that "there is no precise and unique definition of 'professions'" (Dietrich and Roberts […]). We will focus on two main approaches: perception and traits. (Katan, 2011, 70)

Without denying the importance of Katan's and others' ethnomethodology of translation and interpreting, it should be noted that this approach shows only one aspect of the occupational status of the profession – its 'internal' or self-perception.

To explain another aspect of this approach which may be improved upon, a simple illustration can be given. People often disagree about what is 'tall' and what 'short': it depends on what or who is being measured, which measuring unit is used etc. Even if we agree on what is to be measured, different people are likely to do the measurement differently: some will use a ruler, some a measuring tape, some would

prefer to measure in inches, some in centimetres etc. This does not, however, necessarily mean that we will learn much from juxtaposing the different measurements of the objects once they have been selected (according to whatever criteria), some made in inches, some in centimetres. Perhaps it would be more useful to use one type of unit, despite the variety and the lack of consensus concerning which unit is preferable. On the one hand, refusing to measure since there is no consensus and falling back on the commonsensical notions 'tall' and 'short' is comparable to drawing on commonsensical and implicit definitions of professions. Alternatively, using different units at the same time will make our measurement process unnecessarily laborious: it is only by recalculating the results of the measurements using different units based on a common denominator that the measurements can be made comparable. This is the second tendency of discussing translation as a profession in TS.

Arguably, it is easier to do all the measurements of the selected objects using one unit at a time. This is the logic that informs my reliance on the criteria Flexner uses to define 'profession'. They may not be ideal but at least we can hope to obtain something definite or 'objectifying' (that is, not objective but at least steering us towards something more objective). In what follows I will draw on several issues raised by Flexner as a starting point and demonstrate how and to what extent they apply to translation.

2. The Professions vs. the Non-professions

The first step is to apply Flexner's definition of professions to the field of translation. It runs as follows:

> [P]rofessions involve essentially intellectual operations with large individual responsibility; they derive their raw material from science and learning; this material they work up to a practical and definite end; they possess an educationally communicable technique; they tend to self-organization; they are becoming increasingly altruistic in motivation. (1915, 10)

The physician, the lawyer, the engineer, the writer, the painter, the musician, according to Flexner, are clear-cut examples of professions because they satisfy all six of his criteria (ibid., 13–15).

The physician, for instance, has to diagnose patients' problems and assign treatments for the diagnosed diseases on a case-by-case basis. S/he is held responsible for his/her decisions. The foundation for such highly intellectual operations is provided by extensive medical knowledge acquired from biology, physiology and pathology. Moreover, the physician has to learn constantly and keep a close eye on new discoveries in biology and on achievements in the pharmaceutical industry. When it is said that the physician gains experience, what is meant is his/her continuous building on what s/he learned in the process of the initial professional education and training. In each of the cases in his/her professional practice, the physician has to achieve a definite goal – to cure a particular disease or ailment. The practice of the physician is regulated and supervised by his/her colleagues who form professional bodies within the institution they belong to (e.g., a hospital), or by extra-institutional organisations responsible for the licensing of practitioners and for dealing with complaints in cases of professional misconduct. The physician may choose to turn to his/her colleagues for a second opinion in difficult cases. Finally, although

remuneration is a considerable motivation for the physician, his/her service is (presented to the public as) altruistic, and the professional practice of the physician is regulated through a high ethical code, expressed, for instance, in the Hippocratic oath or a similar creed.

The professions stand apart from amateurism, on the one hand, and what Flexner calls handicrafts and businesses, on the other. Thus, one can speak of a tripartite classification: amateurism – the professions – non-professions. The term 'occupation' in what follows embraces both the professions and non-professions and is contrasted with amateur performances. This broader notion, treating 'profession' as a hyponym of 'occupation', agrees with Freidson's usage (see above) and is different from that of Katan (2011), which treats the two notions as opposites.

Amateurism is briefly mentioned by Flexner and distinguished from professionalism in that it relates to an activity that is practised only for a short period in one's life: a professional nurse is one who works as a nurse his/her whole life, while an amateur nurse is the one who, for instance, practises nursing only during a war (ibid., 2).

