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Fantastic Translator Role Models and Where to Find Them

A Longitudinal Perspective on Translation Students' Possible Selves and Role Model Development

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Abstract

Drawing on possible selves theory and role model theory, this article explores translation students' possibilities of envisioning their future as translators. Four MA students in a Swedish university were followed over two years through a longitudinal focus group study. The material was analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke (2006). The results show that the students discuss themes related to possible selves and role models with both textual and extratextual dimensions, but that the two dimensions do not coincide.

Key Words

Possible selves, role models, translation students, longitudinal qualitative research, focus groups.

> "But why, I wonder in the dark of night under the whispering pines, why was there no one around that time to take me by the collar and say: You are meant to be a translator, don't you see? I didn't know such a profession existed, didn't know anyone who did that."
>
> Gun-Britt Sundström (2008: 241)

> "But he also offered a sophisticated and rather lyrical understanding of what I wanted to do, a position of identification for me as a translator, someone I could be when translating […]"
>
> Lawrence Venuti (1995: 275)

1. Introduction

Sela-Sheffy (2008: 610) discusses occupational prestige and states that, apart from the institutionalizing factors such as income or competences, "the image of an occupation is actually the image of the people practicing it." Following this line of thought, in this article I ask how translation students perceive the people practicing their occupation in relation to their future selves by drawing on possible selves theory and role model theory. I have elsewhere (Svahn, 2020) examined two groups of Swedish MA translation students' socialization into the translation profession. One of the main findings concerned the students' scarce involvement with the profession. The novel frameworks offered by the use of possible selves theory and role model theory in this study aim at discovering new dimensions of this involvement for a group of Japanese-Swedish translation students. The concept of possible selves refers to "representation of the self in the future" (Markus and Naurius, 1986: 954). Role model theory and its two approaches can be exemplified by the two quotes at the beginning of the article. The first quote from the Swedish author and translator Gun-Britt Sundström relates to the author's problems *finding role models* as a translator, whereas the quote from Lawrence Venuti refers to him *making sense of a role model* in relation to himself and his translation practice. Both of these perspectives will be dealt with in this article. The theoretical underpinnings of these two concepts are introduced in the next section.

This article seeks to approach translation students from a translation sociological perspective. Such an approach may include a broader contextualization of translator education (Voinova, 2013; Svahn, 2016, 2020); approaching students as future professionals (Ruokonen, 2016, 2019); or

fostering empowerment for translation students to become professional translators or interpreters (Abdallah, 2011; Voinova, 2013). For example, in a questionnaire study with Finnish translation students, Ruokonen (2016) finds that the students' views of their future profession are marked by realism, and the students "seem fairly committed to a field that promises neither high status nor high income" (Ruokonen, 2016: 207). In a later study, Ruokonen (2019) compares translation students' perspectives with those of professional translators. One area where statistically significant changes emerged was in their views of the translator's possibilities of influencing their working environment. The students had lower rankings on translator's possibilities of influencing deadlines, income, the commissioner's expectations of the quality of the translation, and the quality of the final translation (Ruokonen, 2019: 16–17), which "hardly support[s] the notion of idealistic students" (Ruokonen, 2019: 18).

This article is also influenced by translation psychology. As pointed out by Jääskeläinen (2012: 196), translation sociology may share a vantage point with translation psychology when the focus is on "[u]nderstanding the humans in […] social practices." One example of relevance for this study is recent translation psychological research on translation students' self-efficacy beliefs (e.g., Haro-Soler and Kiraly, 2018; Haro-Soler, 2019), including translation students' self-concepts. Results from Haro-Soler's (2019) study on vicarious learning show that the students' self-efficacy beliefs were positively affected by learning about the successful experience of former students, as the comparison created a positive point of comparison for them. Vicarious learning, i.e., learning "based on the performance of others that the individual perceives as models" (Haro-Soler, 2019: 95), shares common grounds with role model theory, as vicarious learning is also rooted in the perceived similarity between the student and the model.

The questions this article seeks to answer are: Firstly, do translation students have role models, and if so, how do they make sense of them? Secondly, how and to what extent do they express their possible selves? Thirdly, to what extent are the themes of possible selves and role models aligned?

