

MARKETIZATION - AN INEVITABLE PATH TO PROFESSIONALIZING TRANSLATION AS A TRADE-IN VIETNAM

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Abstract. Adopting statistical, comparative, and experimental methods, this article discusses the marketization of translation in Vietnam. Part 1 of the article briefly presents the current situation of translation training as well as the shortcomings in public perceptions and practices in Vietnam. Part 2 argues that marketization is an inevitable path to professionalism as regards translation. Based on the analysis of the inadequacies and limitations of the domestic translation market, Part 2 also maps out a package of measures for achieving this objective, which involves establishing feasible codes and standards, developing a professional training system, building a quality assurance and evaluation system, promoting cooperation in information exchange and digitalization in translation, setting up a reasonable competitive system, changing public perception of translation, etc. These suggestions serve as a proper theoretical background for the marketization and professionalization of the translation trade in Vietnam.

Keywords: marketization, professionalization, trade, translation.

1. Introduction

As a form of exchange among civilizations, translation has been a long-standing traditional trade [1, p.484]. The root of translation dated back to the translations of Buddhist scriptures in China and the Bible in Europe. To a certain extent, translation has presented one of the most important factors in the popularization and dissemination of human cultures and civilizations since ancient times. In modern societies, translation is not confined to cultural exchange in a narrow sense. Rather, it covers all aspects of daily communication and life. In the context of expanding exchange and integration at international and regional levels, translation plays an increasingly significant role. Apart from being a communication bridge, it has evolved into an element of such intercultural exchange [2].

The functions of translation lie in its social values, which are dominated by the social nature of translation and largely reflected in the vigorous promotion of market-based social exchange and development with translation being a driving force. As a long-established tradition, translation covers every corner of life with diverse modes, exerting its indispensable role over societies. Considering its origin, it is the demand for human-to-human interaction that gives birth to one of the core functions of translation. In other words, translation comes into existence as a consequence of the need for human communication. Arguing the importance of translation upon producing a translated version of the Bible, Alfred Adler put it eloquently "Translation is like opening a window, letting light in; translation is like breaking the hard shell

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of a fruit for us to enjoy its seeds; translation is like opening a velvet curtain to contemplate the sacred sanctuary; translation is like uncovering a good cap to get cool, fresh water” [3, p.151]. Though Alfred Adler’s comment was given on the translation of the Bible, it is evident that translation brings about not only material values but also massive spiritual ones. Thanks to translation, human societies have been exchanging their self-achieved values and results for mutual development. Therefore, it can be said that human societies could not make such considerable strides in the absence of intercultural communication like translation.

With regard to the long history of translation in Vietnam, right after the August Revolution in 1945, a host of translations of well-known works, ranging from literary masterpieces to documents on social realism in former Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe bloc were published in the form of printed books and on prestigious magazines. Then-leading translators include Ngô Tất Tố, Vũ Ngọc Phan, Hoài Thanh, Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, Phan Khôi, Tố Hữu, Nguyễn Đình Thi, Hoàng Trung Thông, Nguyễn Xuân Sanh, to name a few. While the translation was associated with the popularization of the national written language at the end of the 19th century, this period’s translation was characterized by the objective of satisfying public demand and aesthetic tastes. This presents the market demand, which in return serves as the motivation for translation. From then on, it is noticeable that every single step of renovation and development in Vietnam could not be separated from translation. In the Doi Moi era in Vietnam, the trend toward marketizing translation is of inevitability [4, p.28]. To the extent of this article, the authors investigate the shortcomings facing the Vietnamese translation market, on which some suggestions for promoting the quality of translation training and meeting the domestic market demand are based.

2. Content

2.1. The perceptions of translation services remain unchanged

Translation has long been considered a “hot” trade in the market with high income. Notably, since Vietnam became an official member of the World Trade Organization, the demand for translation into English, Chinese, and Japanese, among others has been on the rise. In the context of globalization going on at an extremely strong speed, the industrial revolution 4.0 spreading far and wide on a global scale, pulling countries closer together than ever before, the need to communicate Trade between countries and cultures is growing rapidly [5, p.965]. Translators act as important bridge between languages and cultures. Nevertheless, translation hasn’t been paid adequate attention as a trade, which is manifested in the common misjudgment that fluency in foreign languages secures success in translation. It is proven that mastering foreign languages does not necessarily mean mastering translation. Rather, translators are expected to be adequately equipped with linguistic and background knowledge, cultural base, translation techniques, good health, and especially ethical translation principles. Translation services must be provided by reputable and qualified units and organizations that can help businesses minimize spending on recruiting specialized translators to meet the need for international cooperation. However, this is not sufficiently considered by enterprises. It is the unprofessional perception of the person/agency that hires translators and interpreters that leads to the fragmented domestic translation market.

