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Letter to the Editor

Social Isolation and Disconnectedness of Translators: An Overlooked Occupational Concern



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Dear Editor in Chief

This letter comes to you in the hope of highlighting a concern about the affective side of translators' occupation. In fact, by getting focused on sensitive texts such as law and medicine (Drugan, 2017) and spending long hours in isolation for deeper concentration, translators get engaged in challenging intellectual work, which is an inherent characteristic of translating from one language and culture to another (Drugan, 2017). Accordingly, they will miss opportunities to be in nature, to join with friends and relatives, to get engaged in social events in addition to losing chances of intimacy (De Jong Gierveld & Van Tilburg, 2010). As a compensatory strategy for decreased chances of social life, online friendships and relations develop for translators, as in most other contemporary professions. In following lines, we will briefly see to the strengths and disadvantages, and suggest ways to draw further attention to this affective concern for translators.

On the one hand, engaging with the audience in written discourse (Hyland, 2001 & 2005) provides a basic taste of sociability for an author of a text, but unregulated occupations such as translation naturally urge translators to spend hours in isolation and at a distance from others to

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concentrate on accuracy of the equivalence, smooth written text, and polished production for commissioners and readers. In fact, this might even lead them to develop a sense of professionalism by experience, and cross-cultural orientation by exposure to diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary texts. In other words, translators involved in precise intellectual trans-creation of the original texts are often seen to value lifelong learning and self-development (Katan, 2009), while being faithful to the text and sacrificing their lives to transferring knowledge from a source language to the readers of the target language.

Relevant occupational theories stress the need for social connectedness as a deeply ingrained human characteristic (Cacioppo & Hawkey, 2009). As a matter of fact, participation in social activities and social network ties are associated with better mental health (Cornwell & Laumann, 2015, Vasheghani Farahani & Shomoossi, 2021). Despite sporadic social activities, occupational concentrations leading to translators' loneliness or feeling isolated are more likely to cause persistent fatigue symptoms such as depression (Chen & Feeley, 2014) which may manifest both physically and cognitively (Ocon, 2013).

Despite its being considered as probably the "second oldest profession" (Baer & Koby, 2003: viii), translators even admit being deprived of a societal recognition status (Katan, 2009). While Sela-Sheffey (2008) laments the lack of research or findings regarding their social status, she does suggest that "all evidence shows that [translators] are usually regarded as minor, auxiliary manpower" (p.2). Despite developing their own perspectives by education and career experience, such paradoxical effects may further lead translators to perceived identity loss.

In short, we wrote this letter to highlight a concern over the mental health of translators during their life course. Isolation from social life, worries about one's societal status, concentrating on translation even after the office hours, sedentary lifestyle due to overwork, and lifelong commitment to translation are felt to aggravate factors in ill-health both physically and cognitively. Therefore, appropriate regulation and enhanced professional advantages such as payment and insurance to compensate for perceived social disconnectedness can be topics for further research in this area of inquiry. Future studies are necessary to formally determine relevant variables and aspects. Sustainable strategies may be empirically developed to address affective problems, in particular.

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