There are also various occupations to which Flexner refuses to accord the status of profession, since they do not meet all his criteria. Plumbing is one example. Plumbing is a handicraft because, although its application has a definite purpose, and although it is a technique requiring some form of education and has become "a very definite organization", it is practised on the instrumental, rather than the intellectual level: that is, in a routine way; plumbers do not need to keep abreast of new scientific knowledge, and plumbing is "still persecuted too largely for the plumber's profit" (ibid., 10).

Banking is categorised by Flexner as "a trade with certain professional leanings" (ibid., 11), primarily because banking practice relies on empirical business common sense and shrewdness, rather than on scientific knowledge, and it is hardly altruistic in nature.

Pharmacy is found to be "an arm added to the medical profession, a special and distinctly higher form of handicraft, not a profession" (ibid., 12), because it lacks the high degree of intellectual responsibility characteristic of the profession closest to it – medical doctor.

3.1. Intellectual Operations and Large Individual Responsibility

Before we attempt to apply Flexner's criteria to translation, it should be made clear that in this paper 'translation' as an operation is understood as interlingual transfer, rather than intralingual transfer or transfer in semiotic domains not involving language. The reason for this is that translation as an occupation is associated with transfers from Language A into Language B or from language into other semiotic media (audiovisual translation, translating into sign languages, translating lyrics, which naturally involves music, or translating with visual semiosis involved, as is the case in the translation of advertising or videogame localisation). Moreover, the term 'translation' is used as an umbrella term to include both oral and written forms of language-involving transfers. Finally, the analysis here takes into consideration only translation practice in the latter part of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century; there is no attempt to consider the historical evolution of translation as an occupation.

The first of Flexner's criteria concerns the nature of the operations performed by the practitioners of an occupation. The professions require the intellectual rather

than a routine processing of tasks and the practitioner is vested with considerable individual responsibility. This may seem an almost self-evident point as regards translation: it is a complex intellectual activity which implies the active processing of information and the translator is held responsible for the quality of this processing. Yet recent sociologically informed studies, especially with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (Buzelin and Forlaron 2007; Buzelin 2014) have demonstrated that the translation agency must be broadened to include not only translators as actors responsible for a translation product, but also publishers, commissioners and other paratranslational actors who may be responsible for the final 'look' of a translated text. If so, then the degree of the translator's contribution to the translational process inevitably dictates the extent of his/her responsibility (although, as Hanna 2005 and Bogic 2010 showed, this is not always taken into consideration).

Thus, although there is no doubt that translation involves highly intellectual operations, the extent of the translator's responsibility may not be as large as in the case of the physician and turns out to be closer to that of a nurse: the translator is held responsible only for his/her part of the translation processes, which may have been initiated by a commissioner and may be taken over by editors, proof-readers, revisers etc.

3.2. Drawing on Science and Learning

With regard to the second criterion, the translator derives a considerable amount of his/her "raw material", to use Flexner's phrase, from learning. Indeed, when translating the translator has constantly to learn new vocabulary, new terminology, new domains of knowledge perhaps, and watch their developments, especially if s/he specialises in a particular thematic field (cf. Robinson 1997: 103).

3.3. A Practical and Definite End

The difference between the ways in which this knowledge is used by the translator and by the physician, however, should not escape our attention (this relates to Flexner's third criterion). The physician uses the 'raw' scientific material or the knowledge acquired through learning to reach a practical and definite end, e.g., to cure a disease. The translator, however, leaves the material as 'raw' as it was when s/he received it. The translator only transfers material into another medium: it is left for others to "work [it] up to a practical and definite end." The contribution of the translation is not final, it is ancillary and therefore hardly ever intended for achieving the final end of an enterprise or process of which it is only a middle point. This may sound not convincing enough. Flexner explained this point applying it to social work (more on this below). For now suffice it to say that as regards the third criterion, translation again falls short of qualifying for the classification of profession.