2. Possible selves and role models

The concepts of possible selves and role models stem from social psychology and sociology. The concept of possible selves is the future-oriented element of

the self-concept, which, in turn, is defined as "the set of meanings we hold for ourselves when we look at ourselves" (Stets and Burke, 2003: 129). The self-concept has been pointed out as an essential element in the transition made by translator students in becoming professional translators (Kiraly, 1995; 2000). Within Translation Studies, research on the translator's self-concept has mainly been studied from a cognitive perspective and, most often, within a didactic framework (for an overview, see Muñoz Martín, 2014). In a previous study (Svahn, 2016), I traced translation students' self-concept from a qualitative, sociological viewpoint through three focus groups, ranging from the first semester to the last, with the same student as in this study. The main result was that the development of their self-concept seemed to have been slowed down, probably due to the rare language combination (Japanese-Swedish) and a perceived lack of feedback (Svahn, 2016).

Whereas self-concept has attracted some attention within Translation Studies, the concept of possible selves has not, although it offers great potential for becoming a fruitful concept for research on translation students. The concept of possible selves represents "individuals' ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming" (Markus and Nurius, 1986: 954). It has been extensively used in organizational studies as well as in pedagogies for, e.g., teachers (e.g., Hamman et al., 2010). In the context of studying teacher students, Hamman et al. (2010: 1349) describes the use of possible selves theory as "a theoretical framework for examining future-oriented, identity-relevant, goal-directed thinking in the present, and the salience of that thinking for regulating behavior to reach a future state." For this article, I use the definition of possible selves proposed by Erikson (2007: 356):

> Possible selves are conceptions of our selves in the future, including, at least to some degree, an experience of being an agent in the future situation. Possible selves get vital parts of their meaning in interplay with the self-concept, which they in turn moderate, as well from their social and cultural context.

This definition situates possible selves as highly social and cultural dependent. The self-concept and the possible selves are in interplay; our conceptions about ourselves in the present affect our conceptions about ourselves in the future.

Gibson (2003, 2004) puts forward the importance of role models for the development of possible selves: Individuals construct their possible selves by

observing other individuals, who for some reason are potential role models, in their social environment. Gibson (2003: 592) defines role models as:

> person(s) an individual perceives to be similar to some extent, and because of that similarity, the individual desires to emulate (or specifically avoid) aspects of that person's attributes or behaviors. Individuals attend to role models as possible exemplars of the professional skills and personal attributes needed to achieve desired goals.

Through this definition it is clear that role model selection amounts to two things, namely "whether the individual 1) finds a role model relevant to his or her needs and goals, and 2) views the role model's position or expertise to be potentially attainable" (Gibson, 2003: 592). This two-step process is "an approach that includes selection of role models from the individual's social environment, and making sense (meaning) of how a role model can help by observing how the model thinks and acts" (Gibson, 2003: 592). The quote from Sundström at the beginning of this article then depicts a lack of potential role models in her social context. Venuti, on the other hand, has found a potential role model who offered "a position of identification for me as a translator" (Venuti, 1995: 275) and thereby a way to make sense of this role model.

Indeed, this topic touches upon several key concepts in Translation Studies. As becomes evident in the quote from Sundström, finding a role model requires attainability, which, in turn, requires visibility. Here, Koskinen's (2000: 99) distinction between textual, paratextual, and extratextual visibility becomes useful. Whereas Koskinen's division refers to the invisibility of *translations*, it makes sense to extend this perspective to translators. The idea of translators' extratextual invisibility is widespread, but how, and to what extent, it affects translation students seeking role models have not yet been explored. Moreover, in the definition of possible selves, being an agent – or having agency – becomes of paramount importance. The concept of agency has been much discussed in Translation Studies (e.g., Kinnunen and Koskinen, 2010). Kinnunen and Koskinen (2010: 6) define agency as "willingness and ability to act". They describe the notion as both individualistic and psychological (willingness) and collective and social (ability). However, only limited research has focused on how translation students perceive their agency in a future state as professional translators (see Ruokonen, 2019).

