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## A LITERARY TRANSLATOR'S STATUS IN A GLOBALISED WORLD. REFLECTIONS IN LIGHT OF ZYGMUNT BAUMAN'S LIQUID MODERNITY IDEA

The main aim of this paper is to present the results of a questionnaire study on the everyday functioning of a group of literary translators within the Polish publishing industry. Building on Zygmunt Bauman's idea of liquid modernity, the author of the study makes an attempt to demonstrate that the new reality of the translation industry leads to the emergence of a new style of communication within the publishing industry and of a new characterisation of the professional literary translator. The author will also try to show a translators' status in the contemporary cultural and social agenda of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

KEYWORDS: sociology of translation, literary translators, Zygmunt Bauman, liquid modernity, globalisation

### INTRODUCTION

This article intersects two sub-disciplines of translation studies, namely, translation sociology and translation philosophy, attempting to describe translation as a social practice. Recently, there have been an increasing number of publications within the sociology of translation and the philosophy of translation fields, although it has to be underlined that the two sub-disciplines of translation studies still remain as relatively new research areas. These aspects of the functioning of translation, which are mainly undertaken within the above research areas, to a considerable extent, relate to themes such as the status of translators in a social structure, translation as a sociological phenomenon, or translation as an activity regulated by social actions (see Wolf, Fukari 2007: 1). Nowadays, the terms 'sociological turn' as well as 'power turn' are very popular among not only translation scholars but also sociologists, philosophers, and historians. As Daniel Simeoni (2005: 12) stated, a sharpening of the social eye in translation studies has taken place in recent years. With regard to the above, it, however, has to be stressed that despite the considerable interest attracted by the social reality in which translation functions, too little attention is devoted to the process of the degradation of the status of

translators as well as the influence of economic and political changes exerted on the translation profession.

As for the theoretical perspective from which the sociological phenomena are analysed, translation scholars often refer to the theory developed by Pierre Bourdieu or to Luhmann's theoretical concepts (see Tyulenev 2012). However, the author of the article claims that the theoretical constructs which are characteristic of the two theoretical systems, are not sufficient for the comprehensive description of changes which, in recent years, have been taking place with reference to the category of translation and the community of translators. Therefore, it is suggested that the description of the situation of translators as well as a broadly defined 'translational reality' should be enriched by the main tenets and features of the theory of liquid modernity as developed and promoted by Zygmunt Bauman (2000, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2006), a famous sociologist and philosopher of Polish origin.

### LIQUID MODERNITY

Zygmunt Bauman is a well-known sociologist and philosopher of Polish origin, who spent almost his entire life in Great Britain, thus making his theoretical and philosophical perspective "distinctly Western" (Oxenham 2013: 8). He uses the term 'liquid modernity' as a way to describe the conditions of contemporary living as well as the status of an individual in a world fraught with overwhelming uncertainty, excess, chaos, lack of hope, constant changes, precariousness, rivalry, global capitalism, etc. Liquid modernity is often contrasted with so-called solid modernity which, as opposed to the liquid variety, has more to do with an industrial society, social security, the certainty of social benefits, and humanity. Zygmunt Bauman described the two phases of modernity in the following words:

Light modernity let one partner out of the cage. 'Solid' modernity was an era of mutual engagement. 'Fluid' modernity is the epoch of disengagement, elusiveness, facile escape and hopeless chase. In 'liquid' modernity, it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule...

If 'solid' modernity posited eternal duration as the main motive and principle of action, 'fluid' modernity has no function for the eternal duration to play. The 'short term' has replaced the 'long term' and made of instantaneity its ultimate ideal. While promoting time to the rank of an infinitely capacious container, fluid modernity dissolves – denigrates and devalues – its duration. (Bauman 2000: 120, 125)

The passage from so called 'solid' modernity to its 'fluid' counterpart brought a variety of changes to the human condition, namely, an increased feeling of uncertainty, the ambiguity of moral values, unending changes in the sphere of economy, society, and culture, as well as nomadism of an individual, which

might be reflected, for instance, in the area of work conditions and work processes. Let us refer to Bauman's words:

Secure jobs in secure companies seem to be the yarn of grandfathers' nostalgia; nor are there many skills and experiences which, once acquired, would guarantee that the job will be offered, and once offered, will prove lasting. No one may reasonably assume to be insured against the next round of 'downsizing', 'streamlining' or 'rationalizing', against erratic shifts of market demand and whimsical yet irresistible, indomitable pressures of 'competitiveness', 'productivity' and 'effectiveness' 'Flexibility' is the catchword of the day. It augurs jobs without in-built security, firm commitments or future entitlements, offering no more than fixed-term or rolling contracts, dismissal without notice and no right to compensation. No one can therefore feel truly irreplaceable – neither those already outcast nor those relishing the job of casting others out. Even the most privileged position may prove to be only temporary and 'until further notice'. (Bauman 2000: 161–162)