3.4. An Educationally Communicable Technique

The fourth criterion, which is that a profession must have an "educationally communicable technique", once again causes one to question if translation is indeed a profession. Translation is still practised very actively by those whom Flexner might call amateurs. In TS, there are publications exploring various types and degrees of amateurs' involvement with translation (Knapp-Potthoff and Knapp 1987; Ferrer

Simó 2005; Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006; Pérez González 2006; Susam-Sarajeva and Pérez-González 2012). It is clear that amateur translation can play key roles in certain circumstances where professional translators, for various reasons, may not be available (Tyulenev 2014, 75–6).

Amateur translators are often referred to as 'non-professional' in the TS literature. It is a notable term, firstly, because it implies that translation theorists, echoing translation practitioners, do (apparently sometimes unawares) claim the status of profession for translation on the grounds that it is a social activity, despite their statements to the contrary (cf. Knapp-Potthof and Knapp 1987; Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2011; Susam-Sarajeva and Pérez-González 2012). This is a consequence of the lack of clarity in defining the concept of profession and, hence, its place in the semantic field of related terms and notions, such as 'occupation', 'trade' etc.

Secondly, the ever-growing body of studies on non-professional translation is a curious phenomenon from the point of view of the translation professional project. A professional project is the process by means of which an occupation secures a clearly demarcated social niche for itself. This process consists of a series of measures undertaken to limit the access to what is declared to be a professional activity and thereby reduce the number of opportunities for those workers who are excluded and declared 'non-professionals' to compete with 'professionals' in providing remunerable services to the public in the area of the claimed 'professionalism'. Among the most salient signs of a professional project are the creation of closed professional unions (guilds, lawyers' bars, societies etc.), the required professional education and/or passing formal tests and the guarantee to the public that those belonging to the profession will perform according to a set of ethical principles (Tyulenev 2014: 67–74).

Unlike the majority of known professional fields, although translation does use its educational programmes to promote its professional projects, in some of its academic research translation theory may actually be serving to counteract the closing of the occupation's domain. This is the result of two intersecting professional projects: that of translation as an occupation in the process of becoming professionalised and that of Translation Studies as an academic specialisation. TS scholars have to publish novel translation-related research and therefore they are constantly in search of new translational phenomena. Their field of interest is considerably broader than that of the adherents of the translation professional project. TS scholars seem to be caught between two allegiances, which sometimes overlap (cf. the discourse of empowering translators), but which sometimes conflict, as is the case with the interest of TS scholars in amateur translation.

Indeed, usually, professionalising occupations, that is, occupations claiming the status of profession, try to block the access to their key activity, including discussions thereof. It is difficult to imagine a medical scholar studying and publishing on the medicinal practices of shamans. That is relegated to anthropology and is not considered a worthy subject in medicine.

Yet another aspect of translation practice that casts doubt on its qualification for the status of profession according to the discussed criterion is literary translation. It is frequently practised without special training, and talent is believed to be enough to qualify a person as a literary translator. This opinion is found even within Translation Studies:

> I would argue that translation theory is not indispensable, since there are good translators who have had no theoretical training [...] Most prentice translators

have to master their skills through study, but a few gifted linguists appear to acquire them instinctively, because they know how to write well in the target language. (Peter Newmark in Munday 2009, 20)

Such statements issued by TS scholars, however true they may be, once again are in conflict with the translation professional project. Certainly, the fact that more and more translator training programmes are being set up demonstrates that opinions such as Newmark's are giving way to the understanding that translation does constitute "an educationally communicable technique" (Flexner 1915, 10), at least outside the realm of literary translation. To conclude, translation is perhaps only in the process of professionalisation if viewed in the light of Flexner's fourth criterion, and it seems to be still behind some other occupations such as nursing: nobody would even consider employing a 'talented' nurse with no special training.

3.5. Self-Organising

The application of the fifth criterion – the professions tend to self-organise – seems to be influenced by geography as far as translation is concerned. In some countries, a translator, in order to be able to practise as an officially recognised translator, must be a member of some professional body, and are then recommended to potential clients not only by these professional bodies themselves but also by governmental organisations or other professionals relying on translation services.

