



# LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

## **Investigating the Interplay within Disciplines: Translation Studies and Sociology**

**Mr. Jahfar Sadiq**

Researcher, Department of Translation Studies, English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad, Telengana, India.

### **Abstract**

The shift of the translation from linguistic turn to cultural turn itself marks the importance of sociological aspects meted by translation studies. Translation as a process encompassing the translator and product has its own effect in various ways of sociology deals with. That is how the inter-disciplinarily characteristic of translation studies and its deep relation with sociology get relevance. Any translation is necessarily embedded within social context and is undeniably carried out by individuals who belong to a social system; similarly the translation phenomenon is inevitably implicated in social institutions, which greatly determine the selection, production and distribution of translation and, as a result, the strategies adopted in translation itself. The social function and the socio-communicative value of a translation can best be located within the contact zone where the translated text and the various socially driven agencies meet.

**Keywords**

Sociology; Translation; Field; Agency; Paratexts.

---

◆

Sociology enables us to understand the structure and dynamics of society, and their intricate connections to patterns of human behavior and individual life changes. It examines the ways in which the forms of social structure - groups, organizations, communities, social categories (such as class, sex, age, or race), and various social institutions (such as kinship, economic, political, or religious) affect human attitudes, actions, and opportunities. The discipline also explores how both individuals and collectivities construct, maintain, and alter social organization in various ways. Sociology asks about the sources and consequences of change in social arrangements and institutions, and about the satisfactions and difficulties of planning, accomplishing, and adapting to such change. Areas studied in examining social dynamics include: culture, values, socialization, cooperation, conflict, power, exchange, inequality, deviance, social control, violence, order and social change. Translation as a process encompassing the translator and product has its own effect in various ways of sociology deals with. That is how the inter-disciplinarily characteristic of translation studies and its deep relation with sociology get relevance.

When cultural research focuses upon the level of ideas sociological research focuses on people and the observable behavior. The shift of the translation from linguistic turn to cultural turn itself marks the importance of sociological aspects meted by translation studies. Much of the works grouped under the cultural turn actually seem closer to sociology than to cultural studies. The process of translation seems to be conditioned by two levels of the cultural and the social. The first level encompasses influential factors such as power, dominance, national interests, religion or economics whereas the second level concerns the agents involved in the translation process, which

continuously internalize the aforementioned structures and act in correspondence with their culturally connoted value systems and ideologies.

Any translation whether enactment or product is necessarily embedded within social context. On the one hand, the act of translation, in all its various stages, is undeniably carried out by individuals who belong to a social system; on the other, the translation phenomenon is inevitably implicated in social institutions, which greatly determine the selection, production and distribution of translation and, as a result, the strategies adopted in translation itself. The social function and the socio-communicative value of a translation can best be located within the contact zone where the translated text and the various socially driven agencies meet. These characteristics of a translation can be revealed through a complex description of the relations that exist between the author of the text, the transfer agencies, the text, and the public in their societal interlacements. In this context, analyzing the social implications of translation helps us to identify the translator and the translation researcher as a constructing and constructed subject in society. Some of the esteemed sociologists whose work could form the basis of a theoretical framework for sociology of translation are Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002), Bernard Lahire (1963-), Bruno Latour (1947-) and Niklas Luhmann (1927-1998).

Once it becomes obvious that all the elements contributing to the constitution of society are conditioned by specific cultural abilities of language and symbolization, the concepts of 'society' and 'culture' are both revealed as construction as Neidhardt said culture "creates social structures and is shaped by existing ones" (Wolf 6). In these construction processes, translation undoubtedly plays a major role especially in the translational analysis of recent world-wide developments, such as migration or globalization, where cultural, social and societal problems in the narrower sense are at stake. Although some theories such as poly system of Even-Zohar shed lights upon the conditions of the social interactions of a text they seldom relates texts to the 'real conditions'

(Gentzler 123) of their production and fail to integrate in proper way. The sociology of translation tries to find the nature of the political and social relationship between the groups involved in these processes and tries to analyze the criteria underlying the generation of a product or the existence of a market.

