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Translation profession in Iran: current challenges and future prospects

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ABSTRACT

Translation is considered as a form of intercultural communication which involves the cooperation of many agents. In recent years, increased attention has been focused on the people and institutions involved with translation. One of the main research areas that has recently emerged is the investigation of the link between the sociology of professions and the status of translation as an occupation. This study aims to determine the current challenges to establishing a professional status for translators in Iran and attempts to offer solutions for improving the status quo based on the suggestions of active agents in the field. The data for this study were collected qualitatively through in-depth interviews using a purposive sample of translation agents in Iran. The results indicate that there are numerous administrative, educational, social and financial challenges facing translation as a profession in Iran. The proposed solutions for improving the current situation have been discussed in the light of the relevant literature.

1. Introduction

Translation Studies (TS) has witnessed a move away from the mere consideration of texts as the products of the translation process towards the view of translation as a social practice which involves the cooperation of many agents (Wolf 2010). Hence, a research domain which has gained popularity in the field of TS is the study of the status of the translation profession in different contexts. In order to verify profession-status claims, a set of criteria should be taken into consideration.

Downie (1990) defines a profession as a full-time occupation which is the main source of income for its practitioners and is supported by a body of knowledge and skills. Roberts and Dietrich (1999) claim that professionalism is the ability of an occupation to gain social respect. Having reviewed the seminal literature, Weiss-Gal and Welbourne (2008) enumerate eight features for a true profession:

- Public respect for the profession
- Having control over certain kinds of work
- Professional autonomy

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- Possessing a strong knowledge base
- Professional education controlled by members of the profession
- An influential professional association
- Code of ethics
- Respect and payment which reflect professional prestige

It is also worth noting that one of the features of a profession that is found in almost all the proposed definitions (e.g. Greenwood 1957; Downie 1990; Barber 1963) is having a systematic body of knowledge.

Some prominent translation scholars have been optimistic towards the evolution of the translation profession. Gentzler (2001) claims that due to the revolution of function-alist theory, translators are now regarded as high-profile cultural mediators. Chesterman (2009) also believes that translators are not looked down upon by clients anymore. However, less optimistic scholars point to a number of issues such as a trend towards deprofessionalisation (e.g. Pym 2005), the translators' voluntary servitude (Simeoni 1998), quality downturn due to lowest bid market economics (e.g. Muzii 2006), and the competition from the emerging technology (e.g. Gil and Pym 2006).

1.1. *Translation profession across the world*

In order to contextualise our study, we begin with a brief overview of recent publications. In a volume entitled *Identity and Status in the Translational Professions*, Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger (2011) have collected several papers concerning translator and interpreter (T/I) status and the translation profession. In addition to a number of articles which have adopted a universal stance, the volume includes articles focusing on T/I issues in specific countries such as Spain, Mainland China and Taiwan, Hong Kong, Palestine, Belgium and Austria. Another country-specific case study is provided by Dam and Zethsen (2010), who explore the opportunities for and barriers to the translation profession in Denmark. After analysing the comments of freelance, agency and company translators, they conclude that translation is an emerging profession in Denmark, but there is still lack of awareness of the level of expertise necessary to translate.

Katan (2011) attempts to investigate the attitudes of T/I towards their professional and social status. The findings of this study indicated that translators and interpreters are satisfied with their professional status, while suffering from a low level of social recognition. More recently, Myoung and Shunmugam (2014) analyse the perceptions of Malaysian translators towards their job status. The findings of their study indicate that there is still a lot of effort needed to establish a true translation profession in Malaysia.

A study conducted by Pym et al. (2013) focuses on the status of the translation profession in the European Union (EU) and provides some suggestions for improving the status quo. The authors investigate the issue from social, economic and gender perspectives, among others. They also compare the profession in the EU countries with that of Australia, the United States and Canada. In another study, Hlavac (2013) investigates the T/I certification procedures in 21 countries. In addition to providing a detailed account of the certification procedures in countries which are distributed along the seven continents, the article points to diverse implications for practice.