The theory of liquid modernity has been chosen as a theoretical framework in this paper, because it is believed that Bauman focuses exclusively on 'change' as the main decisive factor of 'modernity'. The author of the article, then, building on Bauman's notion of development and the constant changes occurring in today's world, hypothesizes that a rapid development and modernisation (e.g. the expansion of markets, new dimension of poverty and labour, an illusion of individuality and self-power, decentralisation, etc.) have serious consequences as far as representatives of the intellectual elite, namely translators, are concerned. The assumption behind the paper is that the translation profession, besides being subject to the process of liquefaction, is characterised by the following features: a growing individualization of translators, a constant fear and uncertainty, flexibility of the translation industry, a lack of stability, disengagement between capital and labour, and an increasing self-management.

#### THE AIM OF THE STUDY

The study presented in this paper constitutes an initial stage of a larger project within the sociology of translation field, whose main objective is to analyse in detail the current situation of contemporary literary translators in Poland. The main goal of the study project is to contribute to the understanding of work procedures and translators conditions as well as of their relationships with different players within the Polish publishing industry: the owners of publishing houses, editors-in-chief, managing editors and proof-readers. This paper, however, was written with the aim of presenting how literary translators in Poland perceive their own role and status in light of current trends and tendencies in the publishing industry worldwide. The author of the paper will also reflect upon the idea whether, and to which extent, Bauman's philosophy of liquid modernity might be used to explain and interpret current phenomena of the working lives of contemporary literary translators.

## METHODOLOGY

The study involved 24 participants (all of them being English-Polish professional literary translators cooperating with publishing houses on a regular basis) who belong to the Polish Literary Translators Association, a professional organisation established in 2010 in Warsaw with the aim of bringing together literary translators and gathering knowledge about their working conditions<sup>1</sup>.

This study bases on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a questionnaire which was sent in October 2016 via e-mail to all members of the above-mentioned association. The questionnaire, entitled *The situation of a literary translator in Poland*, contained 32 open- and closed-ended questions. The questions related to issues such as education, translation experience, the type of literature that the participants of the survey translate on a regular basis, a typical day in a particular translator's job, the participants' opinions concerning the situation of literary translators in Poland, the way the translators cooperate with publishers, remuneration, job satisfaction, the perception of the status of literary translators in Poland, the process of recruitment, and the notion of prestige as seen from the participants' points of view. Some of the questions required very detailed answers, while others were either single or multiple choice questions. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained a numerical rating scale. Despite the fact that open-ended questions are usually discouraged by methodologists, such items were added to the questionnaire in order to avoid highly reduced and distorted data which could result from the answers to their closed-ended counterparts.

## RESULTS

In this section, data will be presented according to the following criteria: demographics, education, job experience (including the type of literature that the respondents have translated, the number of titles that the subjects have rendered), motives behind the respondents' decision to become professional translators, career beginnings (including the recruitment process), the type of contracts that the respondents sign with publishers, remuneration, a typical working day as a literary translator, the respondents' opinion about the situation and the prestige of a literary translator in Poland.

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<sup>1</sup> For more see <http://stl.org.pl/english/>.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

Data show that out of a total of 24 subjects, 50% are women and 50% are men, which is a bit surprising given the fact that the issue which is often raised in discussions concerning gender in the translation profession is that of its feminisation. Of course it must be underlined that the sample size is not representative enough to draw definitive conclusions; however, it would be interesting to discuss in detail the trends in gender distribution among literary translators.

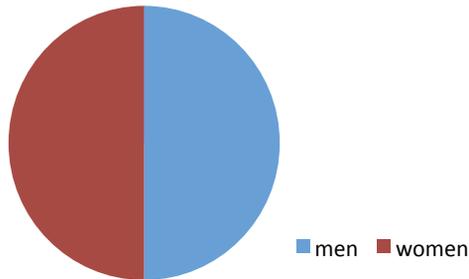


Figure 1. Gender and the translation profession

As far as the age of the participants is concerned, the majority of respondents (18) fall into the 30–42 year-olds category. Only 5 subjects are 50 and over, and one respondent is 26. Interestingly enough, there is a noticeable gap between the younger and the older generations of translators, which is reflected in a lack of respondents falling into the category of 43–49 years.

