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## **Image-Making as Exercised by Iranian Literary**

### **Translators**

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# Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	6
<b>Introduction</b> .....	6
1.1. Introduction .....	7
1.2. Statement of the Problem .....	8
1.3. Significance of the Study .....	9
1.4. Purpose of the Study.....	10
1.5. Research Question.....	10
1.6. Theoretical Framework.....	10
1.7. Definition of Key Terms.....	16
1.8. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study .....	17
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	18
<b>Review of the Related Literature</b> .....	18
2.1. Introduction .....	19
2.2. Translation as a Social Practice .....	20
2.3. Sociology of Translation.....	24

2.4. Sociology of Translators.....	26
2.5. Contributions from Sociology .....	28
2.5.1. Pierre Bourdieu.....	30
2.5.2. Erwing Goffman .....	37
2.6. The Perceived Low Status of Translators.....	41
2.7. Image and Image-making .....	44
2.7.1 Two Different Strategies of Status Claim .....	47
2.7.2 Translators' Work of Self-Presentation and Forms of Symbolic Capital.....	49
<b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>52</b>
3.1. Overview .....	53
3.2. Description of Type of Research .....	53
3.3. Research Design .....	54
3.4. Procedures.....	55
3.5. Data Collection and Analysis .....	55

<b>CHAPTER FOUR</b> .....	57
<b>Data Collection and Analysis</b> .....	57
4.1. Introduction .....	58
4.2. The Translator as a Guardian of Language and Culture and as an Educator Engaged in a National Mission. ....	58
4.3. The translator as an ‘enrichment agency’, responsible for cultural innovations and updating.....	61
4.4. The Translator as a Man-of-Art .....	64
<b>CHAPTER FIVE</b> .....	73
<b>Results, Conclusions and Suggestions for Further Research</b> .....	73
5.1. Introduction .....	74
5.2. Implications.....	78
5.3. Suggestions for Further Research .....	79
<b>APPENDIX</b> .....	80
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	108
Persian Sources.....	111

## ***Abstract***

People engaged in social activities will inevitably be concerned with their status and their image in view of the public and also their counterparts. Translators, as social agents tend to complain about being ignored, undervalued, and underpaid. This perceived invisibility will make them try to improve their image and make a distinction between themselves and other persons entering the field almost with limited experience or talent.

What is done in this research is to investigate the strategies of image-making adopted by Iranian literary translators as proposed by Rakefet Sela-sheffy. All three image introduced by her are found in the corpus of this study together with another image which is not mentioned by her. Out of these images, presenting translation as an art is the most frequently used. Results of this study show that Iranian literary translators bother themselves to make a distinction in order to claim status and somehow to drive translation toward being an independent profession with established regulations, specific prerequisites, and maybe talents.

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Introduction**

## **1.1. Introduction**

“In recent years, Bourdieusian concepts of field and habitus are being introduced into Translation Studies. From the standpoint of cultural research, the strongest point of these processes lies in approaching the practice of translation as a *social activity*, which, like any other human activity, is organized and regulated through social forces” (Sela-Sheffy, 2000, pp. 345–355).

One fact to be considered about people involved in all social human actions is that they all strive for status and accumulation of prestige. Translators like many other occupational groups are very much concerned with their occupational prestige. Aware of the image of their trade as a second-rate auxiliary occupation with only secondary function in the production of texts, translators invest considerable efforts in trying to enhance their prestige and improve their starting point as professionals. (Sela-Sheffy, 2005, pp. 1–26).

Many researches have been done on the sociology of translation and the social status of translators, but few researches have been done on extracting different strategies adopted by translators in order to increase their prestige and improve their image both “in group fighting for recognition from outside and an internal competition for better positions

within their own field” (Sela-Sheffy, 2006, pp. 243–262). This thesis was an attempt to contribute to this line of the study.

### ***1.2. Statement of the Problem***

Translators, literary or non-literary, with all their differences, tend to complain about being under-valued, ignored and underpaid. This invisibility of translators is connected to the fact that translation is not recognized as a profession. This means that there is neither exclusivity over the work, nor any need to have a license or knowledge base. There is no obligatory formal training, nor regulation of conditions of work and fees; in short it can be said that anybody is allowed to translate.

All these facts push translators into fights for higher positions inside and outside of their own field, to distinguish themselves as professional. According to Sela-Sheffy (2008: 1) “the way translators perceive their occupation and their role as cultural agents which is determined by their status as a professional group and as individuals” is very important. This study intended to investigate the strategies adopted by Iranian literary translators in order to improve their image as a professional group.