An earlier study by Godbout (2009) discussed the ways through which translators obtain certification in Canada: namely, the annual certification exam systematised by the Canadian Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters Council (CTTIC); on dossier or portfolio examination; and mentorship. According to Pym et al. (2013), there are 11 translator associations in Canada with a total number of 4438 members, all of which follow a code of ethics (Godbout 2009). However, Godbout points to a number of drawbacks associated with the profession in Canada:

- Most translator associations in Canada do not impose obligatory professional development
- Society does not fully recognise the authorities of the profession
- Associations only control access to their own system and there is not an association to control access to the profession

1.2. *Translation education and translator associations in Iran*

The practice of translation in Iran dates back to prehistoric times (Toosi 2000). One of the first attempts to academise translation in Iran was the establishment of a translation college in 1973. The College of Translation was established in Tehran with the aim of training professional translators in several languages including English, Arabic, French, German, Russian, Italian and Spanish. In 1979, this college merged with the Literature and Humanities University Complex. Currently, there are no translation academies in Iran.

Aside from sporadic research on translation in applied linguistics postgraduate programmes, official higher education in TS is quite new in Iranian universities. The first postgraduate programme in TS was the Master of Arts in English Translation offered by Allameh Tabataba'i University in 2001. Currently, 38 Iranian universities including state-run universities and private institutes of higher education offer the Master of Arts (MA) in English ($n = 20$), Arabic ($n = 12$), French ($n = 5$) and German Translation ($n = 1$). These MA programmes include three semesters of coursework followed by a research project as thesis. More specifically, the MA programmes include courses on translation practice, Persian and the foreign language (e.g. translation workshop, review of the translated classical/sacred texts) and theories of translation (e.g. translation theories, genealogy of translation in Iran, research methodology in TS, translation assessment, culture and sociology in translation and translation seminar).

Allameh Tabataba'i University was the first in Iran to offer a PhD in TS in 2011, soon followed by the University of Isfahan in 2012 and Ferdowsi University of Mashhad in 2013. The programme typically spans over 4 years, including three semesters of coursework and a thesis project. Some of the modules of this programme include critical analysis of modern translation theories, pragmatics and discourse analysis in TS, didactics of translation, culture and translation, terminology and lexicography, computers and translation, translation criticism and the poetics of translation. Admission of students to both MA and PhD programmes in TS, as in all other majors, takes place through an annual nationwide admission examination.

Unlike the graduate programmes in translation, undergraduate translation programmes in Iran date back to over four decades ago. The 4-year Bachelor of Arts in

translation is completely practice-oriented and offered in Persian and a foreign language. The BA in English Translation is one of the most popular degree programmes in the humanities cluster.

The programme courses cover four main areas of languages, linguistics, literature and translation. The curriculum dates back to over 20 years ago and has been criticised for having failed to adapt to the recent developments in the field and market demands (Khazaee Farid and Khoshsaligheh 2010; Khoshsaligheh 2014). The teaching approach has been dominantly transmissionist and could hardly compare with the more student-centred, constructivist approaches to translator education (Kiraly 2000). However, with the emergence of the new generation of teachers who have been formally trained in TS programmes, the teaching landscape of translation in Iran is improving.

Recently, the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology has authorised Iranian universities to fully update the curricula at all levels and the smaller universities and institutions of higher education have been allowed to follow the newly revised curricula of one of the major universities – a measure the success of which remains to be seen in the immediate future.

There are currently three official translator associations in Iran, namely the Iranian Association of Certified Translators and Interpreters (IACTI), Iranian Translators and Interpreters Association (ITIA) and Tehran Translators and Interpreters' Association (TIAT), all of which outline as their main objectives to improve the status of the translation profession in Iran, provide financial and moral support for Iranian translators and act as a link between translators and authoritative bodies.

IACTI was founded in 2000 and currently has 531 members who are all official judiciary translators. The members of this association are specialised in different languages including English, Arabic, Spanish, German, Italian and Russian. In Iran, the only way to become a certified translator is to successfully pass a multistage examination held by the judiciary. This assessment is highly competitive and only held once every 5 years.