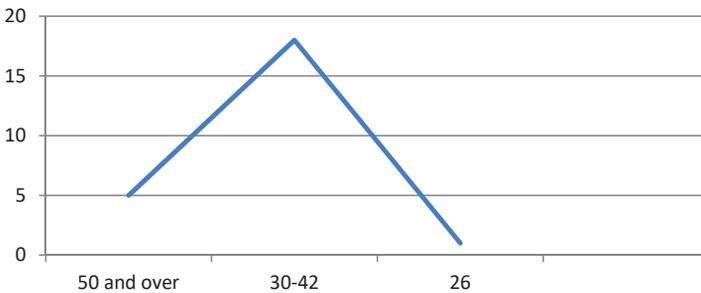


Figure 2. Age and translation profession

## EDUCATION

Data collected on education show an interesting aspect of the literary translation profession: 5 participants graduated from one of the Polish institutes of applied linguistics, where they studied translation,<sup>2</sup> while 7 respondents have a degree in English studies.<sup>3</sup> 3 respondents completed post-MA studies in translation, 1 participant graduated from post-MA in proof-reading, and 1 in Jewish Studies (Oxford University). The remaining subjects have a degree in a subject other than translation, namely, Polish studies (2), Scandinavian studies (1), psychology (1), sociology, Ph.D. (1), physics and environment protection, Ph.D. (1), technical physics (1), journalism (1), cultural studies (1), classical philology (1), Hispanic studies (1), rehabilitation sciences (1). Two respondents completed Individual Humanistic and Social Studies (MISH).

After having analysed the relationship between age and education, it can be noticed that these are the representatives of an older generation (50 and over) who do not hold a degree in translation studies. Out of a total of 5 such respondents, only one completed English studies. The remaining four have a degree in Polish studies, physics, classical philology, and rehabilitation science respectively. Those respondents who have an MA in applied linguistics fall into the younger generation category (26–39 years of age). As for the category of age “in between the above two” (40–42 years of age), the respondents usually have a degree in English studies.

## JOB EXPERIENCE

In the study, some questions were asked whose objective was to describe the nature of the profession of the literary translators. A considerable number of respondents (14) have worked as translators for over 10 years, out of which 3 are professionals with more than 20 years' experience in translation for publishing houses. However, as a correlation coefficient function demonstrates (calculated using Excel), job experience is not strongly correlated with the age of the participants ( $r = 0.6$ ).

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that in Polish higher education, translation is usually studied within the field of applied linguistics.

<sup>3</sup> It has to be noted that some of the respondents who have a degree in English Studies completed post-MA studies in translation.

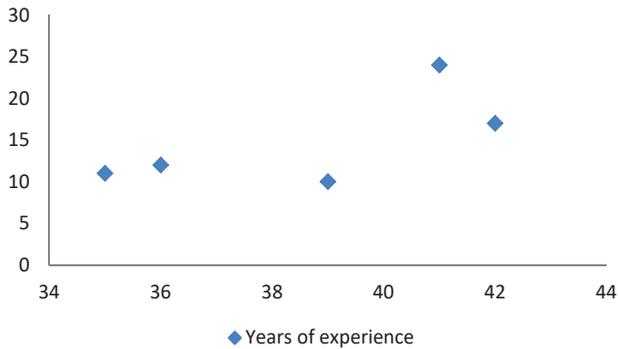


Figure 3. Correlation between age and years of experience

As for the types of literature that the respondents have translated, the majority of subjects declare that they have experience in rendering belles-lettres, non-fiction, young adult literature, children's literature, popular literature, crime fiction, drama and poetry. As for the number of titles translated, 2 respondents stated that they had translated over 100 titles, 8 study participants managed to render over 50 titles, six subjects fell into the category of 30 titles and more, 5 respondents translated between 15–29 books, and 3 participants answered that they had less than 15 titles in their translation portfolio. However, the data indicates a weak correlation between the number of years' experience and the number of titles that the respondents have translated ( $r = 0.3$ ), which means that the age of a participant does not tie in with how many books he/she has translated up to the time of conducting the study.

