Assessing the Digital Visibility of Literary Translators

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Abstract

Academic and professional publications have shown that the social status of literary translators is relatively low. However, with the rise of digitalization, translators dispose of new means to enhance their visibility within and outside of the translation market, potentially establishing themselves as visible language professionals. They help shape the literary space through online presence and professional (and) social networking. This paper reports on an exploratory research project, focusing on strategies employed by literary translators to establish digital visibility within the Dutch-language book market. The dataset that will be presented comprises 82 profiles of digitally visible professional literary translators and is compiled in collaboration with MA Students of Utrecht, enrolled in a course on translation-oriented entrepreneurship. In the dataset, strategies were broken down into five categories (Formal Digital Presence, Service Profile, Formal and Visual Branding Strategies, Verbal Strategies, and Customer Relationship Management). These categories allowed for a multifaceted analysis of digital professional visibility of literary translators. To enrich and deepen this analysis, insightful guided semi-structured discussions were held with the same students who collected the data. The outcomes of this exploratory study allow for a deeper understanding of digital professional visibility of literary translators on the Dutch-language (book) market and of the range of available means to enhance visibility.

Short Bios:

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1. Introduction

Within the field of Translation Studies, the visibility of the translator has long been a contentious topic, especially in literary translation. The debate whether or not translators should maintain a visible presence, relating to both their translation work and their image as a professional beyond the texts, let alone the desirability of such visibility, hinges on the contention that translators inevitably make choices that render their presence conspicuous.

Since its revival in 1995, under the guidance of Lawrence Venuti's 1995 text on invisibility (1995), the idea of visibility, a highly prevalent topic in discussions surrounding translation and translator ethics, has garnered renewed interest both within and beyond the field of Translation Studies. Initially, the focus often fell on translator poetics and the relation to textual expectancy norms on the part of the readers (see Koskinen 2000). What is remarkable about the renewed interest in this often hyped concept is that para- and extratexual aspects of visibility seem to take center stage (ibid.). The ever-growing body of publications on the profile or (rather) the profiling of translators seek to stake out the historical and social position(ing) of translators as well as their agency in specific contexts (e.g. Pym 2009, Koster and Naaijkens 2011, Delisle and Woodsworth 2012).

Numerous studies seem to contradict the somewhat pessimistic image of the submissive translator (Naudé 2011; Sela-Sheffy 2016; Monzó-Nebot 2021). These studies concern figures who have cemented their reputation as literary translators and are therefore highly visible members of the literary community and who seem to be free in their choice of translation projects (e.g. Milton and Bandia 2009). And yet, research in this strand of Translation Studies has abundantly shown that the professional status of translators is still relatively low in the Western world, and their agency is often limited (e.g. Koster and Naaijkens 2016; European Commission 2022, 65-74; Schoenaerts et al. 2022). However, the socio-professional position of the translator is not immutable (Sela-Sheffy 2016) and, as has been pointed out in recent studies, literary translators dispose of an increasingly broader

"repertoire of choices' (Tyulenev 2016), a range of means and strategies to exert agency and enhance their socio-professional visibility. Recent research even suggests that 'translators are […] able to develop into powerful and influential brands' (Zhang 2021, 128; see also Zhang 2022).

The increase in the number of means and strategies to create or enhance socio-professional identities (or even brands) can be considered a direct consequence of digitalization. Simone Murray recently noted that 'the contemporary digital literary sphere's mass democratic accessibility, its vocal celebration of […] self-expression, and the preponderance of born-digital start-ups [...] generates its [own] cultural energy and dynamism' (see 2018, 18). The digital sphere encourages cultural entrepreneurs to stray from the beaten paths of the traditional book-centric market and its means of promotion: they can pick from a multitude of online platforms, tools, and communication channels, allowing them to craft and promote their professional lives in unseen ways (Murray 2018, 77 *et passim*; see also Desjardins 2022). Achieving digital professional visibility involves the creation of personal websites, networking with professionals both within and beyond the literary domain, and active engagement on social media platforms (Van Egdom &

Declercq 2024). Ideally, optimal digital visibility leads to an improved social status of the translation profession, to better remuneration and, ultimately, to higher translation quality (see European Commission 2022, 65).

This paper reports on an ongoing exploration of the digital professional profiles of Dutch-language literary translators. Part of this exploration is an inventory of carefully constructed professional profiles of a selected group of literary translators. These profiles were scrutinized in light of the two-pronged research question*: To what extent can literary translators be considered digitally visible professionals, and which strategies are employed to enhance digital professional visibility on the literary market?* A theoretical point of departure in this study was the assumption that visibility is closely connected to both "digital presence", which can to some extent be inferred from quantitative data, and "distinctiveness", defined in the digital realm as a sociotechnical construct wherein professional translators strive to leverage technical and verbal means to differentiate themselves from fellow translators, consequently enhancing their professional and societal prominence.

The theoretical landscape in which abovementioned research project moves will be set out in Section 2. The method used to

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create an inventory of and critically assess the digital professional visibility of literary translators will be outlined in Section 3. Section 4 will present the results our this research project. In Section 5, conclusions will be drawn from the project.

2. Theoretical framework

In order to research how in the digital age, translators are urged to embrace new visibilities – impacting their social standing and professional agency – relevant literature related to visibility is discussed. Lawrence Venuti's approach of the the tension between visibility and invisibility is explored involving three types of visibility: intratextual, paratextual, and extratextual. In addition, instrumentalisation of digital means encourages the fusion of professional identity, personality, and work, providing translators diverse means to enhance socio-professional visibility.

2.1. Visibility

A scholar who has written extensively about the concept of "visibility" is Lawrence Venuti. Within his body of work, Venuti addresses the inherent tension between visibility and invisibility that is discernible in the context of

translation, with a particular emphasis on prevailing paradigms in the Western world, notably within predominantly Anglophone spheres (Venuti 1995, Venuti 1998).[2] Venuti only implicitly distinguishes between three types of visibility. Koskinen was the first to elaborate on this classification in her PhD thesis (2000, 99-100). The first type, *intratextual visibility*, has managed to cut the widest swath in translation research: the concept refers to the sum total of strategies deployed by translators to call attention to (or divert the attention away from) the TT's status as a translation. The second type, *paratexual visibility*, refers to the visibility of the translator in elements surrounding the translation (e.g. title, subtitle, colophon, blurb, preface) (see also Kaindl, Waltraub, and Schlager 2021).[3] Said elements are used to provide a frame for reading texts and managing reader expectations (ibid.), but also for comparing retranslations (see Albachten and Gürçağlar 2018). The third type is *extratextual visibility*, which is focused on "the social status of translation outside and beyond the immediate vicinity of the translated text" (Koskinen 2000, 99).[4] Traditionally, research on extratexual visibility

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[2] According to Venuti, the pursuit of invisibility is dominant in this part of the world, a situation he deplores since translation norms favouring the invisibility of translation tend to erase differences between cultures and tend to reinforce the ideological and cultural power of the target culture (1995, 1998).