3. Methods of data collection and analysis

Gibson (2003: 592) proposes that role models are studied longitudinally to enhance the understanding of how role model selection develops over a longer period of time. The material for this article consists of a longitudinal study of four focus group sessions, with the same four students, recorded over two years (November 2013–November 2015). The material was a part of a dissertation project on extratextual translatorship in the Swedish context and, more particularly, an examination of how two groups of translation students socialized into the translation profession over time (for the full study, see Svahn, 2020). The four students were attending an MA program in Translation Studies at a Swedish university. When recruiting the participants, I presented the project to the MA program, and the four students chosen were the ones who were willing to participate. It is, thus, a case of a convenience sampling (for more information, see Svahn 2020: 110–111). The students' names – Emma, Eva, Edvin, and Erik – used in this article are fictitious. At the time of the first focus group session, their age ranged between 25-30. The students were in a unique position since it was the first time the language combination Japanese-Swedish was offered in a Swedish MA program in Translation Studies. While their training provides the students with a unique profile on the Swedish translation market, it also comes with certain challenges (see Svahn, 2020: 112). The content of the MA program is presented in Table 1 in relation to the four focus group sessions.

Focus Group	Recorded (semester)	Courses	Credits (ECTS)	Progression-related topics
FG 1	1st	Translation I:	15	After the first semester. The students are starting the program.
		- Translation	9	
		- Text Analysis	3	
		- Professional Knowledge	3	
		Translation Studies: Theory and Research Methods	15	
FG 2	2nd	Translation II:	15	Half-way in the program. Looking backward and forward.
		- Translation	9	
		- Terminology	3	
		- Specialized Language	3	
		Elective courses	15	
FG 3	4th	3rd semester:		Close to graduation. Finishing the program.
		Faculty-obligatory courses	15	
		Elective courses	15	
		4th semester:		
		MA thesis	30	
FG 4	Seven months after graduation	–	–	The first step as professionals.

Table 1. Overview of MA program and progression-related topics

The focus group sessions were recorded at the end of the first, second, and fourth semesters. The last focus group session was recorded seven months after their graduation, which allowed me to follow-up with the students also during their first few months as professional translators. Being both qualitative and longitudinal, this study is an example of Qualitative Longitudinal Research (QLR), a research orientation which can "offer realistic understanding of causality, how and why things happen as they do, how aspects of social,

cultural and contextual processes interact to produce different individual outcomes […]" (Holland et al., 2006: 32).

Each focus group session lasted for 1–1,5 hours. I served as the moderator (marked with an M. in the results section below). The interview guide covered five overarching content-related topics: the students' background, the students' education, the translation profession, translatorship (questions related to the students' role a translators), and the students' future. There were also progression-related topics that prompted questions following the progression of the MA program (see Table 1). However, the focus group sessions were semi-structured with the primary aim of gaining a bottom-up perspective from the students' viewpoint, and the students were encouraged to talk freely. Before each focus group session, the students signed informed consent. The focus group sessions were held in Swedish and were later transcribed by me. An overview of the material is presented in Table 2.

Focus group session	**Recorded (semester)**	**Time (h:m)**	**Transcription (pages)**
FG1	1st	01:13	31
FG2	2nd	01:28	53
FG3	4th	01:02	53
FG4	Seven months after graduation	00:45	54
Total		04:30	191

Table 2. Focus group material

The material was analyzed according to the thematic analysis model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The thematic analysis model follows a six-step process: (1) Familiarizing with the data through transcription and re-readings, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Reviewing the themes, (5) Defining and naming the themes, and (6) Producing the report (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 87). Each theme "represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82, original emphasis) and together, they form the basis of the thematic analysis. In line with Braun and Clarke's (2006: 84) division between an inductive and a theoretical coding approach, I used a theoretical approach, where 'possible selves' and the two stages of role model theory, i.e. 'finding role models' and 'making sense of role models,' were constructed as themes. In the second

stage, I analyzed these themes inductively to create sub-themes. Both themes and sub-themes were constructed as 'latent themes,' as opposed to 'semantic themes,' thereby focusing on the underlying assumption underpinning the utterances (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 84). On a practical level, the analysis was conducted manually. The following results section is structured longitudinally, i.e., one focus group session at a time.

4. Results

The results of the thematic analysis of the focus group material show that the themes of possible selves and role models are conceptualized as having both textual and extratextual dimensions. The textual dimensions relate to translations on a textual micro-level, whereas the extratextual dimensions refers to the outside world in some sense. Figure 1 shows themes and sub-themes grouped as textual dimensions or extratextual dimensions.