ITIA is an NGO founded in 2003. Home to only 56 active members specialised in a few major languages, this association is not representative of the large body of translators working in Iran. Finally, TIAT is a newly established association with only 70 members. It focuses on the notion of translation industry and centres around improving the economic conditions of Iranian translators.

2. Research questions and method

The current study addresses the following questions:

(1) What are the current challenges of developing a translation profession in Iran?
(2) What are the recommendations of Iranian translation agents for developing a translation profession in Iran?

This study is based on a phenomenological research design (Dornyei 2007). The study uses an in-depth interview technique to collect qualitative insights into the phenomenon under investigation from a purposive sample of participants. According to Fylan

(2005), semi-structured interviews are conversations in which the interviewer knows what s/he is looking for using a set of questions to cover, but the structure of the conversation is flexible and may vary for different interviewees. In such studies, data collection continues until new information saturation is reached. Romney, Weller, and Batchelder (1986) claim that if the interviewees possess an acceptable degree of knowledge and expertise in the specific domain, sample sizes as small as four can provide almost complete information in a specific cultural context. In the current study, the researchers concluded that saturation has been reached after conducting 11 interviews. Overall, five translation scholars, three professional translators, two managers at translation agencies and the head of a publishing house were interviewed. All the interviews were audio-recorded for analysis.

As a result of a comprehensive review of the seminal literature, several themes were identified as indicators of a true profession. The themes covering a wide range of issues were used to design the interview protocol for data collection. In the interview sessions, the participants were asked to express their opinion about the following aspects of the status quo of translation occupation in Iran and their recommendations for developing a prospective translation profession:

- Authoritative bodies
- Economic condition
- Social status
- Admission criteria
- Translator education
- Regulatory measures

To analyse the data, grounded theory procedure (Glaser and Strauss 1967) was employed. Grounded theory is used in qualitative research to achieve an emerging theory – as a set of organised ideas, which describe a phenomenon or explain how it works. It entails basic stages including open coding, axial coding and selective coding, which involve diving the data into small units of meaning and their subsequent categorisation (Dornyei 2007).

Moreover, in order to provide a better picture of the real-world translation rates in Iran and compare the rates with those of foreign translation companies, a general English passage of 930 words was selected as an instrument to obtain quotes for Persian translation. Overall, 15 foreign translation companies and 15 translation companies in Iran were contacted and asked for a quote for the translation of the English text into Persian. Also, to obtain more realistic results, a Persian text with the same length was sent to the same Iranian translation companies and they were asked to give a quote for the English translation of the text.

3. Results

3.1. *Current challenges facing the translation profession in Iran*

Overall, five main themes were extracted from the interviews, each of which consists of a number of sub-branches.

3.1.1. *Administrative issues*

One of the main themes covered by almost all the interviewees (10/11) was the administrative challenges which target higher-rank authorities and are beyond the responsibilities of translation agents. In this study, translation agent is a generic term, which refers to translators, translation teachers and publishers.

3.1.1.1. *Lack of a strong translation guild.* Most of the interviewees (9/11) in this study pointed to the lack of a strong translation guild as a major challenge and argued that Iranian translators do not receive considerable financial or moral support from the government or NGOs. Also, in case a conflict of interest arises between the client and the translator, there is no higher-rank translation body to judge between the two sides.

There are indeed numerous art associations in Iran including Iran's Music House,[1] The Iranian Alliance of Motion Picture Guilds,[2] and the Iranian Artists' Forum.[3] These associations provide their members with financial and administrative support. The latter association is home to many Iranian artists from various backgrounds, including but not limited to painters, photographers, poets, calligraphers and sculptors. Surprisingly, translators are not listed as a branch of artists in this association. In addition to these groups, there is the Writers' Association of Iran whose members are comprised of well-known writers, translators and editors. However, as the name suggests, translators are not the main focus of this organisation.

3.1.1.2. *Lack of a unified code of ethics.* According to Schmeiser (1992), codes of ethics are a series of principles which guide the behaviours of practitioners in any given profession and ensure the public that the members of the profession follow certain moral principles. According to most of the interviewees in this study (7/11), Iranian translators do not explicitly follow any set of ethical principles. Although there have recently been some efforts to establish a set of ethical codes for Iranian translators, these efforts have not been fruitful due to the lack of a representative guild with the authority to reinforce such types of regulations.