[3] At the time of rewriting after useful reviews, a special issue of *Translation Studies* was published on "Media Paratexts and Translation" (Bucaria and Batchelor 2023), but this could not be taken into account anymore.

has centered on the translator's reputation as cemented through book reviews and other types of media coverage (see Bachleitner 2020). Typically, public statements and appearances are also taken into consideration when determining the level of extratextual visibility of translated works and translators, as are the enduring relationships crafted in the professional field.

A growing body of evidence is clearly showing that this rather traditional demarcation between textual, paratextual, and extratextual visibility, is becoming increasingly porous and complex in the digital age. Koskinen's words resonate once more: "the notion of visibility needs to be opened up" (or perhaps even broken up) (2000, 100). The emergence of digital literary formats and the proliferation of digital literary spaces have liberated texts from their physical constraints, blurring the boundaries between the textual, paratextual and extratextual dimensions (Freeth 2022, 6; see also Bax et al. 2022). The role of the translator has also come under fire and calls for "new visibilities" of translators as professionals and as members of society (see also Venuti 2023). Consequently, in this brave new world, translators are encouraged to step out of their traditional positions of obscurity and secrecy and enter the realm of professional and public awareness.

A proper understanding of the visibility of translation and translators sheds light on the social standing of translators, their autonomy, and agency within a culturally and historically defined field. In many respects, research in this domain can be said to gel well with studies exploring the perceived socio-occupational status and self-image of translators, as exemplified by the works of Dam and Zethsen (2010), Katan (2009), Sela-Sheffy (2016), Ruokonen, Salmi, and Svahn (2018), and Ruffo (2021). Traditionally, the concept of 'submissiveness' has been at the heart of the debate about the social position, status and agency of translators. This submissiveness manifests itself in limited social and professional visibility and a tendency to exhibit norm-conforming behavior. The underlying belief is that the primary goal of translation is to do justice to the original work, ensuring its essence and message are accurately conveyed, with minimal intervention on the part of the translator. Furthermore, from a professional point of view, adhering to established norms is logical: conforming to these norms increases the likelihood of the translation being appreciated by both the publishing industry and the general public. This adherence reflects a professional pragmatism, balancing the translator's personal style and the expectations of the

broader literary and cultural community(see Simeoni 1998) However, some scholars have tried to steer clear of this notion of submissiveness, arguing that, in the complex and dynamic interplay of social forces, there is plenty of room for translators that allows them to assert agency, craft a compelling image of translatorship and, thus, build or maintain their social-professional dignity (Sela-Sheffy 2016).

2.2. The Digital Realm

Within the digital sphere, this room becomes even more expansive, and the dynamics even more intriguing (see Murray 2018; Van den Braber et al. 2021, Desjardins 2022; Freeth 2022). Here, a fusion of professional identity, personality, and work is not only possible but even encouraged. With the rise of the internet and social media, translators can be said to dispose of an ever-wider range of means and strategies they can deploy to exercise agency and enhance their socio-professional visibility. Online presence can be heightened through verbal, visual and auditive means (Van Egdom & Declercq 2024). 'The digital space allows them to 'push back' against the traditional regimes of invisibility' (Kotze forthcoming;

Desjardins 2017). Among the media that can be used to enhance digital professional visibility, we find websites, social media platforms (ranging from LinkedIn to TikTok) and online outlets of traditional and new professional and non-professional media (ranging from newspapers to e-zines targeting niche markets) (see Bax et al. 2022).[5] In assuming visibility strategies, translators are encouraged to ponder issues as self-presentation and their (active) role in the promotion of book translations (Middelbeek-Oortgiesen 2019). As a result of these developments, initiatives have been taken to break ground for research that is more in line with modern forms of visibility, research that incorporate new social and "material" realities.[6] Much like physical space, the digital realm can be perceived as a structured and ever-structuring space, imposing constraints and offering possibilities alike. The structure is shaped by socio-technical factors, with algorithmic mechanisms being the most elusive among them: algorithms consistently operate in the background, both within search engines and on various (social) platforms (see Desjardins, 2017). To some extent, visibility in the digital space must always be explained as

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[5] In this ever-evolving landscape, it is worth noting the sociological effect of deterritorialization in the traditional book market, due to the proliferation of e-zines, e-books, and other digital entities that transform how literature and information are

consumed and shared by writers/translators and readers (see Bax et al. 2022).

[6] Freeth and Treviño are currently preparing a volume in which attention is also bestowed on the way digital environment impinges on the professional status and visibility of the translator (forthcoming).

a mere by-product of automated connectivity. However, caution is warranted against an overly deterministic view of online socio-professional activities. Recent research clearly shows that the internet (and social media in particular) has unquestionably emerged as a significant arena where individual identity is showcased, compared, adapted, or fortified in response to an array of circumstances (see Papacharissi 2010). Focused on the translator, the articulations of selfhood give rise to the construction of a professional persona (see Sela-Sheffy 2008) or identity, a carefully digitally construed identity that may evolve over time, through social identity work, and even develop into a personal brand (for a discussion of personal branding, see Zhang 2022).

This paper aims to highlight the importance of digital professional visibility for literary translators.[7] Digital professional visibility is defined as the extent to which a person is present and active in online spaces and platforms in their capacity of literary translator. It encompasses not only their mere online presence as a translator but also their ability to leverage technical and verbal means to differentiate themselves from fellow translators, enhancing their professional (but also their societal) prominence. The notion covers the translator's online presence, engagement with relevant communities, and the ability to showcase their expertise to potential clients, colleagues, and the wider public in the digital realm. It seems safe to assume that enhanced digital professional visibility leads to increased recognition, job opportunities, and networking within the industry as well as to the elevation of the visibility status of the profession.

3. Method

The study, conducted between 2019 and 2022, was centered on assessing the digital professional visibility of literary translators on the Dutch-language market. This research project formed part of a larger project-based

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[7] In this article, the concept of 'brand' is only briefly touched upon. A distinction is made between a 'professional identity' and a 'brand'. Conceptually, a personal brand emerges as a product of a 'personal identity myth' that relies on 'regimented associations' (Moore 2003). By cultivating that myth, a professional creates a cohesive and consistent image of the value they represent to consumers (in this case, potential clients and readers) and delivers 'a promise on the value [they will] receive' (Peters 1997). As Zhang aptly suggests, a potent brand is 'powerful and distinctive' (2022, 128). It is crucial to acknowledge that the concept of 'branding' is deeply intertwined with power

relationships, as expounded by Bourdieu (1993). Power relationships play a pivotal role in determining the success, or more precisely, the ongoing negotiation of brand identity. Such depth and complexity are challenging to attain through the analysis of data from multiple translators. Consequently, this research, serving as an exploration, adopts the concept of "professional identity." This identity of translators is often characterized as emergent, especially in cases of low visibility. Still, it is perceived as a socially co-constructed identity, often closely intertwined with personal identity.

learning assignment carried out within a course on labor-market orientation ("Beroepsoriëntatie voor vertalers"). The study involved the participation of eleven students enrolled in the MA program in Literary Translation, who had all received prior theoretical training on both client acquisition and on- and offline marketing, including the development and effectiveness of strategies related to professional visibility. As part of a project-based assignment, the students were asked to create an inventory of the online presence of a sample of professional literary translators, by researching and compiling information on literary translators tasked with the evaluation of digital profiles of literary translators.