2.2. The scarcity of leading brand names in the translation market

The expansion of renovation and integration has been accompanied by significant strides in translation work. According to the data of Common Sense Advisory, the Vietnamese translation market has a turnover of about 100 million USD/year and has a growth rate of 30% with more than 800 companies registered to operate [6]. A host of translation modes have come into being.

Yet, the limitation of its self-employed nature is responsible for the spontaneous and poorly ordered state of translation at its core.

On the one hand, departments specializing in translation at State-owned agencies, organizations, institutes, and enterprises, apart from their assigned tasks at work, take on part-time translation jobs. Over the years, they have created a large contingent of translators, who are central to the trade's talent pool in Vietnam. Upon the economic shift, their established translation firms make up vital elements of the translation market.

On the other hand, with the wide opening of the market comes the growing demand for translation with a series of purely commercial translation companies coming into existence. Basically, they can be divided into three types: companies specializing in construction engineering; those specializing in Economics, Trade, Law; and those specializing in IT. Normally, these companies employ a limited number of specialized translators who bear responsibilities for multiple tasks. Most of these concurrent translators do not undergo systematic translation training courses and their levels of foreign language competency are uneven. As a result, they, on the one hand, meet the diverse needs of the translation market. On the other hand, it is the fierce competition that makes the market fall into chaos, without proper control of quality and reliability. Although the market has been established with a certain scope, the increasing public demand has not been met due to the lack of human, material, and technical resources. There are many reasons behind such underdevelopment of the domestic translation market, which can be listed as follows: (i) translation is perceived as a highly profitable market. Therefore, companies have recruited a large number of unqualified and incapable translators, leading to the development of a profit-oriented and low-quality trade. This greatly exerts adverse impacts on their image and credibility; (ii) Domestically, large translation companies are rare and often outnumbered by small-sized ones. Also, it is hard to claim any translation companies' success in gaining prestige or standing as models for other entities.

2.3. The varying quality of translators

Considered as a highly lucrative market, translation lures a package of people who are not qualified and experienced enough to "make a fortune", which leads to translations of low quality. To take these cases as examples, *Bonded warehouse/Kho ngoại quan* is poorly translated as *Kho giữ bảo vệ thuế*, *数控发电机/máy phát điện được điều khiển tự động bằng máy tính* as *Máy phát số hóa*, to name a few. Translation quality largely depends on the translators' capacity. Particularly, translators are expected to master and well apply both source and target languages. They need to possess profound knowledge, the right attitude, political and cultural awareness, as well as professional ethics in order to form intercultural communicative competence and avoid cultural misreading. Still, as mentioned before, not all translators in the domestic market, those including foreign language teachers and researchers, are capable of doing the job well. The unprofessionalism and uneven quality of translators have forced major customers to consider when selecting service providers.

2.4 The absence of a quality control process in the translation market

Basically, domestic translation companies are still in manual operation without specific quality control procedures [6, p.25], which overall exerts harmful effects on large-scale exchange and cooperation in economy, politics, culture, science, technology, and so on between Vietnam and other countries.

Translation companies are in fierce competition to attract customers mainly by putting their service at low prices. Worse, due to considerable spending on hiring experienced translators, many companies have shifted to unqualified ones whose final products commonly fall short of

expectation. Consequently, the translation market gets trapped in a vicious circle of unfair competition and constraint.

Overall, the trade of translation in Vietnam has not been molded into a highly professional one owing to the lack of official standards, which results in lax professional discipline and vague classification of translation levels. The absence of a State-level translation association means the shortage of sufficient discipline and a set of common standards.