Let us compare the following cases. If, for example, the UK immigration office has a document that needs to be translated, the translation must be "a fully certified translation by a professional translator/translation company", including "details of the translator/translation company's credentials; and confirmation that it is an accurate translation of the original document; and the translator/translation company's contact details"; the translation should be dated and have "the original signature of the translator or an authorised official of the translation company" (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/37086 6/T4_Guidance_11-14.pdf; accessed November 28, 2014). Who or what type of organisation can be considered professional is not defined here, and it is not quite clear who should confirm the accuracy of the translation, or why this confirmation is required at all if the translation is made by a professional translator or a translation company. Yet what is important is that the British government would not accept just any translation made by anybody who claims to know the language of the original document and English (or Welsh).

In Canada, where each of the provinces has its own translation/interpreting society, it is clearer to whom someone needing a translation should turn. For instance, if a document needs to be translated in the province of British Columbia, it is recommended that the owner of the document seek help from a member of the Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia. On the website of the city of Surrey, for instance, there is only one link provided for somebody who has "important documents that need to be translated" – the link to the Society of Translators and Interpreters of B.C. (www.surrey.ca/community/3615.aspx; accessed November 28, 2014).

Even more specific are the instructions on the Australian governmental site with regard to who should translate documents which were originally not in English: "Any document in a language other than English must be accompanied by a certified English translation. A translator in Australia must be accredited by the National

Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters"
(http://www.immi.gov.au/faqs/Pages/who-can-translate-my-documents-into-english-
for-me.aspx; accessed November 28, 2014). Apparently, in Brazil translation practice
is regulated at both the state level and the level of local governmental bodies (see
Almeida e Silva Nascimento 2006).

This is not the case everywhere. For instance, on the site of the Consulate-
General of the People's Republic of China in Toronto, one can read the following:

> All documents emanating from Canada should be accompanied with Chinese
> translation. Both the original and the translation must be legalized by the
> Chinese Embassy or the Chinese Consulate-General in Canada before being
> used in China. (http://toronto.china-consulate.org/eng/vp/na/t40489.htm;
> accessed November 28, 2014)

Here, the requirement does not specify who can translate, and the Chinese Embassy or
Consulate-General in Canada assumes the responsibility for legalising the translation.

The Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission to the U.S. recommends the services of
its own translation unit:

> Documents will be translated by the translation unit in the Saudi Cultural
> Mission for students who require this service. These documents include high
> school or university degrees received from Saudi educational institutions, birth
> and immunization certificates, and others. In addition, documents in English
> are also translated into Arabic if needed.
> (http://www.sacm.org/StudentServices/Translation.aspx; accessed November
> 28, 2014).

There is no indication as to whether anyone outside the Mission may qualify to
translate documents.

A recent in-depth comparative study of legal translation practices in Europe
and the Americas shows that

> [p]rofessional requirements and working procedures of legal translators can
> vary considerably from one national or international institution to the other,
> and can differ from those of freelance legal translators who operate in a
> competitive market without the translation support services or quality control
> procedures in place at many international organizations. (Borja Albi and Prieto
> Ramos 2013, 3; see especially also the paper by Francisco Vigier, Perla Klein
> and Nancy Festinger, pp. 27–51, in Part 1 and the entirety of Part 2.)

To conclude the discussion of Flexner's fifth criterion – the professions'
tendency to self-organise – as applied to translation, it is clear that translation has the
tendency to professionalise, yet this process is not uniform and less than completed
over the globe. Hence, once again, translation looks more like an occupation in the
process of professionalisation.

3.6. Altruistic Motivation

Finally, the professions are motivated in their practice not so much or not
exclusively by financial as increasingly by altruistic concerns. This criterion reflects

the idea that a profession should be a service to society and not be practised just for the practitioner's personal gain. Until relatively recently, translation practice was seen as a largely altruistic social activity, building bridges between cultures and nations. Now a growing body of TS publications has shown that translation practice is not always innocuous or positive. Translation can and often does take sides. This is obvious in conflict situations (Inghilleri and Harding 2010). This partiality can be quite subtle, yet it is always present. The introduction of descriptive translation studies and especially the influence of various social norms and conventions on translation practice (Toury 1978; 2012 [1995]) have made it hardly possible to think of translation as a conduit or neutral 'go-between' (Tymoczko 2003). Studies drawing on critical discourse analysis, for example, have demonstrated that translation may manipulate not only on the level of additions and omissions or more or less obvious lexical choices, but also on the syntactic and stylistic levels (Mason 1994). Translation can be compared to chemical catalysts whose effects on chemical reactions range from positive to negative (poisonous – Tyulenev 2011, 134–45; 2014, 36–40).