There are currently three translator associations in Iran, which together have less than 650 members. After a thorough analysis of the structure of these associations, it was found that no specific code of ethics has been outlined or supported by any of these associations. For instance, the Iranian Translators and Interpreters' Association (ITIA) suffices to enumerate eight idealistic objectives for the association as a whole, without providing any details about the specific regulations and ethical issues that have to be observed by the members. As for IACTI, which is the only state-supported organisation for certified translators in Iran, it does not currently have a set of ethical codes outlining the responsibilities and rights of its members.

However, a statute was approved in 1993 for official Iranian translators, which contained the legal processes pertaining to translation rates and ethical issues such as confidentiality, impartiality and accountability. This series of regulations has about 60% overlap with that of the International Federation of Translators. However, since it dates back to 23 years ago, some of its sections, especially the clauses which determine the rates for different types of translation services, are not applicable nowadays.

3.1.1.3. *Lack of market entrance criteria.* According to six of the interviewees, any-one with an average knowledge of a foreign language may claim the title of translator in Iran. Except for some entrance exams, which are often held by translation agencies just for matters of formality, there are no specific criteria for entering the field of professional translation.

3.1.1.4. *Unofficial translation services.* According to nearly two-thirds of the inter-viewees, unofficial translation companies are another challenging issue faced by the profession in Iran. In the Iranian context official translation companies are translation service providers which have been authorised by the Judiciary Department. These agencies are often managed by a legally sworn translator. Only the translated docu-ments certified by such companies are accepted for legal procedures. The fees of the translation services provided by such companies are much higher compared to the abundant freelancers or unofficial translation groups, which do not operate under the legal regulations. These unofficial companies are often run by non-linguists who sign low-paid contracts with novice translators or first-year university students to keep the prices competitively low, while still profitable. Ultimately, the entire picture results in cheap yet low-quality translations, which in turn harm the national image of Iranian translators and lead to an unfair pricing imbalance.

3.1.2. *Issues of social status*
The issue of low social status was also discussed by most of the interviewees (9/11).

3.1.2.1. *Non-recognition of translators.* From the viewpoint of approximately one-third of the interviewees, translators are not recognised by a large portion of Iranian society and translation is not recognised as an established profession. While musicians, poets and film-makers enjoy a high level of popularity in Iran, an ordinary Iranian can hardly name any famous Iranian translator.

3.1.2.2. *Misconceptions associated with translation.* According to five of the inter-viewees, there are certain misconceptions associated with the practice of translation in Iran. For instance, many Iranians believe that possessing an average knowledge of two languages is the only criterion for becoming a translator. Another misconception which has recently gained popularity is that translation engines can produce completely flawless translations. As a result of these misconceptions, clients are unwilling to pay considerable amounts for translation services.

3.1.3. *Issues related to translation agents*
Some of the issues mentioned by the interviewees concerned translation agents themselves.

3.1.3.1. *Disunity among translation agents.* Four of the interviewees mentioned the lack of unity among Iranian translation agents as a blockade to the development of a profession. In the interviews conducted for this study, professional translators criticised Iranian translation scholars for not being aware of the real-world translation market,

while translation scholars argued that most Iranian translators lack the necessary theoretical knowledge to produce high-quality translations.

3.1.3.2. *Unfamiliarity with basic rights and duties.*

When society members are not aware of their rights and responsibilities, they can neither stand against any possible injustice nor should they be blamed for not fulfilling their duties. This is the case for many Iranian translators. According to three of the interviewees, the majority of Iranian translators consider the only responsibility of a translator to produce a text in a second language, without being aware of issues such as cultural transfer, the translator as intercultural mediator and translation ethics.

3.1.3.3. *Ghostwriting.*

According to two of the interviewees in this study, a large portion of books/articles in Iran are translated by professional translators, but published under the name of another individual who may not have any knowledge of the source language. In this process which is known as ghostwriting or 'ghost translation' (Qian 1995), the translator is paid (economic capital), without being acknowledged (symbolic capital). This issue is largely related to the economic concerns of translators, which makes them prone to accepting such offers. Also, the lack of necessary regulations catalyses this process. However, the dire situation with such violations of the ethics of publishing has prompted the Iranian parliament to propose new legislations which are expected to curb these ethical misconducts.

