

The Book to Bind them All

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Gouadec, D. (2007) *Translation As a Profession*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins

If I had enough money to buy just a single volume of translation related material, I would gladly spend it on Gouadec's book and never look back, despite the exorbitant price (US\$149, plus postage). I would also probably rarely lift my eye off it, as the book is not only the most comprehensive but also extremely readable to both the newcomer and the veteran to our profession.

I remember sighing in exasperation when I first came across the book. Over the past seven years I have seen all kinds of "books" purporting to be fonts of advice on how to start, and which usually leave me severely disappointed. Most are written by well-meaning freelancers and cover such ultra-essential issues as the need to have a fax, and the fact that there are many types of translation software but - wink, wink - we human translators can do it better so will live happily ever after. What tempted me to pick up Gouadec's book was the fact that it was a Benjamins' Translation Library publication, and they mostly publish excellent stuff. Besides, the book was bulky (over 300 pages) so one could assume the writer had something substantial to say. One can't waffle about ergonomics and carpal tunnel syndrome over 300 pages, can one?

Besides, Gouadec is not just any run-of-the-mill freelancer. He created and currently directs the translator-training institute at the University of Rennes. His thesis was on training translators. In between teaching and research, he managed to produce ten books and dozens of articles and presentations, as well as developing websites on terminography, translation quality, and the professional aspects of being a translator. His current research deals with models of quality of translation service provision. I was suitably awed.

I was also impressed by the range of information the book covers. The book covers past, present and future - it starts with an extensive grounding in what translation is and what are the main categories, followed by a very well written exposition of the whole translation process. Not much theoretical pie-in-the-sky here, but the hands on, down to earth practical advice of how to find work, deciding on requirements, preparation, planning process, and organizing the job, translating it, quality controls implementation (corrections, revisions and editing), all the way to follow-up. In short, as beneficial to the soul and nourishing to the mind as one of Anthony Pym's lectures.

The writer next moves to defining the profession - mostly female, specializing in subject and language pairs, and rapidly adapting to the technological changes, working in such a variety of positions that Gouadec speaks of "many professions" not just the "translating profession". He even has a category of "outlaws": those doing it for "black money" without qualifications, without professionalism, and definitely unethically. Agencies *modus operandi* is described with the proviso that the market demands are changing the contours of the lines dividing the various categories. These market demands are addressed in a separate section.

After having blessed us with a taxonomy, Gouadec next poses the rhetorical question: "Does the reader, having gone so far, still want to be this species, or have they developed cold feet?" If they have persevered (or worse, belong to the species already), they can jump to the next chapter, the one written for the wannabes, the strugglers, the wanderers and - as the For Dummies series so often remind us - "the rest of us". Except that this is not a book for dummies, and the writer takes the whole process very seriously and practically: should you specialize? In what? Where do you find clients, and how do you hold on to them? What about rates, invoicing and growing your

business? I have to admit that this is the first writer in the field who advises, very early on in his book, all translators to go and do accounting, marketing and management courses if they want to succeed. He even has a section on managing during the "famine" periods, not to mention a whole chapter on buying products, dealing with partners - other translators, agencies, direct clients, your lawyer, accountant and IT specialist.. in short, everyone except, maybe, the tea lady.

I hold it against the book that professional ethics comes as Chapter 10, not 2 or 3 - but I have always preached that if one has to wait for a professional association to teach one ethical behaviour, then it is too late already anyway. It is still good to see that, as quite a few of the other "How to become a God-knows-what" publications that gather dust on my shelves address neither ethics nor cooperation, and both are in my opinion quintessential to success. Next to ethics, Gouadec tackles standards (the ISO variety), qualification, recognition and - oh, my - regulating access to the profession, not because it would solve the problem of shoddy work, but because the "regulated" translators would be obliged to pay taxes. He does say that the title "professional" given to those who have a university degree or enough experience to merit it still depends on translators feeling that such title is important enough to merit them not doing shoddy work. A bit circular, that, and highly subjective.

Chapters 13 to 16 deal extensively with all these new, wonderful - and scary - aspects of the information revolution and globalization that affect us as translators: the internet, the incessant software upgrades, globalization of the market, international competition, inflation and recession, and all the rest. It makes one seriously nostalgic for the quill and parchment era, devoid of copyrights and limited to Latin. And this of course leads, invariably, to the coming generation of translators and how, precisely, they should be trained.

And for those into futurology, there is an Epilogue about what the future (might) hold for us. And it is not good news, not for the freelancers. But I am not into spoiling the movie, so there - you go and read. Not all is lost (yet!).

The book should be compulsory reading for any translation course worth its value (not much in it for interpreters, unfortunately) . And the rest of us, of course. Gouadec has converted me and I will be using what I have learned from him not just to improve my own performance, but in my workshops as well.

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