2.5. Marketization - an inevitable path to professionalizing translation as a trade

On a global scale, the translation market is a professionalized market that has been formed with fairly regular patterns. According to a survey report by the Common Sense Advisory (CSA), U.S. Allied Business Intelligence, the total value of the domestic language service market jumped from 34.78 billion USD in 2013 to 37.19 billion USD in 2014 with an average annual growth rate of 6.23%. In other words, whether the development of the translation industry is healthy or not serves as an indicator to evaluate the development potential of a society.

Persistent limitations in Vietnam's translation market need to be dealt with thoroughly and promptly; and to this end, the fundamental work to be done is to strengthen self-management, and self-discipline, and fully marketize the market apart from urging state management agencies in various aspects to intensify their control and regulation.

On the whole, the translation market must meet the following criteria:

2.5.1. Establishing a feasible set of codes and standards

It is the establishment of codes and standards that serves as the cornerstone of professionalism. In the current translation setting, in order for a change to be made, the following two tasks need to be well performed: Firstly, it is necessary to enhance dissemination to enable the public to gain a common perception that translation, a highly professional work, plays an important role in human communication; Secondly, it is also required to set up norms and regulations for the translation market, including professional translator standards, business registration standards, etc. thereby promoting the market development. This serves as the cornerstone and standard to regulate and legalize the translation market, ensuring its solid legal basis for further development. For instance, for translation companies, those tasks can be specified as: (i) Clear joining criteria must be set. That is, a company may be licensed to do business if favorable conditions are at disposal, such as hardware (equipment, machines, documents, etc.), software (contingent of translators, management systems, etc.) (ii) There is a highly professional division of work with clear order as follows: "translation, correction, proofreading, evaluation"; (iii) There is a scientific and unified calculation of the workload. Almost the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the century of the knowledge economy, of a series of standards such as ISO, GMP that manufacturers and businesses in all fields of economy, education, medicine and pharmacy. , etc. must ensure and comply if they want to provide users with quality products and services to survive and develop in today's fiercely competitive, globalized world. The profession of interpreters and translators also needs to have the same professional standards [4, p.28].

2.5.2. Developing a professional training system

The translation is a professional service industry, requires its employees to be innately talented and relatively qualified. To this end, relevant agencies must build a comprehensive professional code of conduct that applies to individuals. In addition, translation companies must develop their own training mechanisms and systems for their employees and work with universities to conduct short-term or long-term specialization training.

In essence, the market is always spontaneous and autonomous. So is the translation market. Some translation service models have been preliminarily formed. To a micro extent,

marketization requires translation companies to build a proper internal mechanism, management system, and operation mode in accordance with market changes. For these to be accomplished, the following points must be considered:

Firstly, staff building is to be done properly

Staff building is of paramount importance, demonstrating a company's internal capacity and overall strength. At present, the wide fluctuation in translation prices is only an indicator of the market's unprofessionalism and underdevelopment. In the future, the competition will switch to the pool of talent. Due to the nature of the trade, it is impossible to require a translation company to have a strong team of translators on its official payroll. This is because it is not necessary; moreover, there is not enough financial resource to pay them. Therefore, its employees are often working as freelance translators and are often "amateurs". There are also companies with only a team of full-time collaborators who are contacted in need. In case of staff shortage, ads are posted to recruit more. This is done on a seasonal basis. As a result, ensuring the effectiveness and business benefits has encountered great challenges. So how to promote efficiency and bring maximum profits to the service providers? In our opinion, translation companies must have a permanent section, acting as a "core" in their organizations, and must cooperate with professional translators who are working at external agencies and organizations. By doing this, business stability is maintained high, meeting all unexpected needs of customers.

Secondly, management is to be done in a scientific and reasonable way

In case of a small translation volume, the job should be assigned to an individual to easily reach an agreement on translation quality. On the contrary, if a large number of translators are involved in dealing with a substantial volume without coordinated measures in the translation process, it will be difficult to achieve effectiveness and ensure quality and consistency. Therefore, the ultimate goals and focus of a translating company must be based on improving the overall qualities of each individual staff. It is also important to optimize cooperation and coordination among staff to ensure the highest quality. To realize those goals, the following tasks should be well performed:

Determining requirements and regulations for each job. These are things that a person in charge of a translation company sets after taking the job and reaching an agreement with his customers. If possible, the company should build a specialized terminological database that provides customers with a range of choices, thereby contributing to increasing translation consistency and quality.