On the other hand, self-organising translation bodies present their services as altruistic. The above-mentioned Society of Translators and Interpreters of British Columbia in Canada states that, alongside promoting the interests of translators and interpreters, their mission is "to serve the public by applying a Code of Ethics that all members are bound to comply with […]" (www.stibc.org; accessed November 28, 2014). Ethics is becoming a standard component of translator training programmes. Thus, younger generations of translators are introduced to the ethical issues of their profession at the earliest stages of their career. This may be seen as an important step in the professionalisation of translation, yet once again TS' discoveries of the less than altruistic activities of translation may be seen as another result of TS scholars' double allegiances.

To avoid the naïve view of the professions as largely altruistic endeavours, Flexner is careful to observe that professions, although they are not practised for mere profit, cannot be performed on a volunteer or underpaid basis, thereby making it impossible for their practitioners to derive from their practice sufficient means necessary for their living and development. Then he asks: "Am I mistaken in thinking that not infrequently the inner joy attached to philanthropic endeavor has seemed to those in control a more complete satisfaction of the worker's legitimate desires than it has seemed, for example, to the worker herself?" (ibid., 20). This point is only too familiar to many practising translators who are frustrated: not only do they see their job as being underpaid and feel undervalued as professionals (Katan 2011), but sometimes, when they are not careful to stipulate the terms of a translation commission in binding terms, they may find their service being mistaken for an act of philanthropy.

As is clear from the above application of Flexner's six criteria, it can be seen that translation cannot as yet claim the status of a fully-fledged profession (as defined by Flexner) in an unqualified fashion. Rather, translation is on its way: in more than one way translation as a professional occupation differs from amateur translation, on the one hand, and from handicrafts and business-like occupations, on the other. In its present state it is closer to the occupations which Flexner categorises as "twilight cases."

4. "Twilight Cases"

Categorising various occupations as professions or denying them this status, Flexner distinguishes between professions, non-professions (amateurism, handicraft and businesses) and what he metaphorically terms "twilight cases" (Flexner 1915, 12). The example he gives is nursing. Although nursing has features making it similar to the professions, such as a high degree of responsibility and specialised knowledge, nursing is less than a profession in that the trained nurse's responsibility is not final in itself, and although the nurse may be considered "almost a collaborator", "she [sic – S.T.] may be described as another arm to the physician or surgeon" (ibid., 12).

The focus of Flexner's discussion is another "twilight case" – social work, and this is another reason why I chose Flexner's essay to serve as the basis for this paper: he grappled with the problem of the institutional and societal status of an occupation (social work) which in some of its traits reminds us of the object of our studies – translation/interpreting. Moreover, in some of places in his essay, Flexner seems to foreshadow the discussion of translation as a professionalised or professionalising occupation within the sociological turn in TS. This is how Flexner's discussion seems to be relevant, despite its being quite distant from us in time.

4.1. Mediating or Original Responsibility?

First of all, analysing the text of the Bulletin of the New York School of Philanthropy, Flexner finds that social work has a high level of intellectual responsibility. But he asks himself whether this responsibility is of a mediating or original nature. In other words, does social work have a definite goal? Unlike physicians who cure illnesses and teachers who educate and thereby diminish ignorance, social workers diagnose a problem and then direct their patients to a specialist with a particular type of knowledge who in turn resolves the problem. Hence, Flexner asks:

> To the extent that the social worker mediates the intervention of the particular agent or agency best fitted to deal with the specific emergency which he [sic] has encountered, is the social worker himself a professional or is he the intelligence that brings this or that profession or other activity into action? The responsibility for specific action thus rests upon the power he has invoked. The very variety of the situations he encounters compels him to be not a professional agent so much as the mediator invoking this or that professional agency. (1915, 16)

Flexner recognises that the professions also depend on one another: architects, engineers, lawyers and educators contribute to the building and functioning of a school. Yet their interdependence is "a division of labor among equals, each party bearing […] primary responsibility for his particular function" (ibid., 16). The degree of the definiteness of the function and the share of the responsibility for the fulfilment of that function among the professions is different, according to Flexner, from the function of and responsibility assumed by the social worker.