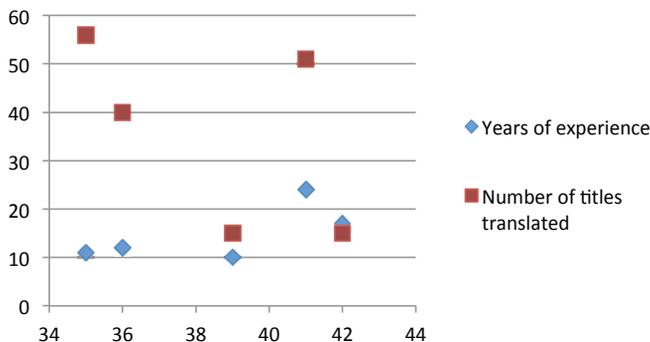


Figure 4. Correlation between years of experience and the number of titles translated

## CAREER BEGINNINGS

Respondents were asked to describe how their translation careers began. Some of them declared that they were simply recommended by someone else for translating. Let us refer to one such response:

While I was still studying, my friend, who was then translating for one of the publishing houses printing self-help books, recommended me to translate a book for the publisher. However, after many years I came to realise that the publishing house had treated its translators poorly and unfairly, taking advantage of young and inexperienced translation trainees. If you ask me about a serious translation career, I have to say that I just knocked on the door of one of the literary publishing houses and asked whether I could provide a free translation sample. The publisher liked the sample, and so I started working as a translator.

Translation samples still remain one of the most effective ways of obtaining a first commission. Firstly, they are a good way of evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the translator. Secondly, they provide an editor-in-chief with information concerning a given applicant's level of translation competence:

At the very beginning, I just translated samples of some literary works. When I obtained my first commission, I translated with one of the editor's close cooperatives so that I would learn a lot about the translation process as well as about proof-reading and editing. I perfected my translation skills in this way. Then I sent e-mails with my CV and translation portfolio to other publishing houses.

Sometimes it was the translation trainer who, when satisfied with his/her translation trainees' progress, would recommended them for translating a particular work or suggested that they translated a book together: "One of the translation teachers at the ILS proposed a cooperation; she also recommended me for translating a book for a publishing house." Two respondents declared that a decisive motive for starting their translation careers was the winning of a translation competition or obtaining a reward for the best MA dissertation within the field of translation studies. An interesting aspect was raised in the study: one of the respondents stated that before she started translations, she had worked as an editor of translations. As she claimed, it was the quality of the translations that she verified that motivated her to start working as a professional translator. A few study participants declared that they came to the decision to become translators due to their life's circumstances; they simply had to start earning money to support both themselves and their families. Nevertheless, as the data demonstrates, a translation career often started unexpectedly, which is frequently connected with the afore-mentioned fact that professional translators do not always have a degree in applied linguistics or translation:

A friend of mine worked in one of the publishing houses. One of the translators who cooperated with the company did not manage to finish the commission on time. Due to the fact that the subject matter of the source text was closely connected to my education and the work I had been doing for many years in the USA, I obtained my first commission in this way. It was a success, and I discovered my true passion in life. The adventure has never stopped since then.

The aspect of career beginnings is strictly connected with motives behind the respondents' decisions to become professional translators. The study participants were asked whether the profession was their dream job or whether something else exerted a huge influence on their becoming a translator. As many as fourteen respondents declared that translation was strictly their dream job. The rest of the study participants reported a wide variety of reasons for translating books. Let us look at them:

Table 1. The reasons for cooperating with publishers

<i>I do like translating fantasy works; however, I earn a living by translating different genres.</i>
<i>Perfecting both my native and the second languages.</i>
<i>It was not my dream job, rather the result of some plans. I like working at home (also for health reasons) and doing something creative.</i>
<i>When I started translating, I liked it a lot, and so it has continued.</i>
<i>The beginnings of my career were, at least to some extent, coincidental, but I can state without exaggeration that now it is my dream job.</i>
<i>It was, first of all, the realisation of my dreams but also the willingness to develop myself, and simply a curiosity about the world.</i>
<i>I decided to become a translator because writing is my true passion, though not the only one; therefore, I am also psychological skills coach.</i>
<i>It has always been my life's fascination.</i>
<i>The opportunity to not only learn languages but also the pleasure of dealing with the matter of various languages.</i>
<i>It is not my main job. I am a writer. Translating is my side-job.</i>

As for the recruitment process, the majority of the respondents sent a CV with a portfolio (sometimes with a publishing offer which is usually ignored, though). Then they obtain a translation sample to complete on which the publishers base their decision whether a translator will get a commission or not. Interestingly enough, one of the respondents compared the process to 'a casting' and 'a party':

In this respect, publishers are careful. They send samples even to those translators who possess a rich translation portfolio. Some time ago I was informed that I had participated in such

a casting and I had been chosen because of the high quality of my translation. However, I never came to realize how many translators had taken part in this 'party.'