The students' research project exhibits several elements that are relevant to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) or critical linguistics (Fairclough 1995). CDA often examines how power and ideology are encoded in language and discourse. In this case, the project aims to assess the digital professional visibility of literary translators through online presence. As those who are more visible may have more opportunities and influence in their field, the findings can be closely tied to power and influence in the digital age.

Each student was assigned the responsibility of examining and compiling digital profiles for ten literary translators. The data collection was conducted from home, utilizing Google searches – both simple searches as well as advanced ones, the latter specifically limiting results to .nl and .be domains – to comprehensively gather information. Students were allowed to freely select translators, ensuring a varied selection process. However, to ensure consistency in the compiled data, students were instructed to use a template provided by the course coordinators (Table 1). This template was brought in line with relevant aspects of the theoretical training they had received (see Table 1, "rationale") and, therefore, facilitated the systematic analysis of specific features and characteristics pertaining to the online visibility of literary translators. Materials were gathered with the primary aim of enabling students to gain insights into the strategies employed by translators in enhancing their professional online presence. Using templates ("frames") and systematic analysis to gather data on the online visibility of literary translators aligns with the methodological aspects of CDA.

Categories	Aspects	Rationale

Formal Digital Presence	• Professional website; • Websites of professional organizations or other organizations that vouch for the translator as an engaged individual, belonging to a socio-cultural network; • Social media platforms.	This category plays a pivotal role in establishing one's digital presence in general. A website serves as a platform to exhibit skills, portfolio, and expertise, while websites of organizations and social media use bolster credibility and convey affiliation within network. These elements are oriented toward potential clients and professional peers, but are also oriented toward a broader audience (Edmiston 2014).
Formal Service Profile	• Language pairs; • Services offered; • Specializations (genre or text type).	A well-defined service profile serves as a key determinant for potential clients seeking to gauge the translator's suitability for a project. Elements such as language pairs, offered services, and specializations furnish specific information regarding the translator's expertise (see Lopez-Meri and Casero-Ripolles 2017).
Formal and Visual Branding Strategies	• Logo's; • Slogans, taglines, pay-offs; • Other formal and visual elements (font type, use of colours).	Visual branding components can engender a memorable professional identity ('brand'). They are ideally construed in such a way that they offer a promise of the value a client or reader will receive. Consistency is key when employing branding strategies (Moore 2003).
Verbal Strategies	• Core values; • Webpage topics; • Blogpost topics ;	Verbal strategies help define the translator's professional identity. They effectively communicate

	• Topics of social media posts; • Topics of talks and/or texts shared via websites of professional organizations.	expertise, personal interest, values, and unique perspectives or selling points to both clients and a broader readership. As a key component of narrativization processes, it can entice potential clients, but also nurture a rapport with a wider readership interested in culture (Quinn and Papachrarissi 2018).
Customer Relationship Management	• References to customers (publishers); • Testimonials; • Contact forms; • Other information indicative of how the translator sources clients; • Other information indicative of how the translator retains clients.	Effective customer relationship management is crucial for retaining existing clients and attracting new ones. Building credibility and trust is achieved through references and testimonials. Contact forms play a vital role in simplifying communication for potential clients, emphasizing the translator's ability to meet their needs and nurture positive professional relationships (Zamil 2011; Payne and Frow 2016).

Table 1. Template Digital Professional Visibility

The starting point of the selection of profiles was the database for literary translators having Dutch as one of their working languages (source and/or target). This database ("Vertalersbestand") was called into existence by the Expertisecentrum Literair Vertalen (*The Expertise Centre Literary Translation*), a strategic partnership of stakeholders that aims to promote literary translation in Dutch and of Dutch-language literature abroad (European Commission 2022). The profiles in said database are offered in a randomized manner, which means that its algorithm does not distinguish in terms of reputation or visibility. This approach minimized the chance of under-representation of less visible translators and helped keep the risk of skewed results as marginal as possible.

Each student conducted an examination of the online profiles of ten literary translators. Initially, this process was anticipated to yield 110 profiles; however, an inadvertent oversight by one student resulted in the final inventory comprising 105 profiles. Despite minor instances of overlap, the inventory ultimately comprised 82 unique profiles of literary translators operating within the literary field. The students predominantly chose younger translators, which correlates with the observation that highly experienced translators seldom maintain profiles in said database. Students were then asked to critically examine the information compiled through the template: they had to identify the strategies used by professional literary translators to become digitally visible professionals and assess them. The results of the critical examination into online translatorship incorporated into a brief reflection report (of 500 words), which was discussed as part of an in-class jigsaw exercise (see Van Egdom & Segers, 2019). The course coordinators had prepared the dataset in advance of the respective classes, organizing and meticulously reviewing it to facilitate both subsequent data interpretation as well as the evaluation of insights documented in the individual reflection reports. In class, patterns in visibility strategies adopted by the literary translators were detected through

collaborative effort and strategies were evaluated in light of research-based principles (see Table 1, "rationale"). The data, patterns and assessment will be discussed in section 4.

4. Results

The creation of the inventory of literary translators in the Dutch-language literary field was a crucial first step in the study. The inventory consisted of 82 profiles of digital visibility of literary translators, sourced from the database of the ELV. Although students were asked to compile the inventory individually, each student contributing ten profiles, the inventory ended up being not as rich as hoped: multiple students described the same translator for their assignment. The mere fact that some names of translators appeared more often than others, however, was seen as relevant. Multiple appearances were interpreted as indications of the translator's notoriety in the translator trainee community. Moreover, the multiple descriptions of profiles corroborated the data regarding aforementioned translators: when more than one student described a translator, this solidified the translator's profile. Having conducted the inventory, the students embarked on a journey of self-reflection, expressing their thoughts in written form about the profiles they had crafted. These reflections laid the foundation for a guided semi-structured discussion. As mentioned,

the analysis of the data contained in the inventory covered five analytical categories, each of which will be delved into in the following subsections: formal digital presence, formal service profile, formal and visual branding strategies, verbal branding strategies, and customer relationship management.

4.1 Formal digital presence

The formal digital presence of literary translators was assessed by examining their professional websites, their social media platforms and possible references to professional organizations and other organizations that vouch for the translator as an engaged individual, belonging to a dedicated socio-cultural networks. The category is mainly focused on easily quantifiable data, and allows for a first impression of the online presence of literary translators. The data seem to reveal that few literary translators seem to fully grasp the importance of simply being "out there" and providing comprehensive information about their professional activities to potential clients and other stakeholders.