### ***1.3. Significance of the Study***

The contention of this study is the assumption that “Translation Studies still focus too much on translation performances, without enough attention to the motivations and constraints of the human agents behind them” (Sela-Sheffy, 2008: 1). Therefore, although many researches have been done on sociological aspects of translation and the social and economic status of translators, not too much research has been done specifically on the view translators have about themselves within the field and their struggle for having a better image and position.

Searching for the tendencies of literary translators regarding their self-imaging strategies and the value categories they mobilize to make sense of their job and create their occupational dignity can be very important, though few researchers have focused on this matter.

Considering the context of Iran, no study has been done specifically on literary translators and the strategies they adopt in order to advance their image and professional dignity, so findings of this study can be helpful in systematizing the profession of translation, therefore making people have a better appreciation for the work done by translators, specifically literary ones.

#### ***1.4. Purpose of the Study***

This study intended to investigate the assumed low status of literary translators in Iran and the strategies Iranian translators adopt to improve their image and professional dignity. This may help in general improve the social status of translators and the position the profession of translation has been occupied as an occupational field. In order to achieve this purpose, the following questions were sought.

#### ***1.5. Research Question***

- How do Iranian literary translators strive to advance their Image?

#### ***1.6. Theoretical Framework***

Translators, like many other occupational groups, are very much concerned with their occupational prestige (Treiman 1997, as cited in Sela-Sheffy, 2006: 243). According to Sela-Sheffy (2006: 243), aware of the image of their trade as a second-rate auxiliary occupation with only a secondary function in the production of texts, translators invest considerable efforts in trying to enhance their prestige and improve their starting point as professionals.

Pierre Bourdieu introduces this situation under the concept of ‘distinction’. In the introduction to his book ‘Distinction’, he argues that “social subjects, classified by their classifications, distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar, in which their position in the objective classifications is expressed or betrayed” (Bourdieu, 1984: 6).

Defining this concept of Bourdieu, Wacquant (2006: 4) states, “social existence thus means difference, and difference implies hierarchy, which in turn sets off the endless dialectic of distinction and pretention, recognition and misrecognition, arbitrariness and necessity”.

Bourdieu argues that the struggle for social distinction is a fundamental dimension of all social life, “struggles over the appropriation of economic or cultural goods are, simultaneously, symbolic struggles to appropriate distinctive signs in the form of classified, classifying goods or practices, or to conserve or subvert the principles of classification of those distinctive properties” (1984: 249).

All human actions take place within social fields, which are arenas for the struggle of the resources. The field is the arena of acquiring status in the hierarchy of powers in it. According to Bourdieu (1986:243) “the

field is like a competing market in which all types of capital (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) are utilized”. Individuals, institutions, and other agents try to distinguish themselves from others, and acquire capital which is useful or valuable on the arena. In modern societies, there are two distinct systems of social hierarchization (Internet file retrieved from <http://muse.jhu.edu/demo/elh/60.4loesberg.html>, July, 2010):

The first is economic, in which position and power are determined by money and property, the capital one commands. The second system is cultural or symbolic. In this, one's status is determined by how much cultural or symbolic capital one possesses. Culture is also a source of domination, in which intellectuals are in the key role as specialists of cultural production and creators of symbolic power.

Since the second system of distinction is prominent in the translation profession, it seems that understanding the economic and cultural capital introduced by Bourdieu is essential.

Bourdieu (1986:241) defines *economic capital* simply as “which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the form of property rights”.

David Swartz (1997: 75) believes that:

Boourdieu's concept of cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources including such things as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school systems, and educational credentials. His point is to suggest that culture (in the broadest sense of the term) can become a power source.

Bourdieu also believes that cultural capital can exist in three different states:

In the *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.), which are the trace or realization of theories or critiques of these theories, problematics, etc.; and in the *institutionalized* state, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee (Bourdieu, 1986:243).

Bourdieu usually applies his theory of 'Distinction' to social classes, but it is possible to apply this theory to occupational groups and fields as well. Using the framework of this theory one can examine the struggles over appropriation of capitals and improvement of status and image by the agents of occupational groups.

People occupying the positions in the field, utilize all kinds of strategies (strategy as the active arrangement of deliberately-oriented action lines which are observing the rules and forming consistent and intelligent patterns). Through these strategies, occupants of positions prompt to keep or improve their status individually or collectively. (George Ritzer, 1974: 724).