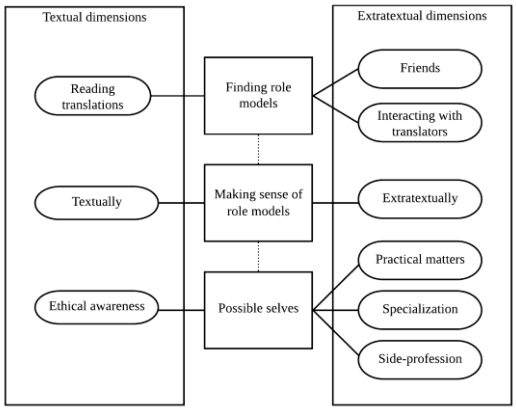

Figure 1. Themes and sub-themes

For example, the **possible selves** theme[1] has a sub-theme – *ethical awareness* – with a textual dimension, which refers to how the students would like to ethically approach their translation practice in the future. The sub-themes with extratextual dimensions relate to how they see themselves organizing their translatorship in more practical terms, such as which SLs to work with, etc.

[1] In the following, themes are **bolded** and sub-themes *italicized.*

4.1 First focus group session

In the first focus group session, the knowledge of the translation profession was overall scarce among the students. To a question about how much they knew about the profession when they started the program three months earlier, Eva replies: "Almost nothing."

On the question of whether they have any translator role models, the answer is direct: "I don't really read a lot in translation, to be honest" Emma says. The question is immediately interpreted as having a textual dimension: since they do not read translations, they cannot have translator role models. *Reading translations* is thus interpreted as a way of **finding role models**. The students, first somewhat reluctantly, and only after I had initially mentioned the names of some literary translators, discuss some translators working from Japanese into Swedish. Asked if they know any other translators from other languages, Emma answers:

(1)

Emma — It's just so easy that you only think about it when you think there's something wrong in a translation rather than what you actually appreciate, so I mean if it's a good translation you don't really think about the translator's role in it. So I don't know.

From this passage, it is clear that the question is interpreted in a textual manner, i.e., that they would know translators through their translations and not through reading about them or meeting them.

Apart from this textual interpretation, another more hands-on approach to finding role models is by *interacting with translators*. One way of achieving this is by becoming a student member in a translator association. Still, at this point early in their studies, none of the students have yet joined an association. The two students who have had some kind of prior contact with translators are Erik and Emma, who both have what can be called translator *friends*. Erik had a former neighbor who translated from Swedish into his mother tongue. Emma has a friend who works abroad as a freelance translator, "but she is probably the only translator I've met," Emma says.

The students discuss topics related to **possible selves** – they envision themselves as translators in the future. At this point, these utterances are

primarily general descriptions, often associated with *practical matters*, such as whether to work as freelance translators or as inhouse translators in an agency:

(2)

Eva	Well after [the professional knowledge course] I've understood that you kind of have to have your own company. That sounds like the easiest at least.
Emma	I think I would try to be employed first. If that's an alternative. Learn more, get more experience …
Edvin	… get the hang of it. Yes absolutely, if there's a possibility of that I'd like that too. But for example if you get in … If you have Japanese and then maybe English. If you still don't have a third source language to translate from … I'm not sure how much work you'd get in a translation agency then.

The theme of *practical matters* also includes discussions of source languages, which will become a significant concern for the students. For example, the students are very reluctant to work in a translation agency and to only translate from English. Erik says that it would "feel like a waste almost," and Emma says: "Only for a shorter period, in that case, to get experience."

As can be seen in example 2, there is already a concern for how the future, including how the students will be able to earn a living as translators. Emma says that "there is not a lot translated" from Japanese in Sweden, and Eva claims that "[the Japanese translation market in Sweden] is tiny." These matters are related to *specialization*, i.e., what kind of translation to work with, such as business translator, and, more particularly, what kind of business translation. Edvin has a rather pragmatic approach:

(3)

Edvin	[…] you kind of have to see what's out there in some way, what there is to take on, and then you can find your niche from that.

To conclude, the students discuss their future as translators, but the discussions are mainly hypothetical and general.

4.2 Second focus group session

The second focus group session was recorded at the end of the first year of the program. The students have now met more translators in various circumstances, which at least on a theoretical level could permit them to **find role models**, although overall contact remains scarce. Edvin and Erik choose

to do internships as a part of their elective courses during the second semester, where they meet translators and different sorts of language professionals. Edvin did an internship in a mid-sized Swedish translation agency and Erik in a national language center. None of the students has so far become a student member in any translator associations.