3.1.4. *Training issues*

In this section, some of the drawbacks of translator training in Iran are discussed.

3.1.4.1. *Outdated syllabus.*

According to most of the interviewees (8/11), the syllabus of TS at Iranian universities has not changed since it was first designed nearly 30 years ago. As a result, many skills which are currently necessary for translators are not included in the syllabus.

3.1.4.2. *Neglecting the role of experienced translators.*

Based on the views of four of the interviewees, very few translation workshops are annually held in Iran. Therefore, the experiences of professional translators are not transferred to the new generation of translators. Moreover, translation workshop courses which are part of the syllabus at Iranian universities are often taught by translation scholars who may not have a strong practical background in translation. Hence, these courses do not yield the desired output for students. After a thorough investigation, it was found that only two well-organised translation workshops have been held in Iran during 2016.

The Art of Translation workshop started in July 2016 and lasted for 15 three-hour sessions (45 h overall). Mr. Ali Solhjoo, a well-known Iranian translator and editor, was the trainer at this workshop. The potential participants had to pass an entrance exam before attending the training sessions. This workshop was organised by TIAT in collaboration with the University of Tehran; hence, it could be considered as a high-standard workshop.

In May 2016, a 3-day translation workshop was held by the Literature department of Sistan and Baloochestan University. The trainer of this workshop was Ms. Leili Golestan, a

well-known Iranian translator. The material presented at this workshop consisted of the experiences of the trainer as a professional literary translator. All the students majoring in Persian/English Literature were allowed to attend the workshop.

Nearly eight other translation workshops were in Iran during 2016. However, these workshops were not organised by recognised associations and the trainers did not have a strong practical background. Moreover, in most cases, the workshop announcements did not include any information regarding the structure of the workshop, the material that was going to be presented or the method of training.

3.1.5. *Economic issues*

The economic status of Iranian translators has been thoroughly investigated in a study conducted by Kafi, Khoshsaligheh, and Hashemi (2016). Similarly, the interviewees in this study raised two points regarding this issue.

3.1.5.1. *Undesirable economic condition.* According to most of the interviewees (9/11), a large number of Iranian translators cannot make a decent living out of translation, unless they work for more than 10 h a day. One of the interviewees claimed that in 2014, an MA student of TS who spent around 40 h a week on translating technical texts, only earned €185 in a month. This amount is lower than the minimum monthly wage of labourers set by the government of Iran (approximately €230).

In order to provide further clarification regarding the financial issues of translators in Iran, 15 Iranian translation companies and 15 foreign translation companies (mostly in Europe, Australia and the United States) were asked to send a quote for the translation of a short general English text into Persian. All the estimations were then converted into Euro. The average price set by the non-Iranian translation companies for the translation of this 930 words text into Persian was 172 euros. Surprisingly, on average, the Iranian translation companies estimated the Persian translation to cost as low as 8 euros.

However, since Persian is the official language of Iran, the rate of translation into this language would definitely be lower in Iran compared to countries in which Persian is considered as a foreign language, let alone a language of limited diffusion internationally. In order to make up for this issue, the rate of Persian-to-English translation of a text with the same length was also investigated from the Iranian translation companies. On average, this rate was estimated to be 18 euros, which is about 10 times less than the average rates in the United States, Australia and Europe. Since non-probability samples were used for this part of the study, the findings are merely approximate indications of the status quo and for conclusion with higher validity and generalisability, more controlled and large-scale research is necessary.