Organizing a suitable translation team. Based on the nature of each job, the person in charge selects qualified and knowledgeable translators in respective fields, and at the same time assigns other staff to do the editing, proofreading, and evaluating in a logical line of work.

Developing a work schedule. This plan needs to specify work arrangement, time progress, etc.

Promoting close monitoring and control. The person in charge should catch up on work progress in a timely manner, fix non-conforming plans and schedules, or add changes if required.

Checking and approving. This is a particularly important final stage that the person in charge definitely cannot ignore.

Thirdly, quality control is to be done closely

Quality control in translation, like in food and medicine, plays a vital role. To the extent of the internal operation of a translation company, the responsibility for quality control, an indispensable stage during a translation process, must be placed on a specialized body. In a nutshell, all the above-mentioned measures are aimed at optimizing control over a translation product.

Despite the fact that Vietnam has entered the world market for ages with World Trade Organization membership featured in the expanding level of market globalization, there is no brand-named translation company in an imperfect market to meet the growing demand in the new situation. It is the responsibility of relevant agencies and translation companies to make every effort to change the panoramic picture.

2.5.3. Building an evaluation and quality control system and improving post-sales service

Due to the specific and professional nature of translation, it is difficult to set a fixed standard. Currently, some translation companies put ISO9002 quality management system into their business, which helps solve some problems. Nevertheless, the current practical context must be taken into consideration to find out the best solution. Because the translation industry in Vietnam lacks a clear and complete quality management standard, coupled with customers' insufficient capacity of evaluating translation quality, quality assessment is basically made by service providers unilaterally, causing controversy over translation products. This requires a national translation quality management standard to be built.

In terms of after-sales service, there is no consistency among translation companies. Some even deploy staff to constantly work with their clients to fix, change, and update their translations. This is of great necessity. In addition, others grant compensation to customers for possible damages caused by their faulty translations. Again, this policy earns customers' trust. These practices contribute to perfecting the after-sales service policy and bettering the translation service at the best level.

2.5.4. Cooperating in information exchange

If there is no cooperation in information exchange among translation companies, then the translation market will be far from perfect. Consequently, there needs to be a mechanism of cooperation in information exchange led by a professional agency or association. In fact, such governing body was founded in Europe in 1994 and named the European Union of Associations of Translation Companies. All translation companies in Europe are members of the association. Forums and conferences are held annually to discuss issues of mutual concern. It is advisable for domestic translation companies to establish such a body coupled with other channels (websites on translation, conferences, seminars, etc.) to exchange and cooperate for mutual development.

2.5.5. Digitalizing the translation process

A primary criterion laid down for professionalizing translation work is digitalization. This means the application of supporting software running on such platforms as the Internet, computer, digitalized technique, etc. However, it remains the case that most translation companies fail to perform the task. Now, it is not uncommon to witness translators sit in front of a heap of target papers with thick dictionaries. Looking up new, unfamiliar, old-fashioned terms is very time-consuming. When it comes to literary works or outdated documents, much more time is needed. Such low efficiency cannot keep pace with the requirements in the digital age. Hence, the use of supporting software like ICAT, Qtranslate, Ace translate, and so on is in desperate need. These tools can aid in speeding up the translation process, securing the universality of terminology, content, and quality of translation products.

2.5.6. Building a reasonably competitive system

A translation market should not be a completely controlled one nor a disorderly, unfair one. The current limitation of the domestic translation market is mainly reflected in its relatively disorganized state, which leads to unfair competition. In this case, the establishment of a reasonably competitive system is in dire need. Our suggested solution is to develop leading and exemplary translation companies with real capacity, good services, and competitive prices. At the same time, it is necessary to build small and medium-sized companies specializing in different areas, making up a fresh competition system.

2.5.7. Taking advantage of opportunities arising in major national events

In the context of increasing international integration, a range of opportunities and challenges arise with such events as 2017 APEC, 2020 ASEAN Summit, 2020 ASEAN Defense Minister Meeting (ADMM), to name a few. These significant international events serve as ideal chances for translators to practice, absorb and improve their capacity; for translation companies and organizations to expand their domestic market, translation services to meet the growing demand of economic globalization.