Emma is one of the few students who has a translator *friend*, whom she mentioned in the first focus group session. Although Emma does not explicitly label her as a role model, the friend has a position where Emma can observe the behavior of a translator. In a discussion on whether a translator can manage his or her own time, Emma now returns to her friend's experience:

(4)

Emma	[…] but I have a friend who works as a translator, she's earning a living on it, she lives in Spain and she always talks about how she needs to stay up all night long …
M.	Freelancing?
Emma	Yes, because clients have unreasonable perceptions about what one single person can manage. So I mean although she has enough work so that she can make a living out of it and a fairly stable income she's pretty often … well, much busier than she would like to be and has to do things with short notice and so on. So maybe a translator with longer working experience can manage his or her life more […]

In this example, Emma's friend's experience – the busy working conditions – is made sense *extratextually* and is linked to her being a junior translator, with the implication that more experienced translators can control their time better. The example also shows an unidealized awareness of what might be to come for Emma, would she continue with business translation. While she does not seem to long for this situation, she does not shrug away from it either.

The students' future roles as translators are slightly clearer than in the first focus group, although there are still many aspects that remain unclear. Some of the students have been thinking of starting a company:

(5)

Emma	Yes when we had that course in Professional knowledge I started thinking along those lines, to … At that time we talked more about what it takes to get established and so on. But … There should have been some kind of follow-up from that course, more teaching in that direction.

Edvin Yes, I have absolutely been thinking about starting … a company. But I would like to get some years' experience in a company first. As an employee. Ehm, for example … Well now I know that it's not very likely to work with Japanese in a translation agency … so it would be good if you had your own company where you specialize in Japanese, and maybe other Asian languages. And then work with English and other languages… somewhere, or in a translation agency. Something like that.

Edvin now understands that the chances of working with Japanese in a translation agency are small, as opposed to the first focus group session. His newfound insight comes from his recent internship in a translation agency. He explains his choice to do an internship by saying that "I wanted to gain experience. I wanted some kind of contact with the market." To a question of whether he has learned something new during his internship, he replies:

(6)

Edvin Yes, some things maybe … there are many … many freelancers that maybe have a very good connection with pretty few companies, or who do a lot of work for the same … the same client. And I mean that's good, then you can establish that contact and then … then you have a pretty solid ground to stand on as a freelancer, if you manage to establish one good connection with an agency that gives you work. If they like what you do, you'll … get a lot of work. And then … (silence) But apart from that it was also that … a translator in an agency is not only a translator, but there are many different roles. It is ... often the project manager who translates sometimes and proofreads and reviews a lot. So it's not … I guess there are a couple of people who are only sitting with translation all day long but … many people have many different roles. So … (silence) and I thought that was good, to get a bit of variation. If you think that's good, that is (laughs). But I wouldn't mind only working with translation either. (silence) Because it's very easy, the way of working … You didn't really have to think about anything, like the folder structure or anything on the computer or what to name the files or anything like that. All that was taken care of by the system and the project manager. As a translator you just receive a demand by email, and there you find the project file and then you click on it and then you can translate it and afterward, when you're done, you just let the project manager know. Then the project manager takes care of the rest. So it's really very easy …

In this detailed account of working in a translation agency, Edvin shows that he has gained substantial knowledge of how business translation works. While the students' general knowledge of the profession is generally better in the second focus group – and in Edvin's case much better – there is still a feeling of uncertainty about what their future professional lives will look like. Their future roles as translators are often determined by the fact that they will be the only MA university-trained translators from Japanese. For example, Emma compares herself with someone without a degree in Translation Studies: "[t]his degree in itself will look good, I mean if I compete for a job with someone without the degree I will feel entitled to get it … maybe." In the first focus group session, the students discussed 'making a name for oneself' in order to succeed as a translator. When I now ask what that entails, Emma answers:

(7)

Emma I guess it means the same thing as in other professions, that you're trying to have a professional approach, that I know that I've done a good job that I'm delivering to the client … and if that means that I might have to explain my choice of a specific term or question something that the client specifically has asked for, then maybe I want to do that because I know that I have acted in the right way or something. But like we said, you have to adhere to the client's wishes as well, since the client is the one who's paying. (silence) But I would like at least always to have that awareness, what is right in this specific situation, and not just try to produce as much text as possible as fast as possible.

