

The Transformation of a Hidden Industry: Freelance Translators and the Social Web



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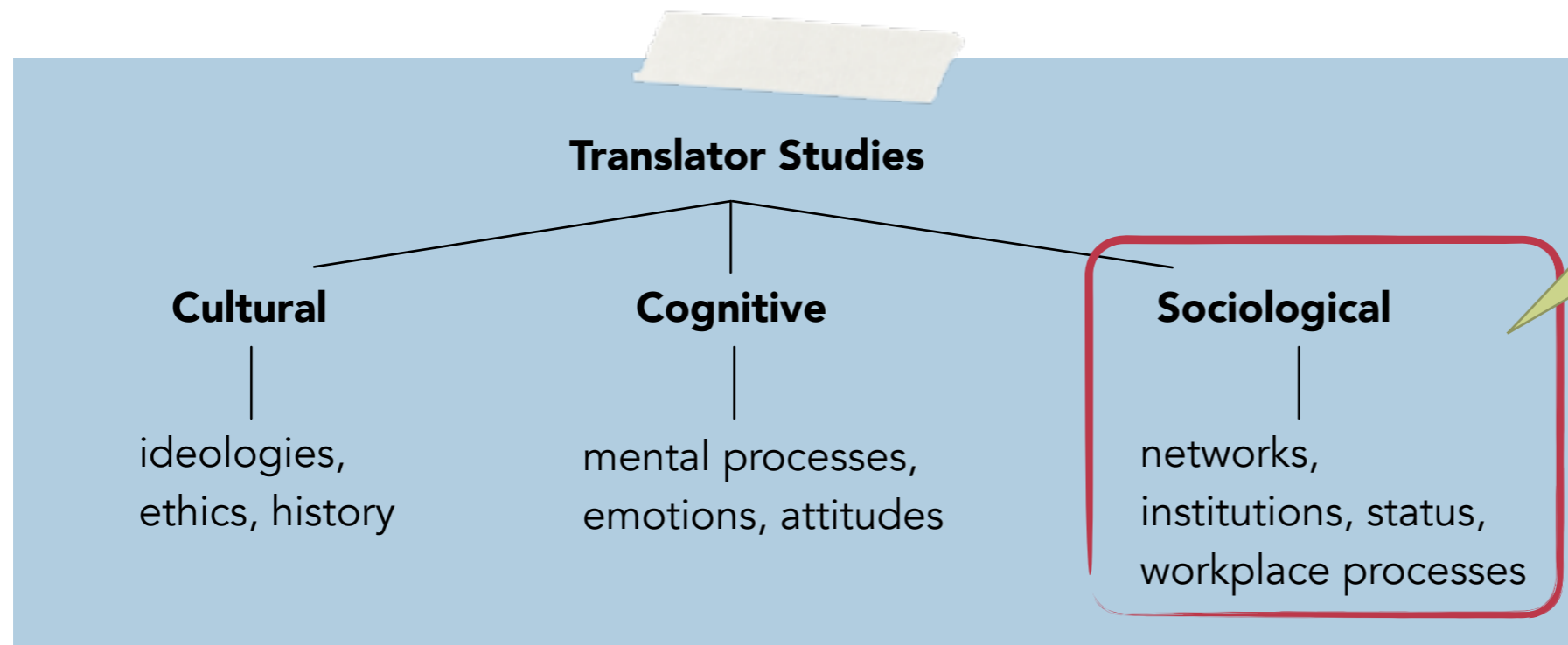


Translator Studies?

- New interdisciplinary sub-field of Translation Studies
- **Focussing on translators**, not translations
- Name coined by Andrew Chesterman (2009)
- Still few researchers, but growing steadily

My previous research:

The impact of the Social Web on freelance translators' social networks (Methods: Qualitative SNA, workplace observation, interviews)



Are Translators Entrepreneurs?

- 80% work freelance
- Members of the "Freie Berufe" (liberal professions): highly-qualified, creative individuals with strong professional ethics and social norms
- Flexible and hard-working, risk-taking, accountable (Howorth/Tempest/Coupland 2005)
- Alert to opportunities (Kirzner 1979)
- Found a business (Gartner 1989)

„rather than searching for one generalisable definition of the entrepreneur [researchers] should focus on a relevant aspect of what entrepreneurs do.“

(Howorth/Tempest/Coupland 2005, p.38)



Starting up as a Translator

3. Running Business

- Tasks: Become trusted advisor of clients, build professional network
- Resources: Emotional and practical support, production networks
- Key stakeholders: Other translators, translation agencies, clients, professional associations

2. Firm Birth

- Tasks: Create legal identity, find clients and suppliers
- Resources: Emotional and practical support, experience
- Key stakeholders: Experienced translators, translation agencies, clients, professional associations

1. Nascent Entrepreneur

- Tasks: Write business plan, decide on portfolio
- Resources: Emotional support, information
- Key stakeholders: Family, friends, former co-students and experienced translators.

0. Graduation

Promoting Factors

- **Social capital** from private and professional relations
- Mutual support among professional translators, both emotional and practical
- **Experienced translators**, supporting newcomers with advice and work
- **Professional associations**, providing networking opportunities, education and support
- (Regular) clients, appreciating translators' work – which allows sense-making and increases job satisfaction

Hindering Factors

- **Lack of knowledge** about starting a business
- “Freelancing is not a real job...”
- **Lack of information** about the market and the profession
- Low self-esteem, stereotypes and *urban legends* of bad income situation and robot-replacement in the near future
- **Insecurity** about prerequisites and qualifications needed
- Newcomers cannot assess the value of their work
- Language Services Providers foster price competition among translators, leading to increased price deterioration

What about...

Internet-enabled Entrepreneurship?

Participants of my study reported negative effects:

- Agencies dominate online marketplaces
- Artificially enforced **price competition**
- Unexperienced translators and laymen work at very low rates, which leads to Akerlofs "**market for lemons**"
- Nascent translators turn to online-marketplaces, because of a perceived lower market threshold
- Traditional apprenticeship is inhibited.
- The translation practice, which is based on strong honor codices and unwritten rules, might fall apart.
- No internet-based business models

Future Research

Research Questions:

- Why do “nascent professional translators” turn to either professional associations and personal relationships or to online-communities and marketplaces?
- How does this choice affect their start into the industry?
- How does this choice effect social norms and business ethics of the translation practice?

Mixed-method Research Design:

- Story-telling
- Social Network Analysis methods

“E-lancer”?

“Entrepreneur 2.0”?

Thank you for your attention :-).

Questions?