2.5.8. Serving the domestic market, taking part in international competition

The ultimate goal of professionalizing the translation market is to serve the market better and faster, making contributions to creating a more competitive market for the sake of customers, especially for domestic industries which are in urgent need to improve their technical mastery and localization rate. Take the domestic automobile manufacturing industry as an example. Although the profits and taxes brought by this industry are huge in 2019, the main technology and spare parts are mostly imported. Vietnam is basically an auto assembly workshop for foreign firms. Currently, the industry is trying to improve its localization rate, and change its structure towards self-production and self-assembly. This, accordingly, offers countless opportunities for translators to work in the industry. Against the backdrop, translation companies are required to have professional staff, a modern quality management system, and standardized services.

The demand of state agencies for translation services also increases. When the country is open to international integration, cities are building up their international image. Yet the process is encountering a number of problems, such as incomplete image, low construction speed, delayed technology transfer, and troubled foreign investment promotion. All these things help boost the demand for translation services and require translation companies to change and gradually improve their trademark.

At the same time, translation companies should not only target the domestic market. Rather, global view of the world market should be adopted to find a wider development space for themselves. Through translation, foreign culture and science will be introduced and spread into the country, and in turn, the quintessence of Vietnamese culture will be brought overseas. For example, Japan after translating and analyzing the tactics and strategies used in such Chinese literary works as “Romance of the Three Kingdoms”, and “Water Margin”, applied them to market success. During the Olympic Games and World Cup, Korea translated and introduced its culture into 80 languages, and conducted dissemination on mass media, contributing to vigorously developing the domestic tourism industry and local cuisine, as well as beautifying its national image in the international arena. These are specific pieces of evidence to prove the value of translation. We have reasons to believe that, by accelerating the pace of translation professionalization and taking advantage of all opportunities provided by organizing important international events in the country, the translation industry in Vietnam will definitely thrive.

2.5.9. Changing public perceptions of translation and the translation market

For example, for students majoring in Chinese translation, this can be clearly seen in the influence of translators on the national spirit and thinking of the Chinese people. Lu Xun's practice and thought when translating is a clear demonstration. In this regard, Wang Xinbin wrote: “Openness is the lifelong career of Lu Xun, and the primary mode of openness is the introduction of ideas, concepts, and spiritual life of other countries to China. It can be said that Lu Xun is one of the most significant figures in the Chinese translation field in the 20th century. He possessed two unique characteristics: First, he always paid attention to introducing spiritual life, private life, ideas, and activities of vulnerable ethnic groups [7, p.5]. While in Japan, he was interested in searching for works of oppressed peoples and translating and introducing them

to Chinese readers. He thought the oppressed people had the same fate as the Chinese people of the time, and these works would be realistic and could arouse the Chinese people to stand up and fight. What's more, he always hoped to use translation to renovate the Chinese language, thereby changing the Chinese way of thinking". Chinese translators also reached a high consensus on this view. And for Vietnamese translators, there are similar perceptions on par with the conditions and circumstances of the Vietnamese people. We believe that translation has a great influence on building up the people's spirit and the innovation and reform of the language, which in turn contributes to changing the public view of translation activities. These two aspects are inextricably linked, and complementary to each other, and are the driving force to promote social change. It can be said that the effect of translation is shown here directly and deeply. Therefore, changing public perceptions of translation and the translation market is very urgent.

3. Conclusion

In recent times, foreign language universities in Vietnam have attached importance to the research and promotion of foreign language teaching in general and translation, translation training in particular. Seminars at international and national levels on foreign language training have been conducted on a yearly basis. At these events, scholars have reached a common consensus that there has been a growing demand for translation training. Especially, when put into the current context of the scientific and technological boom, the need for foreign language training institutions to swiftly renovate teaching contents and methods to adapt to the general trend as well as the trend toward translation marketization in Vietnam becomes desperate. However, given the increasingly demanding market, limitations of the translation market in Vietnam have been exposed as follows: the unchanged public perceptions of the translation service; the scarcity of renowned trademarks; the varying capabilities of translators; the lack of quality control, etc. Theoretical and practical guidance to overcome the above drawbacks is necessary. Hopefully, the solutions mentioned in this article will serve as a useful reference, making a contribution to improving the overall quality of the translation market in Vietnam.

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