Having 'a professional approach' is here linked to the textual level, and the example shows Emma's aim to have *ethical awareness* as a future translator –that she "would like to always have that awareness, what is right in this specific situation." However, she seems to doubt the possibilities for this ethical awareness in relation to her translation practice.

4.3 Third focus group session

The third focus group was recorded around the time of graduation. During their final semester, Emma, Edvin, and Erik chose to complete an annotated literary translation as their MA thesis, whereas Eva chooses to do a scientific thesis. The students who completed a literary translation as a part of their thesis shared a linguistic advisor who is a literary translator from Japanese and who comes across as having made a significant influence on the students. Now

that the students have 'found' a role model, the question is: how are they **making sense of role models**? The sense-making is mainly perceived *textually* through the feedback they have received from the advisor. Erik says that he has received "a lot of feedback," and Edvin that the feedback has been "great." Having a professional literary translator as an advisor has also opened up new areas of the textual dimension. This is apparent when Emma says: "Now when we've had [her] as a linguistic advisor, I've become interested in how her work looks and how she carries out her translations. And that was something that I maybe hadn't really given much thought before". Emma is thus not only interested in how the feedback she receives can help *her own* translation practice, but it has also made her more interested in how the advisor translates and her ethical approach to her translating. She continues:

(8)

Emma	[B]ut with [her] translations, I think she has very strong work ethics, that she's got some kind of ethical, or maybe not ethical but well, like how to handle the material and that she doesn't just … do it intuitively and choose what … she thought appropriate at the time, but rather has some kind of … thorough plan of how to work with a piece and sticks to it. I think that's good, I can admire that.
M.	Mm. Do you think it's required to have that kind of approach?
Emma	No, I don't really think so. I mean I think that there are many other translators working in Sweden that don't have … such a carefully crafted plan, or how to put it, but who still can be active. So … I don't think that's something that is required, especially when it's such an unusual language, there are not that many in Sweden that can read originals in Japanese, so I think it might be hard for them to judge if it's … a good translation or not.

In this passage, the sense-making is clearly associated with the textual level. The advisor's "strong work ethics" is related to the conscious and ethical ways she "handle[s] the material" at a micro-level. Furthermore, the advisor stands out as admirable for her ethical ways of translating, which Emma doubts is common practice for translators more generally. Even more so, the unusual language combination, which is what makes her relatable to Emma, is another sign that the advisor is worthy of admiration; the advisor does not *need* to have this ethical approach since very few Swedes can read Japanese, but she has it anyway.

As we have seen, the textual dimension to making sense of role models is the dominant perspective. There are, however, examples when **making sense of role models** has been discussed *extratextually*. This is evident when Edvin considers how keeping a relationship with the advisor could eventually lead to more insight into literary translation:

(9)

Edvin […] So that would be if you can keep that contact and build that relationship and maybe get more insight into how it works if you want to get [a translation] published or … get some tips, you could try … to build on that if you wanted to go in for literary … literary translation.

In this example, Edvin discusses how the linguistic advisor can 'be of use' for them in an extratextual sense, as a resource for getting to know how the literary translation milieu works.

Close to graduation, the students' positions are more diversified than in the previous focus group sessions. This diversity stems from the choices they have made during the final year of the program, not least through the different elective courses they have chosen. Erik has done a second internship in another international translation agency and has been offered work there over summer. He discusses the possibilities of finding role models in a business translation setting:

(10)

Edvin Yes … There are of course many experienced translators that you can look up to in an agency when you get in there, yes of course. But if you think more generally then … especially business translators are maybe … even more invisible than …

M. You don't get your name on it.

Edvin No exactly. Than literary translators. So …

He concludes by saying that there is probably an awareness about who is perceived as a good translator, and therefore a potential role model, in the agencies, but that, as a newcomer, he has not picked up on it yet. Overall, though, he is confident about his future professional life as a profession:

(11)

Edvin Well it looks like I will continue with translation as my … well profession. Eh … and I have also been freelancing a bit, started my own company, my own firm, in February, so I've received

> some work from [the second internship agency] … during the whole semester, and that felt good.

Until now, all of the students have discussed their future selves in terms of working as translators, and there has not been any doubt that they will become translators, although the ways to achieve this have seemed obscure. During the third focus group session, a new perspective is brought up by Emma and Eva, who now see *translation as a side-profession*, i.e., as opposed to their main profession. Emma explains:

(12)

Emma: Yes … I rather feel like I want to try out different professions and see what you can specialize in in the future. This translation thing will rather be some kind of … companion. Rather than a full-time occupation, I think.