Within the wider realm of systemic-oriented translation studies, descriptive, empirical approach was developed which emphasizes a translation's function within the target culture and strongly draws on the concept of translation norms- norms that govern the relations between source and target text. In sociology, norms are a rather disputed category, as they only gain relevance once they have been generally accepted by a given community and can answer the following questions such as what norms are applicable to whom and in what context, in what way are norms accepted, and how does a change in norms operate. However, if we accept the significance of norms in moulding social structures, they become dominant to the discussion of social forces in translation. Thus norms operate in each phase of the translation process: in the selection of the texts, by determining what source language and what (literary) models should be selected for the target literature, and in the selection of translation strategies that reveal the relationships between the two translation cultures involved. A detailed analysis of all translation norms effective at a specific time within a specific society would ideally enable insights into that society's ideas on translation as a cultural phenomenon.

The view of translation as social practice is also central to the work of Andre Lefevere. In particular, the notion of rewriting is one that denotes both the manipulative interventions on the level of the text and the cultural device which direct and control the production procedure in the interplay of social forces. The patronage system at work within this interplay embraces individuals, collectives and institutions, which are mainly determined by ideology. Lefevere not only ascribes a social dimension to this notion, but also

extends it by means of Boudreaux's concept of "cultural capital", which he sees as the driving force for the distribution of translations within a specific culture, as "cultural capital is transmitted, distributed, and regulated by means of translation, among other factors, not only between cultures, but also within one given culture" (Lefevere 48).

The assertion of Gentzler and Tymoczko that translation is "a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication" (Gentzler and Tymoczko XVI) hints at the paramount importance of analyzing social aspects in translation and calls for discussion of both the translator's task creating knowledge and his or her contribution to the shaping of culture and society. Anthony Pym (1998) fills a long-felted need to conceptualize historical studies on translation within a methodological framework. Pym calls for a shift of emphasis from texts and contexts to the individual figures of translators as central objects of research, and aims to reconstruct the domain of socially conditioned subjectivity as a basis for understanding the translator's history.

Recently, the study of translators has become centre-stage in translation studies research. This includes the dramatic increase in works of translation historiography. The simultaneous development of a sociology of translation has investigated the role of the translator as active agent, drawing mainly on the theory of French ethnographer and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and his concepts of 'field' (which is the site of power struggle between participants or agents-for us, this includes translators), 'habitus' (the broad social, identity and cognitive disposition of the agents that structure and are structured by the field), the symbolic and material capital which may be accrued and 'illusio' (which may be understood as the cultural limits of awareness). For him the field is the literary field is a force-field as well as a field of struggles which aim at transforming or maintaining the established relation of forces: each of the agents commits the force (the capital) that he has acquired through previous

struggles to strategies that depend of their general direction on his position in the power struggle, that is, on his specific capital.

Bourdieu defines a field according to the struggles that occur between the agents with a view to similar stakes, which can be summed up as the acquisition of the monopoly of symbolic violence, that is to say the gentle violence that aims to impose upon a field (in terms of literature, that of science fiction, for example) that which is legitimate to produce, publish and value as science-fiction literature and as specific discourse by saying what is and what is not science fiction. Translation is based on the same realities expressed by these notions, in allowing texts to move beyond the cultural and linguistic frontiers under which they are produced.

One of the advantages of sociology of translation founded on Pierre Bourdieu's social ideas seems to reside is that Bourdieusian sociology of translation is based on a social theory of symbolic goods, and in that this theory does not reduce literary objects to simple consumer goods. It was Bourdieu who initiated a discussion on translation and sociology in a text entitled "The social conditions of the international circulation of Ideas" though he did not pursue it further. Bourdieusian social theory is a theory of action, meaning that it theorizes practice, which we extend to translation, to translation practice. At first glance, this conception brings to mind that of Antoine Berman, who defines translation studies as a reflection on *experience*, a term which literally denotes practice. Nevertheless, practice as defined by Berman is distanced somewhat from the way it is defined by Bourdieu. On the one hand, we have a philosophical vision of practice, and on the other, a sociological vision of practice. However, it would be possible to imagine practice encompassing experience (or vice versa) considering the importance of philosophical reflection in the development of Bourdieu's sociological frame work.

