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Constructing
a Sociology
of Translation

edited by
Michaela Wolf
Alexandra Fukari

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Constructing a Sociology of Translation

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Constructing a Sociology of Translation
Edited by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari

Constructing a Sociology of Translation

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Table of contents

Introduction: The emergence of a sociology of translation <i>Michaela Wolf</i>	1
Part I. The debate on the translator's position in an emerging sociology of translation	
Priests, princes and pariahs. Constructing the professional field of translation <i>Erich Prunč</i>	39
Translation, irritation and resonance <i>Theo Hermans</i>	57
Part II. Bourdieu's influence in conceptualising a sociology of translation	
Objectivation, réflexivité et traduction. Pour une re-lecture bourdieusienne de la traduction <i>Jean-Marc Gouanvic</i>	79
Outline for a sociology of translation. Current issues and future prospects <i>Johan Heilbron and Gisèle Sapiro</i>	93
The location of the "translation field". Negotiating borderlines between Pierre Bourdieu and Homi Bhabha <i>Michaela Wolf</i>	109
Part III. Mapping the field: Issues of method and translation practice	
Locating systems and individuals in translation studies <i>Mirella Agorni</i>	123
Translations "in the making" <i>Hélène Buzelin</i>	135
Bridge concepts in translation sociology <i>Andrew Chesterman</i>	171

Part IV. Constructing a sociology of translation studies: Overview and perspectives

Between sociology and history. Method in context and in practice <i>Daniel Simeoni</i>	187
Y a-t-il place pour une socio-traductologie? <i>Yves Gambier</i>	205
Notes on contributors	219
Author index	223
Subject index	225

Introduction

The emergence of a sociology of translation

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Any translation, as both an enactment and a product, is necessarily embedded within social contexts. On the one hand, the act of translating, 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 the translation itself. What is at stake here, therefore, are the various agencies and agents involved in any translation procedure, and more specifically the textual factors operating in the translation process. The interrelational and interactive character of these factors is fundamental to understanding their functioning, and makes up the view of translation as a “socially regulated activity” (Hermans 1997: 10). 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. Accordingly, the subjectivity of the participants in this “global play” is of paramount importance. Drawing on Anthony Giddens’s concept of agency, Venuti argues that this subjectivity is constituted by cultural and social determinations that are diverse and even conflicting:

Human action is intentional, but determinate, self-reflexively measured against social rules and resources, the heterogeneity of which allows for the possibility of change with every self-reflexive action. (Venuti 1996: 206)

In this context, analysing the social implications of translation helps us to identify the translator and the translation researcher as a constructing and constructed subject in society. This, of course, means we need to conceptualize a methodological framework, a task which has been repeatedly undertaken in the last few

years. In this introduction, the efforts to methodologically frame translation and its contexts as a social practice will be discussed. A more important purpose of this volume, however, is to improve the conjunction of translation studies and sociology and thus foster the development of a methodological basis. The volume intends to further the debate on the role of an emergent sociology of translation within the broader context of translation studies, while taking into account the discourses constructing a “sociology of translation studies”. The potential of such a discussion can best be shown by drawing on the concept of interdisciplinarity.

Interdisciplinarity, or: Translation between culture and society

Interdisciplinarity – understood as a differentiated, multidimensional epistemological concept which, according to Roland Barthes, “consists in creating a new object which does not belong to anybody” (Barthes 1984: 100, my translation) – has, not surprisingly, been a claim put forward by translation studies more or less from its beginnings. In his detailed discussion of the role of interdisciplinarity in research, Klaus Kaindl argues that the discipline of translation studies must reconsider its current practice of instrumentalising the research methods of other disciplines, and instead encourage cooperation on a reciprocal basis (Kaindl 2004: 71). The various results of such a move would include the consideration of cultural studies, linguistics, literary studies, historiography, philosophy and sociology within translation studies. To be sure, while interdisciplinarity may offer opportunities for deeper epistemological insights, such collisions always include some form of friction. In particular, the delimitation from other disciplines, and from various special subjects with their origins in the formation of a modern academic system, gives rise to continuous polemics, albeit without seriously prejudicing the production of knowledge and its methodological processing. As a result, the controversial debates and even erroneous ideas resulting from interdisciplinary work cannot be regarded as troublesome or avoidable inconveniences, but are an expression of the differences that exist between scientific disciplines with regard to their structural characteristics.¹

In the humanities, interdisciplinary projects are an especially important contribution to the rise and subsequent establishment of “turns”, which question both existing paradigms and allegedly definitive certainties, and additionally offer innovative potential for productive new research areas and methodologies. As was shown by what has been labelled the “cultural turn” (see Bassnett and Lefevere

1. See Bourdieu (2004) for the discussion of these structural characteristics in the fields of historiography and sociology and the problems arising from interdisciplinary thinking.