Applying this theory of Bourdieu in Translation Studies, Sela-Sheffy proposes that translators adopt two strategies in order to advance their image. According to her, non-literary translators aspire to sound ‘*professionals*,’ and on the other hand literary translators seek recognition as ‘*artists*’. These differentiated strategies mark a distinction between literary and ‘commercial’ translators so as to create a structural distance between elite and common translators (Sela-Sheffy, 2008: 4).

*Professionalism* for non-literary translators entails activities like “aspiration at standardization and self-management, rising educational frameworks and diploma programs, or the various conferences and Internet forums”. By contrast, for literary translators, the status of profession is improved “through promoting the *personal reputation of select individual*” (Sela-Sheffy, 2008: 5).

Since this study focused mainly on literary translators, strategies adopted by this group of translators were studied in detail.

Sela-Sheffy believes that “elite literary translators tend to promote three professional images to build their personal charisma, in terms of their public role as well as personality, as follows:

1. The translator as a guardian of language and culture and as an educator engaged in a national mission. This image implies a profound knowledge of the canonical domestic language and cultural lore, and hence constitutes a safe, albeit scarce, resource.
2. The translator as an ‘enrichment agency’, responsible for cultural innovations and updating. This image implies sophistication and close acquaintance with foreign languages and cultures.
3. The translator as a man-of-art. This image stands out as the major resource evoked by literary translators, which constitute a highly valued resource for taste-makers.

(Sela-Sheffy, 2008: 5–6)

## ***1.7. Definition of Key Terms***

**Capital:** According to Bourdieu (1998, pp. 242–258). “Capital is accumulated labor (in its materialized form or its ‘incorporated’, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private i.e. exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor”.

**Field:** The notion of *field* refers to a social arena within which struggles and maneuvers take place over specific resources and access to them. It denominates the objective, external structure which is independent from the will and the awareness of the social agents.

**Strategy:** strategy is the active arrangement of deliberately-oriented action lines which are observing the rules and forming consistent and intelligent patterns.

**Image:** According to Goffman (1963:129), the individual constructs his image of himself out of the same materials from which others first construct a social and personal identification of him, but he exercises important liberties in regard to what he fashions.



### ***1.8. Limitations and Delimitations of the Study***

1. This study is going to investigate the strategies adopted by Iranian translators in order to advance their image in the society. The data needed to be collected from the printed media, finding enough interviews with the specific orientation of this research was so difficult.

2. The strategies introduced here are two strategies, one proposed for non-literary translators and the other for literary ones. One of the limitations of this study is access to translators and researcher has to consider just one of these strategies concerning literary translators, since they are the group to which contact can be more easily established.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of the Related Literature**

## **2.1. Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategies adopted by Iranian literary translators in order to improve the image of translation as a profession and to change the misconception among people who consider translation, in Sela-Sheffy (as cited in Wolf, 2006:243) words, as a ‘second-hand, auxiliary’ occupation. Therefore, the main approach adopted in this study was a sociological view to translation and translation studies.

First in this chapter some main issues of Sociology of Translation will be summarily presented i.e. Translation as a Social Practice, Sociology of Translation and Sociology of Translators.

The second part to be discussed in this chapter concerns the contributions from Sociology which includes two of the most influential scholars of this field i.e. Pierre Bourdieu and Erving Goffman. This part includes a brief introduction of their theories and mainly the concepts introduced by them.

Third, a brief introduction to the Perceived Low Status of Translators is presented as manifested by different scholars of Translation Studies.

Last but not least, the main concern of this study i.e. Image is introduced and some strategies proposed by Rakefet Sela-Sheffy as adopted by literary translators in order to “advance their occupational prestige and improving their status as professionals” (as cited in Wolf, 2006: 243) are described.

## ***2.2. Translation as a Social Practice***

Different scholars of translation studies, throughout the history, have been dealing with the issue of ‘the social’ in various forms and looking at it from different angles. But although as Venuti (1995: 18) puts it “the viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read”, there seems to be a vacant place for a comprehensive research dealing with social implications of translation. Here, a brief summary of socially-oriented insights to translation taken from Michaela Wolf (2007) will be presented.

According to Wolf (2007:7) “while system-oriented approaches do not insist on the theoretical conceptualization of the social implications of translation, they do – more than any other research