Most surprising was the fact that out of 82 translators, only 32 (39%) appeared to have a professional website. While this group of professionals may represent a minority, those who do have personal websites demonstrate

at least an elementary understanding of the significance of effectively presenting themselves. Their websites typically included vital sections such as an "about me" (26) and a contact page (24). The majority also provided (at least some) information on their experience as a translator and their translated texts (24). This suggests that those who do invest in personal websites recognize the importance of presenting themselves, establishing credentials and encouraging client and stakeholder engagement. Additional services, such as editing, copywriting, singing, are also frequently mentioned on a separate page (12). Some translators also appeared to have a separate "home" page (0). Only six websites included a blog, and three people offered separate pages for reviews of translations. The limited presence of blogs does not bode well for visibility: in addition to showcasing expertise and engaging the audience, having a blog on a professional website increases the likelihood of being picked up by search engines (as it enhances search engine optimization). Information about conditions that apply to services and rates was only mentioned on two professional websites. The last duo belonged to translators who also offer translations in specialized domains. The fact that information about service conditions and rates was only found on two websites suggests that many

translators tend to be less transparent about pricing. It is plausible that literary translators in the Dutch-speaking area hold their cards close to the chest, either because they adhere to standard rates ("modelcontract") or because they can even be persuaded to work for less (see Pilon 2021).

The semi-structured discussion also revealed several intriguing insights regarding online presence through websites. Not only did students express surprise at the relatively low number of professional websites, they also levelled criticism against the translators having a websites. Some websites were described as "cluttered," while others contained irrelevant content, which was labeled as "distractive." For instance, one translator was found using their website to rent out their apartment, which was considered completely off-topic. Nonetheless, students stressed the importance of a professional website, stating that they prefer having a "busy" and "unprofessional" website over having no website at all.

The findings from the analysis of professional websites seem to indicate that literary translators are not fully aware of the importance of having a personal website. However, the analysis of social media calls for more nuance. A majority of translators (51) appear to use social media platforms for their work, with LinkedIn being the most popular choice. 62% of literary translators used LinkedIn for work. Figure 1 shows that most translators with a website also use LinkedIn (23); for 29 translators, LinkedIn serves as a substitute for a dedicated professional website. LinkedIn profiles can be used to showcase work, skills, and connect with potential clients or collaborators. Other social media were less common, but still enjoyed some popularity with translators: Instagram (17%), Twitter/X (15%), Facebook (14%) and TikTok (1%). However, initial optimism about the social media presence of translators was dampened: it became evident that many of them primarily used social media for private networking rather than professional purposes. Activity on platforms was often concealed or completely hidden from public view. Notably, the majority of Instagram accounts were set to private, further emphasizing their preference for social media as platforms for personal networking.
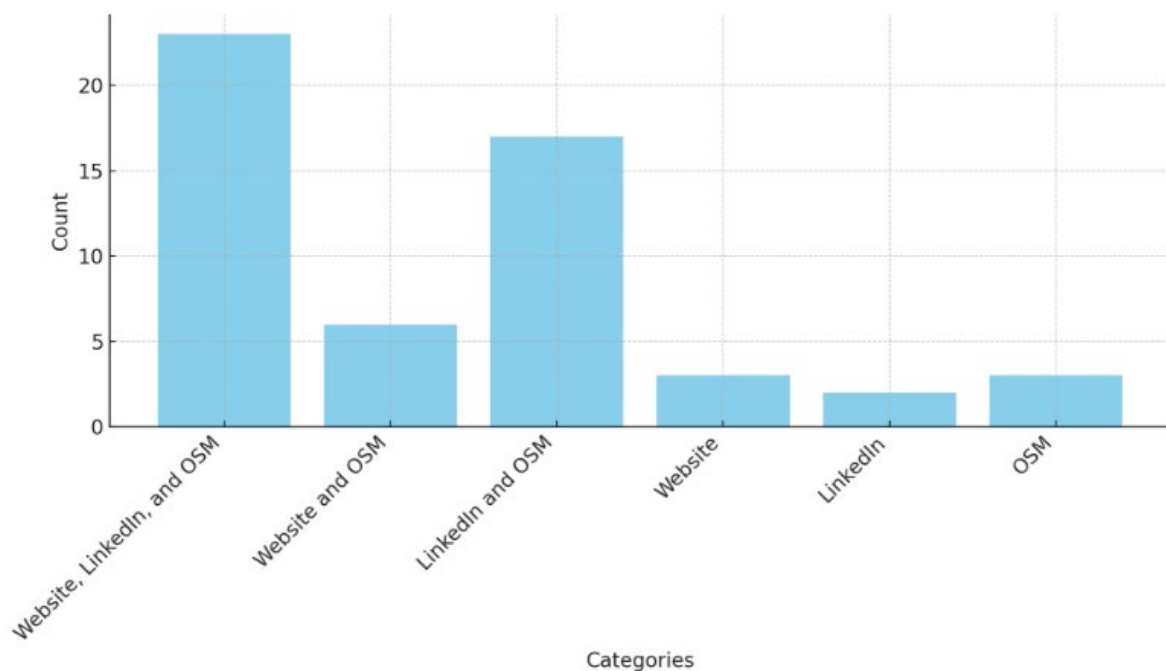
Figure 1. Platforms used to establish online presence: with a distinction between websites and LinkedIn profiles, excluding other Social Media.

The semi-structured discussion also provided depth to the quantitative analysis of social media. Unsurprisingly, LinkedIn emerged as the standout choice for professionals. In their analyses, students clearly placed emphasis on proactivity, as they showed appreciation for translators who had a complete LinkedIn profile and who engaged with their peers and potential clients by regularly posting messages about their professional interests and activities. Evidently, they were critical of translators who showed little effort in crafting comprehensive profiles and who appeared inactive. The discussion also brought forth pointed criticism for the (lack of) use of other

social media platforms, i.e. Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.[8] Instagram, for instance, drew scrutiny for the high prevalence of private profiles. On the other hand, Twitter and Facebook were deemed "outdated" and prone to blurring the lines between personal and professional content, with literary translators often struggling to strike an appropriate balance. Interestingly, two translators, stood out in the semi-structured discussion for their dedicated efforts to showcase their professional experiences on Instagram and even TikTok. A case in point was the social media use of Maria Postema, a translator of children's

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[8] In January 2022, the most used social media platforms in the Netherlands were – in descending order: YouTube, Linkedin, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat,

Tiktok, Facebook Messenger, Pinterest and Twitter/X (Kemp 2022).

literature: this pioneer was considered a sense of inspiration, as they regularly post photos of their translated books, inspiring quotes, visits to cultural events (such as book fairs) and selfies with colleagues from the literary world, etc., using a wide range of hashtags (among others: #BookTok). Postema's approach was considered inspirational, it suggested that translators who make effective use of social media may have a competitive edge. In all, students were convinced that Postema was attuned to cultural and societal developments aligning with their expertise (children's literature). Clearly, the discussion underscored the varying degrees of success in utilizing social media as a professional tool.