As was discussed above (Section 3.2), translation acts in a way that makes the extent of its responsibility similar to that of social work, rather than that of the professions. In Flexner's terms, it is not original, but rather mediating. Translation liaises between different parties and it is these parties themselves who fulfil the ultimate purpose(s) of the mediated materials. Translation's responsibility, thus, is of a mediating nature.

4.2. Multipliplicity of Objects

As was the case with the categorisation of occupations, "[l]ack of specificity in aim affects seriously the problem of training social workers" (Flexner 1915, 18). Indeed, while professions with definite objects of application train their practitioners to perform definite operations in order to achieve concrete goals, social work training cannot possibly accommodate the overwhelming variety of tasks and reflect all areas of social work. Thus, the occupation itself has to rely on the resourcefulness of its practitioners, rather than on a set of defined skills. Flexner recalls hearing one of the social work trainers complain: "We don't know just what to teach them" (ibid., 19). Flexner also points out that the heads of schools for social workers "are trained men with subsequent experience, but not trained social workers" (ibid., 19). Instruction of this type is "not exactly professional in character; it supplements and brings to bear what good students might well acquire in the course of their previous higher education" (ibid., 19). Flexner is careful to emphasise the fact that his intention is not to imply that schools of philanthropy are not needed; rather he wanted to say that "[l]ooking at them as educational ventures, I suspect that they are as yet feeling about for their proper place and function" (ibid., 19).

The objects of social work are not as clear-cut as they are with the professions, either. Where medicine, law and engineering draw clear lines between what belongs to their field and what is outside it, social work does not appear to be "so much a definite field as an aspect of work in many fields": medical work includes an element of social work, so do law, education etc. According to the prospectus of the Boston School for Social Workers, their graduates work with children and religious and civic organisations, and for charities, industrial betterment etc. "The field of employment is indeed so vast that delimitation is impossible" (ibid., 17). As a result "[a] certain superficiality of attainment, a certain lack of practical ability, necessarily characterize such breadth of endeavor" (ibid., 17). Consequently, Flexner questions: "Would it not be at least suggestive therefore to view social work as in touch with many professions rather than as a profession in and by itself?" (ibid., 18).

Similarly, translation has many objects. This fact served as the basis for Daniel Simeoni's denial of the status of a social field (in the Bourdieusian sense) to translation as compared to the literary field, because the translator's habitus is fundamentally subservient to the field wherein s/he acts and there are so many such fields that this makes translation a "pseudo- or would-be field of translation […] much less organized than the literary field, its structuring being far more heteronymous […]" (1998, 19). Also in Bourdieusian terms, Gouanvic (2007, 82) does not see translation as constituting a social field in itself, but rather as operating according to the requirements of the fields in which translation performs or the text genres with which it deals.

It is not, however, a question of whether these claims are right or wrong (see the discussions of them in Wolf 2007 and Tyulenev 2010); what is important is that some translation theorists see translation's thematic multiplicity of objects as the factor that undermines its claims to be a fully formed professional field.[1]

4.3. Complementing Other Occupations

Viewed from another angle, Flexner continues, social work may be considered as a supplement to the deficiency on the social side of the fully-fledged professions:

where the physician or the lawyer are unable to address the social needs of their patients, the social worker steps in: social work "pieces out existing professions; breathes a new spirit into them; and binds them together in the endeavor to deal with a given situation from a new point of view" (ibid., 18).

Translation can also be said to complement other occupations in that it helps them communicate with each other interlingually (see the opening paragraph of Section 3.1 above). Translation allows the professions and occupations operating within one culture and one language to learn how the same or a comparable trade is plied in another culture/language and thereby, perhaps, to gain new inspiration and insights into their professional/occupational objects, thus optimising their professional/occupational performances – breathing a new spirit into them.