One could argue that translation rates in Iran may be in accordance with the costs of living. In order to clarify this issue, some of the most basic living costs in Iran and Australia have been presented in Figure 1. Since the translation quotes given by the European, American and Australian translation companies were in a similar range, the researchers found it unproblematic to use one of them, namely Australia, as the benchmark. The data for this section were taken from a number of online sources including *numbeo.com* and *budgetdirect.com*.
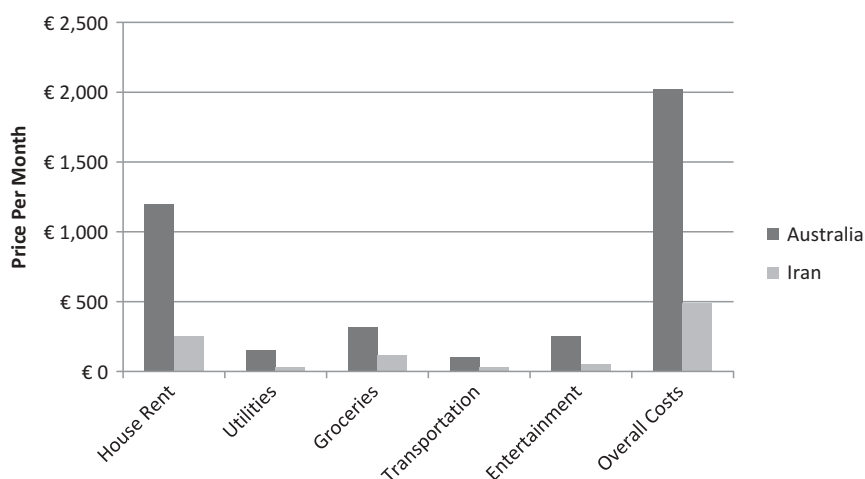
Figure 1. Comparison of the costs of living in Iran and Australia.

Although the costs of living in Iran are about four times less than Australia, the income of Iranian translators does not still cover their living expenses. Hence, most Iranian translators cannot count on translation as their only source of income.

3.1.5.2. *Pricing imbalance.* In any true profession, the members who significantly obviate from the average rates for a specific service would be sanctioned by the authorities of the profession, simply because the discordance of rates would result in the distrust of society members towards that profession. According to three of the interviewees, since translation does not have any strong authoritative body in Iran, such sanctions are not imposed on the translators who violate the pricing norms. Also, due to the lack of a guild, many translators are not aware of the average rates practiced by their colleagues.

3.2. *Suggestions for promoting the translation profession in Iran*

In the second part of the interviews, the interviewees were asked to propose their suggestions for improving the status quo.

3.2.1. *Establishing a strong translation guild*

The interviewees argued that the first step towards professionalisation of translation in Iran is to form a strong translation guild. Previous attempts to establish a representative translation guild in Iran have failed due to disunity among translation agents and lack of necessary regulations. Hence, all of the interviewees maintained that in order to form a strong guild, Iranian translation agents must unite. They also suggested the passing of some laws by the parliament in order to support this association.

3.2.2. *Informing the public about the act of translation*

There were number of suggestions for promoting the undesirable social status of Iranian translators. Four interviewees suggested that the public must get informed about the

vital role of translators in the process of intercultural mediation. This information may be provided through TV programmes, newspaper articles and specialised websites. Also, there exists the need for user-friendly magazines which publish translated material and also provide the readers with basic information about the act of translation. In addition, one of the interviewees suggested that celebrating the international translation day (30 September) as a national event in Iran would help raise public awareness regarding the significant role of translators in enriching the local culture and facilitating intercultural communication.

3.2.3. *Establishing a translator certification system*

Almost half of the interviewees argued that a translation certificate attained through a systematic examination would act as the minimum requirement for anyone who wants to claim the title of translator in Iran. In order to develop an accredited translator certification test, Iranian authorities could follow the path of countries such as Denmark (Dam and Zethsen 2010), England (Osers 1983), the United States (Hammond 1990) and Australia (Hlavac 2013; Ozolins 1998) which have more experiences in this regard. The interviewees also suggested a further step for distinguishing among average, skilful and highly competent translators.

3.2.4. *Establishing a ranking system for Iranian translators*

According to three of the interviewees, clients look for different translation qualities based on their needs and budget. A ranking system would provide the clients with an opportunity to choose a translator based on the difficulty of the source text and the quality that they are looking for. Also, translators who possess higher translation skills would be rewarded by being placed at a higher rank, therefore achieving more economic and symbolic capital.