Finally, attention was paid to presence on websites of professional organizations, cultural organizations promoting literature in translation, cultural directories and databases, magazines, journals and blogs. Literary translators who are prominently featured on websites of professional organizations and cultural institutions are likely to enjoy recognition and affiliation with clients, colleagues and other stakeholders; their ideas and translations are valued, as they are invited to contribute to literary discussions and publications. Moreover, their presence on these websites signals effective networking skills. Also, translators can leverage these platforms to distinguish themselves as experts (working with specific language pairs, genres etc.) and to highlight their unique selling points (such as their social background). The data clearly show that literary translatorship is manifested often in literary magazines. This is evident from the frequent mentions of Digitale Bibliotheek voor Nederlandse Letteren (17), a website that collects publications from literary magazines, on the one hand, and from the mentions of journals and magazines such as *Filter, Tzum*, and *Pluk* (13, combined) on the other. The prevalence of references to these resources underscores that translators primarily manifest themselves through their translated work, complemented by occasional expressions of their thoughts on translation. However, there are also other websites where translators were present. Other digital places where the names of literary translators regularly appeared include the websites of Expertisecentrum Literair vertalen (11), universities (11), professional associations and agencies (Auteursbond, Vlaamse Auteursvereniging, and Schrijverscentrale) (7), Wikipedia pages (6), and cultural funds (Nederlands Letterenfonds, Vlaams Fonds voor de Letteren) (5).Whereas most of these platforms involve a degree of agency of the translator concerned, appearances on pages of funding bodies is less agency than merit.

Mentions on websites of educational institutions are most common when translators are either involved in teaching or have received training or continuing education there: given that literary translation is a "free" profession, mentioning one's education enhances credibility. In 2009, research showed that receiving education in translation results in attaining a model contract at a swifter pace (Kwakkel). The Expertisecentrum Literair Vertalen often appears in the data, because translators have been invited to share their (often specialized) knowledge through lectures or articles on their Kennisbank page ("Knowledge Bank"), which also contributes to the translator's prestige. Professional associations reflect engagement with the professional communities: translators appearing on their websites are often members (and in some cases board members). In this case, networking and community-building are seen as primary motives. Since the publishing world is considered a closed-knit community, networking through professional communities is considered to be highly rewarding (Ghazlane 2023). Literary funds are predominantly seen as "financial backers": successful grant application is often the main reason for a translator's appearance on their website. Grants are awarded to works assessed as works of excellent quality.

Consequently, translators become more attractive for future projects when their name appears on the website of literary funds.

4.2 Formal Service Profile

The formal service profile concerned the language pair directions and genres translators worked in as well as other services they might be offering or other professional profiles they assumed. Information on their service profile is considered a sine qua non for digitally present translators, as it allows them to provide insights into their professional activities and even to position themselves as (aspiring) specialists. In terms of language pair directions covered, more than half the translators covered English (49) (See Figure 2). This should come as no surprise as English literary works are translated the most for the Dutch-speaking market (Franssen 2015). Yet a good many translators also translated from other languages. Next to the prime source language of English, other languages for the Dutch target language market that feature high on the list of languages from which translators worked included German (16), French (12), Italian (10) and Spanish (9). More striking was the presence of translators working out of Norwegian (NO, 5) and Swedish (SV, 8) into Dutch (NL). The surprise does not come from the relatively recent interest in Scandinavian literature (see Franssen 2015), but rather from the fact that

several translators NO>NL (4) also offered SV>NL (4). Although other languages covered by the translators were limited in number and in representation (Russian only 3 for instance), the numbers still indicate that diversity in language pairs is mostly limited to the European context. The data also show that, in the landscape of Dutch literary translation, English to Dutch translators will probably have a harder time distinguishing themselves from their peers, given the prolific

nature of this language direction. This is further compounded by the fact that the data also indicate that 64 % of translators limit their activities to one specific language pair. A similar conclusion was reached during the discussion. Yet, two students noted that mastering multiple source languages need not be seen as an asset, referring to the well-known saying "jack of all trades, master of none."
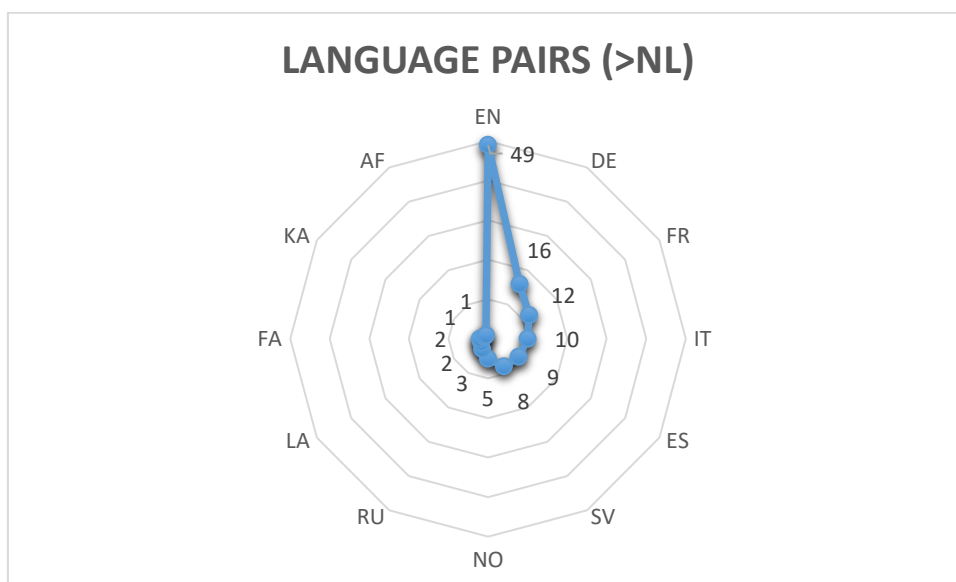

Figure 2. Languages covered by online visible literary translators, working into Dutch.

The online profiles of literary translators mentioned experience, expertise or specialization in eleven different genres. The two most frequently mentioned are the rather generic genres fiction (48) and non-fiction (43) (See Figure 3). The prevalence of these genre categories seem to suggests that many translators do not actively emphasize their specialization. However, there are quite

translators that do pay attention to (multiple) specialization(s). In total, genre specialization is mentioned 178 times (i.e. fiction and non fiction claim half of the references). Translating children's literature (25) and Young Adult (22) together account for 26%. Poetry translation is mentioned by 10% of translators, still ahead of theatre (5%) and graphic novels (4%). The remainder four