Eva has also been thinking along the same lines and says: "I guess I think a little bit like Emma, that this might not be a … full-time profession. I rather think of it as a part of my profession, or like a half- time profession. And then maybe …". This is a new perspective in relation to their future roles as translators. One of the reasons seem to be that they want to work with the Japanese language, but they have now have realized that the chances of doing this are limited. There are, however, also hints of how their low self-esteem regarding other aspects of the profession, such as the use of CAT tools, affects this viewpoint. Emma elaborates on how she sees her future:

(13)

Emma: Well I've been thinking that I'll work in Japan or with something with Japanese. Since I don't see translation as my future profession. At least not exclusively. So I wouldn't see it as a failure if I, on the side of whatever I will be doing, also translates text from for example English or Danish or whatever it could be. Absolutely not.

Emma's primary goal appears to be either to work in Japan or with something related to the Japanese language. Having translation as a "companion" – the word she uses in a previous example – could then take the shape of translating texts from other languages. Already in the first focus group session, the students discussed whether they would consider working with a language other than Japanese, and they were generally reluctant towards this idea. The thought of translating from languages other than Japanese is now more accepted – at

least on a hypothetical level. For Edvin, though, this situation is now becoming a reality as he is starting to work as a business translator without translating from Japanese. He explains his viewpoint as follows:

(14)

Edvin	I have kind of entered this to … well, get into the market as a business translator, and it's worked out pretty well… for me.
M.	Mm.
Edvin	And then, if I want to do something with Japanese then … then that'll be in my own company, that I … market myself as a translator from Japanese. That could work, you can get some direct clients. While you work in an agency or as a freelance … with English and other languages.

Edvin clearly states that his goal has been to work as a business translator, regardless of which language he will be working with. He does not exclude working with Japanese in the future but realizes that such work would have to be on the side of his ordinary translation practice from English.

4.4 Fourth focus group session

When the fourth focus group was recorded seven months after graduation, Edvin was working full-time as a freelance business translator. Emma and Erik had both done test translations for, in Emma's case, a theatre play, and, in Erik's case, a novel from Japanese. Eva works in an administrative role in an authority, where she sometimes translates from Japanese.

Apart from the supervisor, the students' pool of role models is still limited.[2] At one point, Eva says that she is "pretty impressed with just about anyone who can make it as a literary translator. I mean Japanese …", showing that the benchmark for coming across as a role model is indeed rather low. Except for Erik, who currently works in a bookshop, the students' consumption of translations is still scant. However, Emma recalls reading a translation from Japanese a couple of months ago and that she was critical towards the translation:

(15)

Emma	[…] No, what I thought about was rather when I read this […] translation that to me it was pretty clear how the Japanese

[2] For ease of expression, the participants are called students although they have graduated at this point.

> structure looked like … and I thought [the translator] had departed from that in unnecessary ways… Or how to … I don't know how to explain it. I kind of thought that she had taken a detour sometimes …

This passage shows an example of an inversed role model, where the observed behavior is not perceived as admirable, and therefore not desirable to align with one's translation practice either. The linguistic advisor still stands out as the students' principal, and only, role model. However, neither Emma nor Eva have read any of her translations. Erik has read one of her translations and remembers noting similarities with his own translation practice: "ah there are things happenings here where I myself … would have chosen the same solutions." Instead of estranging himself from the translator's solution, as Emma is doing in the example above, he sees similarities in how he and the advisor handle the material on a textual level, thereby creating a positive identification for him as a translator.

In principle, however, the main reason behind the student's admiration for their advisor was her valuable feedback on their literary translations. The students return to this on several occasions: Emma says that the feedback "was really good"; Erik that "she was great in giving feedback"; and Edvin that he had a "good feeling." Edvin elaborates:

(16)

Edvin	Well, I felt that she gave … a lot of examples where I felt that 'this is not how one would express it in Swedish' or …
M.	Mm.
Edvin	Like 'how to best phrase this in Swedish in this case' and … I don't know if I … A lot of good …
M.	Mm.
Erik	Mm.
Edvin	… tips.
Erik	Yes there were some … I had made some grammatical mistakes, mixed up what was the subject in a sentence …
Emma	Ah.
Erik	… just got it all wrong…
Eva	Mm.
Erik	… and then she just corrected me and like 'it should be like this' […]

Erik continues by saying that "everything just fell into place … all of a sudden. So that kind of concrete help too".