3.2.5. *Revising the current syllabus of Translation Studies*

The issue of TS syllabus at Iranian universities has been critically viewed by many Iranian researchers (e.g. Hashemi, Khoshsaligheh, and Erfani Hamidi 2013; Moezzi 2015; Salimi Beni and Heidari Tabrizi 2012; Sohrabi, Rahimi, and Arjmandi 2015). The interviewees were similarly critical towards the current syllabus. Around half of the interviewees focused on the courses which do not seem to have any significant output for the students. Also, they pointed to some overlaps in the current syllabus which result in the disinterestedness of students. The other interviewees put emphasis on the important courses which are currently missing in the syllabus. Some of the courses suggested by the interviewees were machine translation, time and project management, marketing and communication.

4. Conclusions

According to almost all the interviewees in this study, the main challenge for the development of the translation profession in Iran is the lack of a representative translation guild. Similarly, Sook (2015) claims that there are currently no professional translation bodies in Korea and Malaysia. Also, Setton and Liangliang (2011) found that in Taiwan, very few professional translators are member of any local or national translator

association. Regarding the lack of specific market entrance criteria for translators, the findings of this study are in line with the findings of Katan (2009) who argues that in most countries, anyone can claim the title of translator.

Another major issue which hinders the development of a translation profession in Iran is the lack of an agreed-upon code of ethics to be followed by all Iranian translators. The importance of codes of ethics has been expressed by numerous researchers from various academic backgrounds (e.g. Scanlon and Glover 1994; Adams, Tashchian, and Shore 2001; Wotruba, Chonko, and Loe 2001). The findings of this study regarding the lack of ethical codes for Iranian translators are in line with the findings of Sook (2015).

According to most of the interviewees in this study (9/11), translator training issues are of high importance. In the same vein, Gouadec (2007) argues that universities which offer translation courses must have the necessary human, financial and material resources. Similar to Perez (2002), the interviewees in this study suggested some courses (e.g. project management) to be added to the current TS syllabus. This suggestion accords with the interviewees' perception that students who complete translation courses often lack the necessary skills for success in the translation market. This finding is in line with the studies conducted by Schellekens (2004) and Olohan (2007). Other scholars have also pointed that many translation courses do not fulfil industry needs or even students' expectations (e.g. Kearns 2006; Mayoral Asensio 2007). The study by Katan (2009) further emphasises the importance of practical translation skills.

The interviewees participating in this study maintained that a certification system would probably put an end to the issue of unqualified translators. This suggestion is strongly supported by the existing literature. Pym et al. (2013) and Moav and Neeman (2004) point to the need for strengthened systems of translation certification. Chan (2010) investigates translator certification from the viewpoint of vendor managers who believe that certification has many advantages for translators, including more job offers, increased self-confidence and higher respect by colleagues. In the same vein, Chan and Liu (2013) explore the translation market in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is a political and economic organisation of Southeast Asian countries. They argue that lack of a certification system is among the most important issues resulting in the lowering of translators' status.

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that administrative challenges, issues of social status, academic and educational issues, issues related to translators and other translation agents and economic challenges are the main barriers to the development of a translation profession in Iran. It seems that the formation of a representative translation guild would have to be the first step towards professionalisation. A large part of the other challenges mentioned by the interviewees concerned the act of translation, expressed through statements about the lack of expertise of some translators and the need for more professional development in the form of translation workshops.

We acknowledge that the current study is only a preliminary attempt to explore the challenges of developing a translation profession in Iran and propose general solutions. Therefore, further work is required in order to propose more detailed workable solutions regarding the administrative, educational, social and financial challenges through focus groups and in-depth interviews with purposively selected samples of translation agents in Iran. A next step might be to employ nationwide surveys to examine the generalisability of the qualitative findings. Furthermore, multinational analyses of the paths taken

by other nations with better professional status for translators would provide feasible solutions for achieving a more desirable translatorial state in Iran and in other similar countries for that matter.

Notes

1. http://www.iranhmusic.ir/
2. http://www.khanehcinema.ir/en/about
3. http://www.iranartists.org/Fa/Default.aspx

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Disclosure statement

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