mentions relate to one reference each (philosophy, music, thrillers and fantasy respectively). The semi-structured discussion also delved deeper into genre specialization: students noted that specialization is a valuable asset to a translator and that it was uplifting to see that genre is mentioned quite often, particularly by those specializing in children's literature and Young Adult. However, they lamented the fact that few translators truly seem to cultivate their specialization, by producing relevant content (on their personal websites or social media profiles). There still is room for translators to enhance their visibility by highlighting their expertise in (niche) genres: providing more comprehensive information about specialization could lead to more tailored opportunities – which in turn could add to their distinguishability.
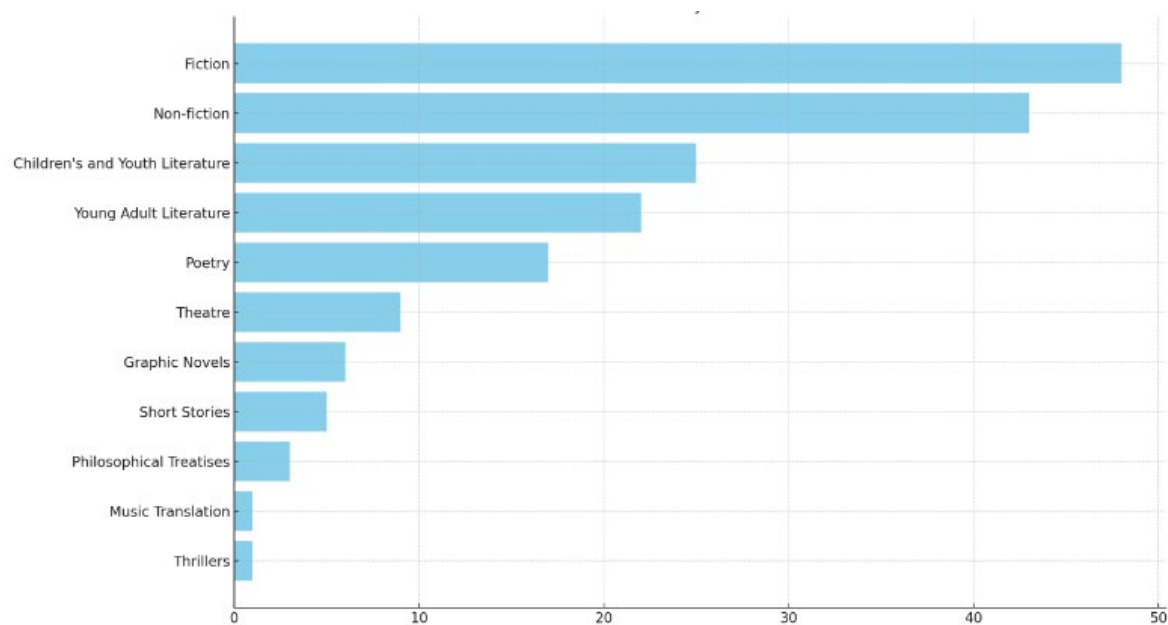

Figure 3. Genres covered by online visible literary translators, working into Dutch.

The inventory data revealed that frequently translators also shared information about other work experience. This could imply that some use their broader professional status to establish their position on the literary market, as often described in sociological research on branding (e.g. Meylaerts, 2008; Zhang 2021, 2022). In order to create a more complete profile, translators stressed their background in creative writing (7) or academia (7). Being an editor (6) or book reviewer (4) alongside literary translation activities was stressed as well. The remainder of the connections between the world of literature and personal life outside of literature all had one proponent and concerned: a certified/sworn translator, revisor, biographer, copywriter, voice actor or film director. One literary translator described

themselves as a consultant. Dual- or multiple-profile translators can use their fuzzy profile to their advantage. On one hand, mentioning additional skills can instill confidence in potential clients regarding the translators' language proficiency, as seen in the case of "creative writing," or their profound knowledge of literature, as evident in connection to academia. On the other hand, it can draw a client's attention to the translator's versatility; for instance, a translator-revisor may be hired for proofreading or assessing literary project done by fellow translators. Moreover, there are situations where unique selling points come to the forefront: a sworn translator may appear suitable for a literary work with significant legal content. During the semi-structureddiscussion, it was evident that students did not have a negative view of dual-profile translators: in the Dutch-language area, few literary translators can sustain themselves solely through literary translation work, so they often need other sources of income in order to be able to make ends meet (see also Pilon 2020). Still, there was a clear negative attitude towards primary or secondary sources of income that had little relevance to writing and translation activities.

4.3 Formal and visual branding strategies

In this article, the notion of "branding" is intentionally avoided. This choice is based, in part, on the fact that branding is an highly complex phenomenon deeply embedded in a social context that demands attention to interaction and to multifaceted narratives (see Mihailovich 2006; Childress 2017). In case of a focus on branding, the complexity of the concept would inevitably lead to a narrowing of the dataset – and often unintentionally result in the selection of translators with a well-established brand. For this reason, the choice has been made to home in on the application of visibility strategies "pure and simple", so to speak. Nevertheless, the categories associated with visibility cannot be disentangled from branding, as visibility remains intertwined with the translator's desire to distinguish themselves. The most notable connection to branding is observed in the subset dealing with formal and visual branding strategies. Formal and visual elements, such as company names, logos, imagery, and corporate identity, are most explicitly linked to brands as 'trademarks', which were originally introduced to distinguish products from 'unbranded' products of a similar nature – with the distinguishing factors associated with a certain 'value' (Van den Braber et al. 2021). Data on formal and visual branding strategies suggested that business names and logos are not commonly used by literary translators (5 out of 82). The exceptions to the rule were

translators who also provide other services (See Figure 4). For example, Tip of the Tongue [1], De Woordgieterij [2], and Vertalerij [3]; all focused on the creative market, but also offered services such as business translation, editing, copywriting, and even voice acting. Creative Difference [4] was the only literary translator with a website and a logo, who did not explicitly highlight additional services. Hadewey van Leersum [5] also occupied a unique position: they did not have a website, but maintained a "business" profile on LinkedIn, where a logo can also be added.

Figure 4. Logo's of Literary Translators.

Additionally, slogans, payoffs, and taglines are rarely used. Again, the exceptions to the rule were Tip of the Tongue [1], choosing "elevating translation and editing" to refer to high quality, De Woordgieterij [2], combining craftsmanship with precision and creativity ("leest als gegoten" is a contamination in Dutch of "a perfect read" and "a perfect fit", a contamination playing on the idea of words being poored into a mould) and Creative Difference [4], providing a payoff that simply reads "Making a creative difference"). Aarts, who did not opt for a business name or logo, also picked a payoff, using their initials to emphasize the word wizardry involved in literary translation ("ra ra ra"). Other aspects of formal and visual branding that caught the eye were images, color schemes, fonts, and sizes. The most commonly used images were photographs, with many featuring the translator themselves (some using professional photos). The photos were mainly used for websites, LinkedIn, and the ELV translators database. In the inventory, students sometimes referred to the translator's expression ('smiling', 'dreamy') on the photos, or to a specific background (dunes, forests). It was noted that many translators also used images of books on their websites, tokens of the physical but also traditional representation of their activity, although these were not always books that they had translated themselves. Additionally, some translators used other paraphernalia,

such as typewriters (4), bookshelves (3), feathers or pens (2), and handwritten notes (2). Most visual elements that appeared in the inventory simply consolidated the somewhat traditional image of translatorial artistry and/or craftmanship. This observation was also made during the semi-structured discussion. However, some translators of Young Adult literature, graphic novels, and fantasy works used what were described (by students) as "embellishing" or "alienating" images on their websites (2). Finally, some images were immediately disparaged as irrelevant, such as those of an Airbnb space rented out by a translator and pictures of random vistas (3). In the inventory and during the discussion, it became evident that formal and visual elements had an effect on the perceptions of credibility among students (see Robins, Holmes, and Stansbury 2010; Brooks and Anumudu 2016), leading to swift judgments in their choice of words (e.g., "clean, sleek, calm and colorful, warm" versus "grey and cluttered, busy").