The other translators usually are either recommended or, due to the fact that they have cooperated with a given publisher for a long time, do not apply for jobs at other publishing houses, the representatives of which sometimes look for translators via translation associations and come up with a translation proposal themselves.

#### FORMAL ASPECTS OF COOPERATION WITH PUBLISHERS

Respondents were asked to describe the way they cooperate with the publishers. In order to do so, the subjects had to specify what type of contract they sign when starting a particular commission. Data shows that a considerable number of respondents (58.3%) sign a license agreement with the translation rights transferred to the publisher, for a specified period of time (usually for 5 years), whereas 16.7% sign a contract for a specified task with the publisher, with the transfer of translation rights for an unspecified period of time. Moreover, 8.3% of the study participants conduct business activity, which means that they issue invoices for the translation service that they offer, whereas the other 16.7% marked the answer 'other', not specifying the basis of the contract or license they work.

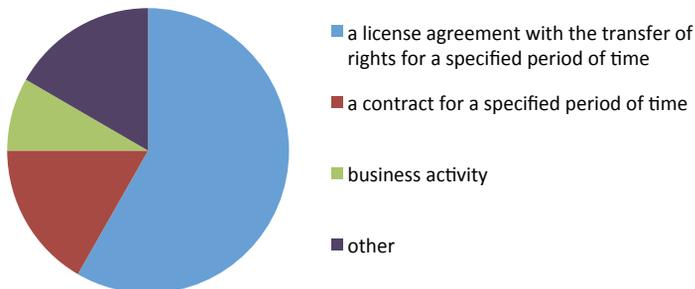


Figure 5. The types of contracts the respondents sign with publishers

Besides, only 25% of respondents stated that they had any control over the publishing process of the book that they translated or over the process of selecting books to which translation rights should be purchased. As many as 22 participants revealed that although they often attempted to help a publisher to choose a title that definitely should be bought and translated, seldom did the publisher take the translators' suggestions into consideration. Likewise, only one fourth of the subjects declared that a publisher had considered their suggestions regarding a book title

in the Polish language. Furthermore, the data shows that half of the respondents often do not have any real (personal) contact, apart from e-mails and telephone conversations, with the representatives of the publishing houses.

#### REMUNERATION

The study participants were also asked to specify how much they earned for translating a publisher's sheet (40 thousand characters including spaces). The standard wage amounts to PLN600.<sup>4</sup> As many as 16 respondents fall into the PLN550–650 category for a publisher's sheet, and 4 subjects fall into the greater than PLN650 category. Only one respondent declared that they earned PLN1335 for a publisher's sheet. Likewise, in only two cases, the remuneration was less than PLN500. One respondent did not specify the exact wages, stating that he obtains royalties and sometimes additional remuneration for the rights to the premiere of a particular play.

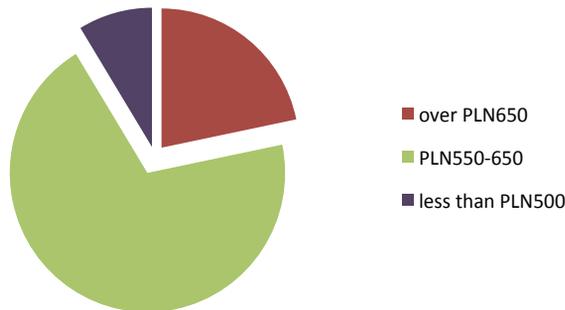


Figure 6. Remuneration for a publishing sheet

When asked whether they are satisfied with how much they earn, 50% of the participants marked the answer 'rather yes'; however, others expressed their dissatisfaction with wages offered by publishers. 37.5% of respondents marked the answer 'rather no', while 12.5% 'definitely no'.

<sup>4</sup> The remuneration is given on the basis of gross value.

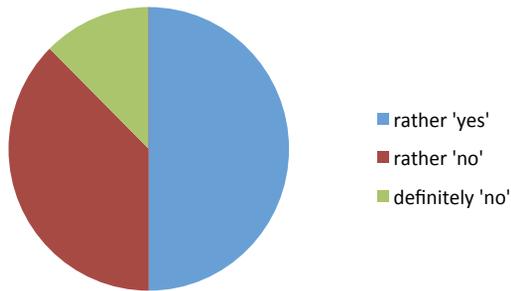


Figure 7. Satisfaction with remuneration

What is surprising is that only half of the respondents receive their remuneration on time. 83.3% of the subjects revealed that they were not forewarned of any delays in payments. What is also crucial in this respect is that 58.3% of the study participants declared that they had to do some extra jobs in order to be able to provide for themselves and their families. As many as 18 respondents revealed that their colleagues also had to supplement their translation income by doing extra commissions (e.g. by teaching English).