As time goes by, the gap between the students' current position and their possible selves decreases – at least for some students. Edvin states, "Well I … I guess I'm a business translator." He explains his position as follows:

(17)

Edvin	Ehm … for my part … well, translation has become a means for me to … well … earn money, to put it simply.
Others	(laughs)
M.	Yes! Yes!
Edvin	… and I like that … So then I'll continue with that. And then … I'll see if I find something so that I can work with Japanese.

For the other students, the situation is not as self-evident. Eva is the only one who currently translates from Japanese from time to time, although her job is not actually related to translation. Still, she downplays the translation part: "that's nothing, only shorter things", she says. The major hindrance for a future career as a translator is her love for Japanese; she explains that "Japanese is absolutely the most important", as opposed to translation, and that she'd rather continue working in her current position than working full-time as a translator from English. Emma agrees and states that she'd rather work with something relating to Japanese than working as a freelance translator. Erik, on the other hand, seems to, hypothetically at this point, be closer to Edvin's pragmatic approach and does not exclude working from other languages in the future. His self-confidence as translator recently took a leap forward when a publisher approached him: "[…] it feels kind of nice when you get contacted by a publishing house and get to do a test translation and that they liked it, that feels kind of affirming in some way (laughs) […]." To conclude, the students have different conceptions of their possible selves and they are at different positions in their journeys towards them.

5. Discussion and concluding remarks

This study has aimed to explore role models and possible selves in a translation student setting. The number of participants in this study is small, and the results cannot be generalizable. However, the results point towards some interesting tendencies that are worth to be investigating beyond the scope of present study. For example, the results display a clear developmental path attuned to the longitudinal nature of the study: from a general perspective, with a focus on finding role models, in the early focus groups, towards a more

specialized and detailed perspective, with an emphasis on making sense of the role models found, in the later focus groups.

The themes constructed in the thematic analysis can be discussed in terms of textual and extratextual dimensions. The **possible selves** theme is mainly addressed in an extratextual sense – how to work practically with translation, which SLs to work from, and what area to specialize in. The role model theme, on the other hand, is primarily found at a textual level; both **finding role models** and **making sense of role models** were mostly discussed in relation to either reading translations or the textual feedback provided by the students' linguistic advisor. While the influence of the advisor may be partly due to the students' perceived lack of feedback earlier in the program (see Svahn, 2016), it is clear she stands out as basically their only role model. The division between the extratextual dimension and the textual dimension suggests that the students' perceptions of their possible selves are not aligned with their perceptions of their role models. Following Gibson's (2003) assumption that role models are crucial in order to develop possible selves, a more comprehensive translator role model – including a conception of the translator as a sole trader – may prove to be beneficial for easing the transition from education to profession. The students' difficulty in finding role models have further revealed how professional translators' extratextual invisibility may negatively affect translation students. The vicarious learning model proposed by Haro-Soler (2019), which exposed the positive benefits of presenting translation students with former graduates' positive career stories, may offer a solution to this problem.

In the light of recent research on translation students (e.g., Ruokonen, 2016; 2019), there might also be a reason to raise awareness of a problematic aspect of Erikson's definition of possible selves. To recapitulate, the first part of his definition of possible selves refers to "conceptions of our selves in the future, *including, at least to some degree, an experience of being an agent in the future situation*" (Eriksson, 2007: 356, emphasis added). The results in this study suggest that the students want to exert agency to influence their working environment in the future; however, they are concerned that the working environment will deny them agency. These results corroborate Ruokonen's (2019) findings, where precisely the translators' possibilities of influencing their working environment received a lower score from students than from freelance translators. More research should be devoted to what it means for students to choose a profession where they fear that their agency will be denied.

Moreover, the results also reveal that both possible selves and role model themes include ethical perspectives, which are mainly related to the students' translation practice. The students consistently demonstrate an awareness of the profession's ethical dimensions and a wish to act ethically in their future role as professionals. It is noticeable that these discussions are mainly found in the latter focus groups, highlighting the developmental character of the students' perceptions and the benefit of examining translation students qualitatively and longitudinally.

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