4.4 Verbal strategies

Literary translators who publish content online tend to exhibit certain key traits and values in order to establish a "synthetic relationship" with potential clients and other stakeholders. They aim to create a common ground so that approaching them is facilitated. Translators can set themselves

apart from the competition and attract new clients by highlighting their unique selling points in their online content (Ashley and Tuten 2015). Demonstrating their traits and values can help them build a solid reputation on the literary market and establish themselves as genuine professionals. This can ultimately lead to a steady stream of work and increased success in their translation career – although it should be noted that displaying these traits and values will not always suffices to reel in clients (the proof of the translatorial pudding is in the reading of a translation). From the field of behavioral psychology, a model is proposed for analyzing professional content. The trait and values that can constitute a common ground are: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness (Aaker 1997). These five dimensions can be further subdivided into subdimensions. As part of the inventory process, students mapped out the subdimensions using discourse analysis methods. The most important traits and values found in the inventory are creativity (19), perfectionism (9), and reliability (5) (See Figure 5). Remarkably, the dominant traits and values identified in the inventory appear to mirror the ideal language professional's personality: with great attention to detail (i.e. perfectionism) the translator provides an accurate (reliable) yet highly fluent (creative)

rendition of the source text. Creativity, perfectionism, and reliability belong to two different dimensions (excitement and competence) (ibid.).Other traits and values exhibited by translators (mentioned fewer than four times) are commitment, versatility, enthusiasm, independence, ambition, and entrepreneurial spirit. These traits and values can be placed in different categories. In general, literary translators seem to blend in with their peers by subscribing to the image of a creative and highly skilled professional (see

'enthusiasm' and 'commitment') professional. However, there are also translators who are trying to break the stereotype: the 'ruggedness' of the independent translator with an entrepreneurial spirit stands out in this regard. During the semi-structured discussion, it was noted that the 'ruggedness' of two or three translators was amusing, but the departure from the stereotype felt "artificial". There was particular appreciation for translators who managed to showcase their creativity in an original way.
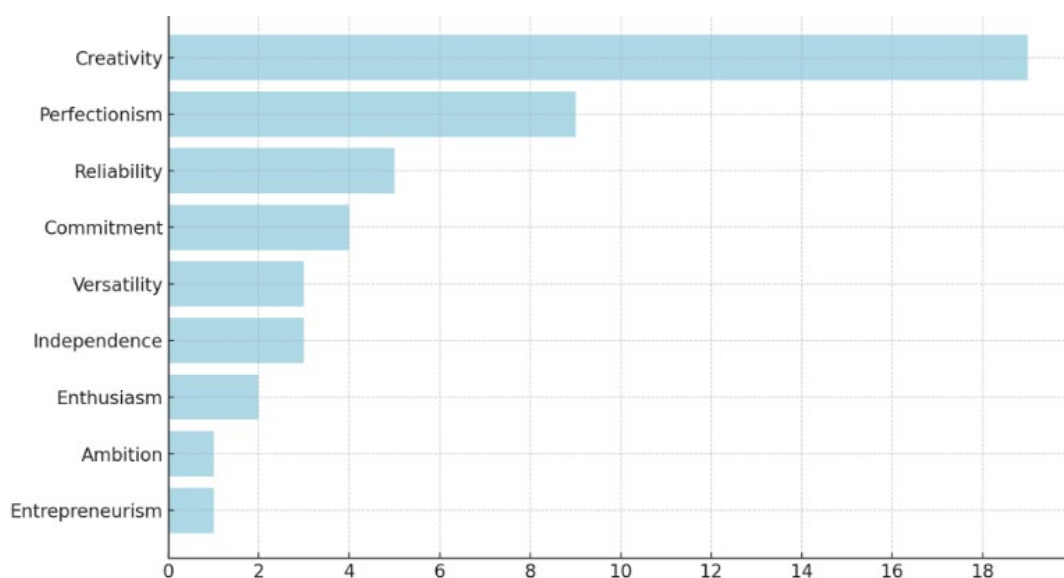

Figure 5. Key traits and values of literary translators.

A glance was also cast at the key themes in the online content of translators (see Figure 6). Books clearly carried the day, being the most important topic (41). Translators often showcase books they have translated or try to act as ambassadors for authors or even entire cultures (which is broadly in line with findings in Sela-Sheffy 2008). By referring to translated

books, translator try to highlight or augment their accumulated experience, and to cement their reputation as knowledgeable experts. The same holds for reviews of foreign books, but these might also prompt publishers to ask the translator to write reader reports. The second most important theme is social issues (39), including inclusivity, diversity,

discrimination, and "wokeness". It stands to reason that these issues reflect the current Zeitgeist. At the same time, the prominence of these issues can be taken as a sign that translators engage with social and political topics, positioning themselves as thought leaders. Conspicuous (yet less so) is the content where translators show their commitment to their craft (22). Some translators express their love for language, culture and translation by writing about linguistic and cultural peculiarities, translation challenges related to style, tone, and humor, and by dealing with specific words, such as pronouns or untranslatable terms. This type of content can be considered an extension of the book reviews: not only does the translator demonstrate their expertise through this type

of content, it also highlights the translator's enthusiasm. Furthermore, content from this category can educate the reader about what translation entails. Some translators truly try to establish some sort of niche (see Hoskins 2021 et al.), by writing on a particular genre (7). Finally, topics such as art (including writing in general), politics, and philosophy also feature in their content. These themes demonstrate what cultural entrepreneurship is to literary translators online. All in all, their content reflects their commitment to the profession and their desire to make a meaningful impact in and outside of the world of literature. Students confirmed this during the discussion. They deplored the scarcity of content on genre specialization.
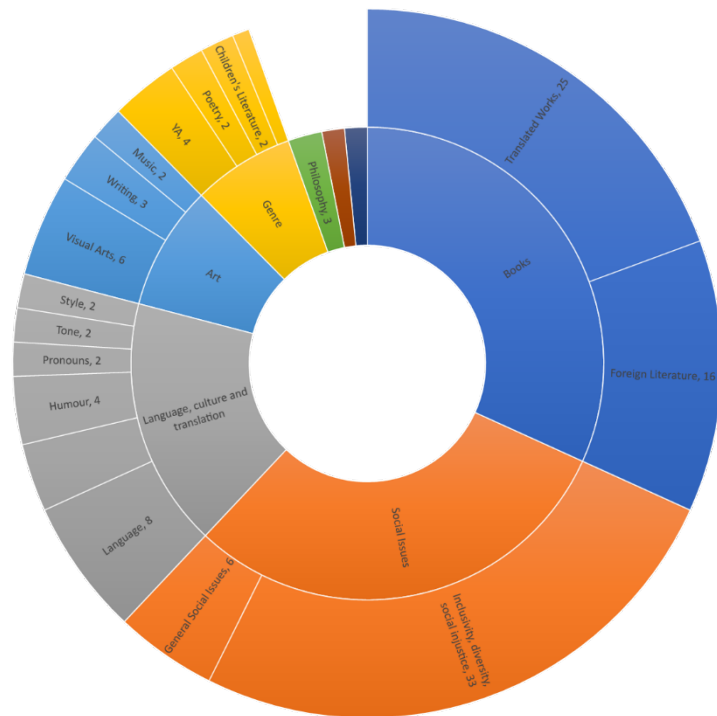

Figure 6. Online content written by literary translators.