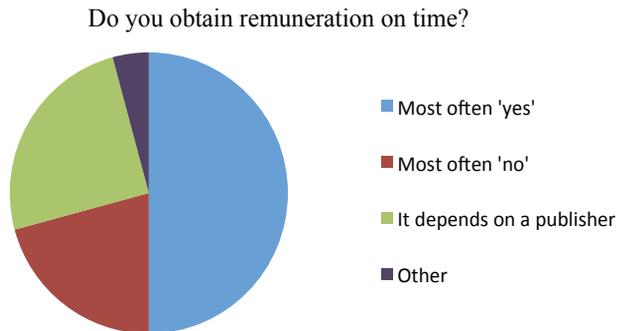


Figure 8. Obtaining remuneration on time

Are you forewarned of any delays in payment?

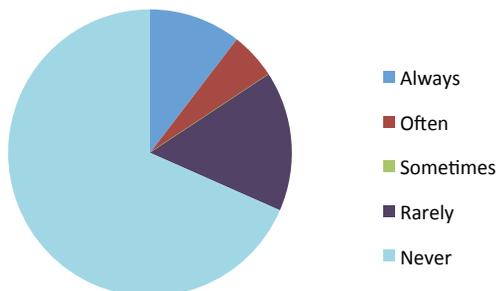


Figure 9. Warnings about possible delays in payment

Do you have to do some extra job apart from translating?

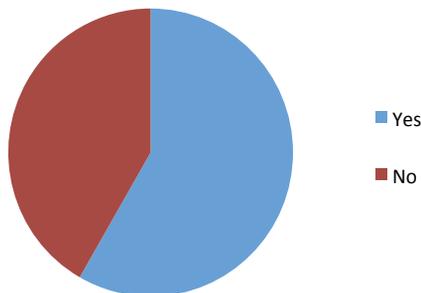


Figure 10. Doing extra job

#### A TYPICAL WORKING DAY AS A LITERARY TRANSLATOR

The majority of respondents work from home, which is not surprising given the fact that literary translators are mostly freelancers, although one person revealed that she sometimes worked in a local library. Accordingly, the study participants declared that they usually organized their working day, taking into consideration the nature of the commission, the deadline, and other professional duties:

I usually plan my work from book to book, and I know how many pages I have to translate every single day. Because my work is most effective in the morning, I usually work from 8am to 12 noon in which time I try to translate as many pages as possible. In the afternoons and in the evenings, I translate those texts which do not require so much creativity and imagination.

Data show that the respondents often translate a few hours (usually 4–6 e.g. from 7am to 12pm) and after having translated a specific portion of a text, they take a break in order to arrange some private matters, do some household chores, or simply “go for a walk.” After the break they start translating again. They usually work till 6–7 pm:

First thing in the morning is to drink a cup of strong coffee and to check my e-mails. Then I start working. I work until 12pm, and then I take a break. I return to translating in the afternoon, unless I have to work to a tight deadline – in such cases a translator’s best friends are coffee and pain-relieving muscle creams.

It can also be seen from the data that the participants often work at weekends and in the evenings. One respondent revealed that he worked as long as he could without forsaking his household chores. Sometimes, though, literary translation is treated as a specific break between those translations which are described by the respondents as “strictly profitable” and literary ones, and some respondents work

only at nights because translation is their side job. Only two respondents declared that, on average, they devote 2–4 hours daily to translating; in most cases, however, translation requires spending long hours behind a desk.

#### RESPONDENTS' OPINION ABOUT THE SITUATION AND THE PRESTIGE OF A LITERARY TRANSLATOR IN POLAND

The respondents were asked to assess whether translating literary works as a job is regarded as prestigious by Polish society and to specify what they think about the situation of literary translators in Poland. In the study, 21 out of 24 participants stated that the general situation of translators cooperating with publishing houses is bad. They complained of poor remuneration, tight deadlines, and a lack of professional cooperation between a translator and an editor. Let us look at the following statements:

[The situation of literary translators is] very bad. Increasing pay cuts, problems with getting new commissions, low standards of work in publishing houses which are forced to reduce all possible costs, strict deadlines, and, what is most significant in this respect, the lack of any legal protection: health insurance contributions, social insurance contributions, holiday leave, etc.

[The situation is] embarrassing. Low wages, delays in payment. I am tired.

Low wages. Unsatisfactory cooperation with publishers and editors who are sometimes not competent enough to do their jobs well. Actually, editors are a dying breed. I met a competent editor only once.