5. Why All This Fuss?

Why is it so important to clarify the occupational status of translation? Flexner explains that the fine distinctions between different occupations are not "merely a verbal quibble, for [they] have an important bearing on the solution of all educational questions" pertaining to these occupations (ibid., 12). This is definitely so as far as translator training is concerned. Some translator training courses are inclined to be more vocational; some offer courses opening up TS research pathways, and consequently theoretical modules feature prominently in their curricula. For instance, the curriculum of the University of British Columbia Chinese Translation graduate certificate does not include any theoretical courses among the required courses (https://cstudies.ubc.ca/programs/chinese-translation-award-achievement; accessed December 1, 2014), while the BA in *applied* translation studies at London Metropolitan University, although emphasising its vocational nature, explicitly includes the theoretical component: "This vocational course provides an excellent grounding in language, culture mediation and translation theory and practice" (http://www.londonmet.ac.uk/courses/undergraduate/2015/translation---ba-hons/; accessed December 1, 2014). The MA in *applied* translation studies includes a module called "Methods and Approaches in Translation Studies", which "provides the theoretical foundations for reflection on practice and for research" (http://www.leeds.ac.uk/arts/info/125053/centre_for_translation_studies/1803/taught_ programmes; accessed December 1, 2014). These programmes are close to the MA in Translation Studies taught at Durham University which gives students the opportunity to choose a theoretical research-led pathway or a practical pathway (https://www.dur.ac.uk/mlac/postgraduate/transstuds/; accessed December 1, 2014).

If translation is taught purely vocationally, then it may be regarded more as a handicraft or business in Flexner's terms (and vice versa). If, however, it is viewed as a profession, then translator training programmes seem to be more inclined to offer modules which allow their students to master not only translation/interpreting but also transferrable skills and thereby prepare them to be translators and/or translation project managers, editors, revisers, co-writers, localisation experts, etc.

A clearer discussion of their occupation, its nature and place among other occupations, whether the recognised professions or not, can help translators view their job and their own professional/occupational status more realistically. Comparing the social worker, ignorant of the occupational status of his/her job, to the journalist, Flexner says that the results in the practitioner's behaviour are disproportionate to the nature of his/her professional practice. The social worker's and the journalist's "vices" diagnosed by Flexner are immoderate self-confidence and "excessive facility

in speech and in action" (1915, 21). Recalling Simeoni's diagnosis of the translator's habitus (1998) – subservience – the translator's problem seems to be the opposite to that of the social worker and journalist. Yet, arguably, Flexner's advice does apply *mutatis mutandis* to translation. A better understanding of the translator's and translation's occupational status in modern society can help, on the negative side, overcome the frustration that is only too clearly felt in the translators' world (Katan 2011), and on the positive side, boost their confidence realistically.[2]

Notes

1. Making a definite thematic object of occupational practice a unifying basis for all translation has been contested with the help of the application of Luhmann's social systems theory. Unlike Bourdieu's focus on social practice, Luhmann puts forward social function as a *Leitdifferenz* (the German for 'guiding difference') of a social system. Whatever its thematic objects may be and whatever other social units it can be found mediating between, arguably, translation can still be seen as a unified social system different from any other social unit, its system-forming difference between its unique function of social mediation across systemic and semiotic boundaries (Hermans 1999, 142–3; Tyulenev 2011). The difference between translation's being constituted as a social function system and its professional status should be appreciated: the former unites all translation based on the ontological nature of its operations, the latter registers the degree of the social recognition of the former.

2. Flexner makes another important point: "[A] profession needs in these days a form of expression and record that is scientific rather than journalistic in character" (1915, 23). This means that an occupational community needs to express itself, yet not on what Flexner calls the journalistic level "for news-propaganda and agitation", but "in the form of a periodical which shall describe in careful terms whatever work is in progress; and it must from time to time register its more impressive performances in a literature of growing solidity and variety. To some extent the evolution of social work towards the professional status can be measured by the quality of publication put forth in its name. […] I believe the point is one which might be profitably considered by those who wish social work to be taken as seriously as medicine or engineering" (ibid., 23). Without going into detail, suffice it to say that Translation Studies does contribute to the translation professional project in this important aspect.

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