4.5 Customer relationship management

Lastly, attention was given to customer relationship management. Professional visibility strategies primarily target clients: a visible translator should be accessible to potential customers. Additionally, it can be assumed that the translator has an interest in retaining clients, as they constitute a source of income. Therefore, it is valuable to also assess the methods literary translators employ to foster contact with (potential) clients. It seems that literary translators use various strategies to acquire new clients and maintain contact with them (customer relationship management). The most commonly used strategies is showcasing current and previous clients, ranging from publishers to television stations, all the way to cultural festivals. Client names are often displayed in tandem with relevant work experience, often book publications or publications in literary magazines, but also work for prestigious theater companies (see "Formal digital presence"). By highlighting previous (presumably successful) collaborations, translators aim to persuade potential clients to work with them. Furthermore, these mentions can be said to serve as an expression of appreciation toward existing clients, thereby increasing the likelihood of future collaboration. Translators also exhibit their expertise through portfolios, which typically include excerpts of texts they have translated. These portfolios help potential clients get a sense of the their language proficiency and their stylistic feats.

Another strategy that is deployed, albeit less frequently, is the publication of testimonials of happy customers, and glowing reviews (7). Testimonials and reviews obviate the need to infer the success of prior collaborations, which is why they can be more persuasive than mentions of past clients and projects. Contact forms are considered of prime importance by a good many translators with a professional websites (24). A small minority can only be contacted through email or phone (2). As said, translators without a professional website have recourse to LinkedIn, where they liaise with clients, through direct messages and reactions to posts or comments. Some also try to reap the fruits of networking through literary associations (13): they make mention of affiliations and associations that can help expand their professional network and maintain relationships with fellow translators (who sometimes pass on projects). The students were pleasantly surprised by the customer relationship management strategies of translators. However, they were taken aback by the fact that 6 translators with a website

did not provide visitors with a means to get in touch. According to students, the website of those translators completely missed its intended purpose.

5. Discussion

The research project presented in this paper aimed to explore the extent to which literary translators can be considered digitally visible professionals, by means of identifying and assessing strategies that are employed by translators on the Dutch-language literary market. The data from the inventory and the reflections confirm the image that emerges from sociologically oriented research. Data concerning formal presence seem to indicate that translators do not fully exploit the opportunities to make themselves visible; although the quantitative data on LinkedIn slightly adjusted that broader picture. Data on websites and other social media reinforced the image of limited visibility of translators. The analysis of the service profile further confirmed this image: although the language profiles of the literary translators clearly call for differentiation, in all not many translators utilize digital spaces to highlight their specialization. This was also evident when formal, visual, and verbal strategies were scrutinized. Visual trademarks were conspicuous by their absence. In addition, visual strategies are almost exclusively aimed

at nurturing the traditional and romantic(ized) perception of translators.

This image is also evident in the analyses of the inferred core values of translators and their online content. The data indicate that translators do not distinguish themselves to a great extent but rather associate themselves with the profession. To put it in Zhang's terminology: "fitting in" prevails over "standing out" (2022). However, the analysis of verbal strategies does reveal that some translators enrich the traditional image by demonstrating engagement with social issues. Communities, especially those in languages other than that of a global lingua franca, recognize that translation plays a crucial role, also in the diversity and inclusivity movement. This observation is highly relevant from a professional standpoint, as socially engaged content aligns with the phenomenon of 'purpose marketing', which has become a prominent theme in the business world in recent years (see Reiman, 2013). Nevertheless, through online content and platforms, translators still manifest themselves as dedicated professionals to a limited extent and fall short of fully utilizing opportunities to become professionally visible. This was also evident in the analysis of customer relationship management. Also, due to the relatively limited number of professional websites and the relatively low

percentage of sites with contact information, it was observed that translators in the Dutch language area could learn much about customer orientation. While it is true that reviews, testimonials, references, and contact forms were found on professional websites, most translators do not seem maintain a website and those that do have one have not always published contact information.

However, caution must be exercised with generalization. Both the quantitative data and the discussion with students revealed that there are translators who have a good grasp of marketing and acquisition techniques that can be deemed on a par with modern demands for offering information and establishing communication. Particularly, translators of children's and young adult literature clearly show awareness of the importance of an attractive website, compelling content, and purposeful use of social media.

Additionally, during the guided discussion, students expressed appreciation for translators with a clean and well-organized website, who use professional photos to establish a rapport with clients or interested parties and seek interaction with translators, authors, publishers, and other stakeholders. In doing so, the students endorsed the ideas advocated in marketing as best practices.

6. Conclusion

This study sheds new light on the digital professional visibility of literary translators in the Dutch language area, revealing its role in shaping translators' sociological and professional landscapes. Our findings not only complement sociological research on visibility of translators beyond their translations, on the translatorial self-image, and on branding, but they also pave the way for an enhanced and more nuanced understanding of said concepts, for instance by highlighting the sheer complexity of the socio-professional negotiation of a brand. They can also provide further impetus for broadening and interweaving research within so-called "Translator Studies".

Future research is needed to ascertain if the findings from this study hold true in a broader context. This involves considering a larger sample size and extending the scope far beyond the Dutch-language context. Additionally, diversifying data collection methods, including close readings of paratextual material and the nature of interactions with the writing and reading communities, will be crucial. By expanding the research in these ways, a more comprehensive understanding of the digital visibility strategies employed by literary translators can be achieved. By enriching visibility strategy data with bibliographic and

bibliometric research, and especially with social network analysis, the relationship between professional visibility and the position of translators as actors in a sociological field can be further explored as well. Through innovative quantitative and qualitative research methods— and via triangulation— more control can be gained over the impact of professional visibility strategies on power relations and capital structures within the literary field and on key drivers in professional visibility of translators in the (digital) literary sphere.

While more comprehensive studies on professional and social visibility may provide strategic insights, they will also continue to acknowledge a persistent challenge: the opaque nature of algorithmic influence in digital spaces. Despite enhanced understanding of visibility, self-presentation, and branding strategies, the unpredictable influence of digital algorithms remains a blind spot, shaping reception and visibility in ways that are difficult to anticipate or control. Therefore, it is most likely that we will never gain a full conceptual and/or empirical handle on digital professional visibility.

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