In order to analyze what translation practice means, the focus on the translation of literary texts in particular American literary texts into French will be helpful. If we consider American literature translated into French from James Fenimore Cooper (1820) to Henry Miller (1960) it becomes evident that the publication of translations of American writers into French is regulated according to existing divisions in the target French culture, or culture of translation, as demonstrated by the theoreticians of the Polysystem School. What constitutes these divisions in Bourdieu's theory is what the sociologist calls fields, as heterogeneous space is specified into autonomous fields. It is the distribution of texts according to specific traits that contributes to define fields. In literature, fields are defined as realist fiction, science fiction, detective novel, youth fiction, etc. thus forming the fields of realist fiction, science fiction, detective fiction etc. while they get translated the reception varies along with fields of genres they belong to. The translation characteristics are traits of the entire translation process, from pre to post-production. In particular, they relate to translation agents (translators, publishers and managers of series, literary agents, literary directors, editors-in-chief of the magazines, critics, etc.)

Symbolic (literary) goods, whether indigenous or imported, find a place in the target culture's literary fields. This positions the work in a unique relationship with the social world (economic, political, etc.). The relationship that takes place in the field is marked by the phenomenon of refraction, in such a way as the literary work's field acts as prism, eliminating any future interpretations of the work according to reflection theories. For instance we can compare the translations of Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). It is evident that there is a plethora of translations of Cooper's novel, whereas *A Farewell to Arms* has only been translated once in 1931 (by Mourice- Edgar). This was because of an absence of international legislation related to the publishing profession and copyright laws until 1886, when the Berne Convention was signed.

Under such a condition the translator invests his or her capacities in translating according to experience acquired in the translation practice of a given field. That is here the question of ‘agency’ and the ‘structure’ (in sociology) comes to fore in a better way. To get an idea of the translator’s idea of translating, the notion of *habitus* is very useful as mentioned above; in that it refers to the social trajectory of the translator at the time he acquired a practice of translation. The *habitus* of a translator is constructed on competition with the translations of other publishing houses. Gouanvic distinguishes between the translator’s *habitus* as a result of his or her practice, and a specific *habitus* which is constructed while the cultures involved encounter one another during the transfer process. Consequently, translation strategies, according to Gouanvic “are generally not to be understood as deliberate choices conforming to or breaking norms, but rather as translator’s *habitus*, which, together with that of other agents, structures the respective field and, in turn, is structured by the field itself” (Gouanvic 157-58). Gouanvic stresses that there is an aesthetic pleasure in playing a game of practices endowed with power on the basis of which the terms of translation operating between the various social spaces are continually renegotiated. This is what Bourdieu calls ‘*illusio*’. *Illusio* is viewed as the object of the translator’s work. During the translation process, a text reinvents the rules of the literary genre to which it belongs, and subsequently is reinterpreted according to its own logic, by the agents involved. “Gouanvic claims that proficient readers stick to the idea of *Illusio* and specific stakes in the field by internalizing them for the duration of the reading” (Wolf 19).

Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological theories seem to be fertile for deepening understanding of the social relevance and responsibility of the translation process. For the conceptualization of sociology of translation, though important insights have already been gained from the reflection of these methodological tools, there are a lot of scholars who tried to look more closely into the



theorizing potential of his framework for a more comprehensive understanding of translation. Bernard Lahire, Erich Prunc, Theo Hermans, Michaela Wolf, Mirella Agorni, Daniel Simeoni are some of them to mention.

Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems has also been applied in Translation Studies. Luhmann sees society as being constructed of differentiated systems such as law, politics etc, each being constituted of acts of communication. These communications are the elements out of which society is built. A translation event is precisely such a communication, an element of the translation system. A translation event can be defined temporally as the duration of a translation task, from initial request to delivery and payment. Following Toury, such events can be distinguished from translation acts because acts take place in the translator's head, at the level of cognition, and are not directly observable. Since social systems of different kinds use different organizing codes, Luhmann seems to like binary codes. Thus Hermans suggests that the translation system is structured on the difference between a valid and non-valid representation of the source text.

Theo Hermans developed the norm concept by focusing on its broader, social function, and particularly stresses its relevance in relation to power and ideology. Hermans has concentrated on the social constraints by which norms, in turn, shape the translation process and effect. He claims that translation today is seen "as a complex transaction taking place in a communicative, socio-cultural context" (Hermans 26). This means the agents involved are placed at the fore of these transfer processes, with special attention paid to the "interactive form of social behavior, involving a degree of 'interpersonal coordination' among those taking part". In his book *The Conference of the Tongues*, 2007 Theo Hermans draws extensively on Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory. In addition, he explicitly aims for a more self-reflexive Translation Studies. Hans J. Vermeer reflecting on Luhmann In his *Luhmann's 'Social Systems' Theory: Preliminary Fragments of a Theory of Translation* sets

out to interpret Luhmann's social system theory in its application to translation, especially from a Skopos perspective. He understands a general translation system as a special type of social system, and explores the interrelations of the various entities involved in a translation action (translator, commissioner, source text author, reader, etc.), which, in turn, form a set of interdependent systems in the environment of the overall translation system. Vermeer's central assumption is that in order to conceptualize translation as a (social) system, it is mandatory to go beyond Luhmann's theoretical tools and he suggests an analysis on three levels of "the microcosmic level of microphysical elements (processes and events), the mesocosmic level of the 'real world of human beings', and the macrocosmic level of memetics, which applies to the replication, spread and evolution of memes" (Wolf 74).

It is obvious that a translation system contains more than just translation events since it also contains statement about the events such as discourse on translation, translation reviews, prefaces and other paratexts which wholly feed into the system, reflecting it and affecting its relation with the society. In spite of the theory of symbolic goods introduced by Pierre Bourdieu and the later developments by the later scholars have been widely applied to the studies of sociological aspects of Translation studies it becomes apparent that they only do not seem to be sufficient for the conceptualization of medium space which have been exposed to various levels day by day. That is how Homi Bhabha's concept of 'Third Space' becomes very important in the analysis of sociology of translation in the ongoing fields of research.

**References:**

- Bassnett, Susan and Harish Trivedi. Eds. *Post-colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Print.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. London and New York: Routledge. 1994. Print.

- Gentzler, Edwin. *Contemporary Translation Theories*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993. Print.
- Gentzler, Edwin and Maria Tymoczko. "Introduction." *Translation and Power*. Amherst and Boston: U of Massachusetts P, 2002. XI-XXVIII. Print.
- Hermans, Theo. *The Conference of the Tongues*. New York: St. Jerome Publishing, 2007. Print.
- Hornby, Mary Snell. *The Turns of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2006. Print.
- Itamar, Even-Zohar. "The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem." *Poetics Today* 11.1 (1990): 45-51. Print.
- Munday, Jeremy. *Introducing Translation Studies*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Pym, Anthony and Perekrestenko, Alexander. Eds. *Translation Research Projects 2*. Tarragona: Intercultural Studies Group, 2009. Print.
- Simeoni, Daniel. 2007. "Between Sociology and History: Method in Context and in Practice." *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. M. Wolf and A. Fukari. Eds. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins. 187- 204. Print.
- Toury, Gideon. "The Nature and Role of Norms in Translation." *The Translation Studies Reader*. Ed. Lawrence Venuti. London: Routledge, 2000: 198-211. Print.
- Wolf, Michaela and Alexandra Fukari John. Eds. *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2007. Print.

**MLA (7th Edition) Citation:**

- Sadiq, Jahfar. "Investigating the Interplay within Disciplines: Translation Studies and Sociology." *Literary Quest* 2.4 (2015): 1-12. Web. DoA.

**DoA – Date of Access**

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.