Wages are quite low. Delays in payment, caused by problems of delays in payment encountered by the owners of wholesale stores, and the lack of financial liquidity in publishing houses, are not rare.

It can only be a hobby but not a real job, unless one translates from Polish into English in which case wages are somewhat different.

The translator is in the shadow of the publisher.

Likewise, the majority of respondents believe that society does not regard translation as a prestigious and valuable job, although, as one of the subjects declared, the job itself arouses interest in some people. The participants of the study revealed that, unfortunately, translators are still in the shadow of the book market and are appreciated only by those who love literature or consider translators mediators between cultures. Interestingly enough, one respondent stated that according to many people, translation is an activity which might be performed by anyone who has a good command of a foreign language.

Furthermore, the respondents complained about not being recognised as important ‘actors’ within the publishing process. As one person rightly revealed, prestige is often connected with remuneration; accordingly, the translation profession cannot be regarded as prestigious due to the above-mentioned financial problems, low wages, and delays in payment. Finally, translation is not considered a real job by society, mostly because of its character: working at home, no regular working hours, no distinct work location, etc. As one person stated, “When I tell someone what I do for a living, I often feel like an alien, and then an awkward silence falls.”

## DISCUSSION

The main objective of the study was to investigate the current situation of literary translators in Poland. In order to examine the translators’ working conditions and their opinions concerning the status and prestige of the profession in Poland, the author of the paper conducted a questionnaire which was sent to selected members of the Polish Literary Translation Association. The study provided evidence that the translation profession in Poland remains in a phase of liquid modernity, which also means that translation constitutes a specific ontological entity subject to the process of liquefaction. Building on the findings of the research and on Bauman’s idea of liquid modernity, especially with relation to relationships in work life, the author of the paper distinguished the key features of the fluid phase, affecting literary translators’ working conditions: 1) individualization, 2) flexibility, 3) “disengagement between capital and labour” (Poder 2013: 138), 4) “an increased emphasis on employee’s own self-management (*ibid.*), and 5) uncertainty and liquid fear.

The findings presented above seem to provide convincing evidence that contemporary translators are subject to the process of growing individualization. Bauman (2000: 31–32) sees this phenomenon as “transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance.” Furthermore, it is required that the individuals define their tasks themselves and decide about the way these tasks are to be performed (Poder 2013: 141). This feature might be seen not only in the nature of specific translation tasks to be solved (translators are freelancers), but also in the process of searching for new translation commissions. The results indicate that in the modern world, translators are subject to never-ending challenges of rivalry on the translation market; they often have to advertise themselves on a regular basis in order to get new commissions allowing them to support their families. As one respondent revealed, even the most experienced specialists in the field are still expected to provide

translation samples, which means that in the professional world of translators, extreme competitive rivalry is widespread, and, unfortunately, often it's not the most competent ones who win the game. This view is clearly expressed by Paszkiet (2013: 133–134):

It might seem, in a situation where so many translations are appearing on the Polish market, that recognized and distinguished translators would be highly sought-after and bombarded with proposals. However, this is not the case and the large printing houses not only refrain from fighting over them, but treat such translators with reserve, as they are often meticulous, responsible, and demanding people. They won't agree to any half-measures, they demand a deadline appropriate to the difficulty and size of the work, as well as a suitable payment. Furthermore, they expect professional collaboration with a publishing house employing specialist editors and proof-readers.

The transformation from a 'given' into a 'task' and the self-management can be seen in the way publishers treat translators' suggestions concerning new titles to be purchased. The majority of respondents revealed that such offers were usually ignored by the representatives of publishing houses, especially if it did not concern books with a potential to sell well on the Polish book market and to bring considerable profit. Besides, literary translators are not granted any legal protection, and the feeling that they can control their life is illusory.

The translators who participated in the study are cognizant of the fact that it is no longer the final quality of the product that they might offer that is the most important. Being forced to compete with inexperienced and incompetent persons, who often agree to do a translation for a lower fee, literary translators in Poland "are to be found at or below the poverty threshold set ..." (Fock 2010: 45, cited after Paszkiet 2013: 124), which is directly correlated with so-called flexibility as well as epidiosicity:

With no state of ultimate perfection looming on the horizon of human efforts, with no trust in the fool-proof effectiveness of any effort, the idea of 'total' order to be erected floor by floor in a protracted, consistent, purpose-guided effort of labour makes little sense. The less hold one has on the present, the less of the 'future' can be embraced in the design. Stretches of time labelled 'future' get shorter, and the time-span of life as a whole is sliced into episodes dealt with 'one a time'. Continuity is no longer the mark of improvement. The once cumulative and long-term nature of progress is giving way to demands addressed to every successive episode separately: the merit of each episode must be revealed and consumed in full before it is finished a next episode starts. In a life ruled by the precept of flexibility, life strategies and plans can be but short-term. (Bauman 2000: 137–138)

This is a concise description of translators' working conditions, where particular commissions might be compared to short-term episodes and where the specialists cannot strive for holding a permanent post and following a clear career path. Bauman (2000: 138) pointed out that work, once defined as the sphere of order-

building and future-control, has drifted to the realm of a game where workers are players focusing on short-term objectives, “reaching no further than one or two moves ahead.” In a similar vein, translators cannot plan anything, working ‘from commission to commission.’ As Bauman suggests (2000: 139, 147), work no longer offers security and stability around which one can “wrap and fix self-definitions, identities and self-projects”:

‘Flexibility’ is the slogan of the day, and when applied to the labour market it augurs an end to the ‘job as we know it’, announcing instead the advent of work on short-term contracts, rolling contracts or no contracts, positions with no in-built security but with the ‘until further notice’ clause. Working life is saturated with uncertainty.

The whole situation could be reflected, for instance, in the types of contract that translators sign with publishers. According to the above findings, almost half of the respondents in this study sign either a contract for a specified task (with a full transfer of translation rights to the publisher) or are forced to run a business activity. This situation, as Paszkiet (2013: 132) rightly suggests, can be explained, at least partially, by political and economic transformations which occurred in Poland in 1989 and in the nineties:

Until 1989 there were around a hundred state publishing houses printing literary fiction in Poland, often in what were enormous print runs for the conditions of the time, as well as a small group of Church, cooperative and other publishing houses publishing in limited print runs. After the political and economic changes of the 1990s, the market began to rule the book industry. The result was the emergence of hundreds of new publishing houses, as well as a veritable flood of translations, often hurriedly and unprofessionally done, since the growth in the number of publishing houses went hand in hand with a deterioration in the quality of translation and editing.

The above considerations indicate the presence of disengagement between capital and labour in the Polish translation industry. As Poder put it (2013: 138), “in liquid modernity, capitalism is no longer heavy in the sense of being tied to local communities like factories used to be”, which means that the market in general and the translation industry in particular are imbued with the state of the above-mentioned notions of flexibility as well as precariousness:

Once the employment of labour has become short-term and precarious, having been stripped of firm (let alone guaranteed) prospects and therefore made episodic, when virtually all rules concerning the game of promotions and dismissals have been scrapped or tend to be altered well before the game is over, there is little chance for mutual loyalty and commitment to sprout and take root. Unlike in the time of long-term mutual dependency, there is hardly any stimulus to take acute and serious, let alone critical, interest in the wisdom of the common endeavour and related arrangements which are bound to be transient anyway. (Bauman 2000: 149)

It is only to be hoped that with the attempt of such associations as the Polish Literary Translation Association and with the presentation of the findings of studies like this one, literary translators will manage to “put up an organized resistance to whatever decision the capital might yet take” (Bauman 2000: 150).

### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

At this point, because of the limited number of the participants (24), no definite conclusions can be drawn from the results of the study. Despite the limitations, it was possible to describe some general tendencies of the way literary translators function in the Polish publishing industry and perceive their own status. However, such issues should be studied in more detail in future, especially with regard to the relationship between the economy and market policies and the status of a literary translator in a given community. More insights into historical factors determining the status of translators in society could be gained by means of analysing ideological features of particular political systems within which translators work.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

The aim of this paper was to show the findings of the first part of a larger sociological project whose main objective is to gain access to social aspects of the literary translation profession. The theoretical framework of the study is the idea of liquid modernity by Zygmunt Bauman. The assumption behind the project is that translation constitutes a liquid entity and that high-skilled translators are low-paid people holding precarious positions. An on-line questionnaire, containing both closed- and open-ended questions, sent to some members of the Polish Literary Translation Association who translate from English into Polish or from Polish into English, was completed by 24 respondents. Data confirmed that globalisation and inevitable changes in the book market influenced the way literary translators are perceived not only by society in general, but also by themselves. Although the respondents regard themselves as professionals deserving a decent salary, they are cognizant of the fact that the situation of literary translators in Poland is going to deteriorate. Fortunately, members of the Polish Literary Translation Association have made attempts to reverse this trend by popularising the image of a literary translator in Polish society. It is also to be hoped that through such studies as the one presented in this paper, awareness about literary translators' working conditions will be raised.

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