1990), translation studies seems particularly inclined towards the shift of paradigms.² This results partly from the fact that its subject is by nature located in the contact zones “between cultures”, and is therefore exposed to different constellations of contextualisation and structures of communication, but also from the make-up of the discipline itself. The multifaceted forms of communication which shape the issues undertaken within translation studies call for us to go beyond disciplinary boundaries. It cannot be denied that the “cultural turn” brought about a lasting expansion of the frames of research and demanded the elaboration of very broad questions. This enabled a thorough discussion of historical perspectives, contextual situations and translation conventions, thus foregrounding the macro-context of translation and different forms of representation. If as a first step questions of “transfer” were dealt with as culturally specific facets of single phenomena, this dimension was soon extended to the level of discourse (see e.g. Müller-Vollmer 1998) before being reformulated in terms of new approaches drawn primarily from cultural studies. The methodological procedures resulting from these approaches explicitly questioned modes of representation and redefined translations as “inventions” or “constructions” of the “Other” (see Bachmann-Medick 2004: 450-451; Wolf 2005b: 106-107).

The rupture with exclusively text-bound approaches not only allows translation studies to dislocate fixed entities and reveal asymmetrical transfer conditions, but also focuses on those modes of translation which “concretise translation as an interactive social event” (Fuchs 1997: 319, my translation). This helps draw attention to the cultural *and* social formations which fundamentally characterize the translation phenomenon: processes of mediation are thus implicated in frameworks which involve both negotiating cultural differences and exploring the forms of action that belong to the translation process. Consequently, mediating agents operate – in Clifford Geertz’ sense – as a sort of “web”³ that exists between the various cultures. They are bound up in social networks which allow them to be viewed as socially constructed and constructing subjects.

In the wake of the “cultural turn”, these observations open up several questions. On the one hand, they shed a radically new light on the notion of “translation”, and thus on the discipline’s research object. From this perspective, translation is a concept that opposes the view of culture as an agency preserving static views of tradition and identity, and instead highlights the dynamic transforma-

2. See Mary Snell-Hornby’s recent book *The Turns of Translation Studies. New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints?* (Snell-Hornby 2006) and Doris Bachmann-Medick’s seminal study *Cultural Turns. Neuorientierungen in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Bachmann-Medick 2006).

3. Geertz says, “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs [...]” (Geertz 1993: 5).

tions resulting from continual confrontations of cultural formations. This change of viewpoint requires us to engage with the potential of a metaphorically conceptualized notion of translation. Such a theory of translation would not only consider the intersecting spaces within the translation process, but would also give voice to the translators and other agents of this process as subjects ensuing from particular cultural dynamics. In addition, it would reveal problems of cultural representation⁴ and the contribution made by translation to the construction of cultures. On the other hand, these insights introduce a research area which so far has been touched upon only unsystematically and which, under the label of a “sociology of translation”, deals with the issues that arise when viewing translation and interpreting as social practice as well as symbolically transferred interaction. As will be shown, the implications of these interactions are being analysed in an increasingly sophisticated range of issues and methodological refinements.

The process of translation seems, to different degrees, to be conditioned by two levels: the “cultural” and the “social”. The first level, a structural one, encompasses influential factors such as power, dominance, national interests, religion or economics. The second level concerns the agents involved in the translation process, who continuously internalize the aforementioned structures and act in correspondence with their culturally connotated value systems and ideologies. There is, however, a danger of dichotomising these two levels. Anthony Pym has recently claimed that “[w]e talk, too readily, about ‘sociocultural’ or ‘social and cultural’ approaches, contexts, factors, whatever. [...] No doubt the ‘social’ is also the ‘cultural’, in the sense that both are opposed to the ‘eternal’ or the ‘ontological’. But why then do we need the two terms?” (Pym 2006: 14). This question has troubled other disciplines as well. Certainly, society cannot be adequately described without culture nor culture without society. As part of the classical heritage, the Roman terms *cultura* and *societas* survived for several centuries in the common language of education, Latin, without suffering considerable changes in meaning. It was only around 1800, with the rise of radical social changes, that these terms were integrated into the European vernaculars and became key terms in public as well as private discourses. This indicates that the terms “culture” and “society” symbolized radical re-orientations. In their various connotations they not only reflected social transformation over time and space but also encompassed new perceptions by adopting a certain “social vocabulary” as a tool for developing new concepts of society and culture (Tenbruck 1990: 21-22). The subsequent dichotomisation of the two terms denotes that two distinct aspects of “reality” were taking shape.

4. For the “crisis of representation” in cultural studies, see Berg and Fuchs (1993) and Chartier (1992).

By way of illustration, a glance at the discussions on the evolution of “cultural sociology” within German speaking academia reveals the dilemma inherent in this dichotomisation – a dilemma which is ultimately reflected in the questions put forth on the subject of a “cultural” and/or “social turn” currently being discussed within translation studies. The founders of German sociology, Max Weber and Georg Simmel, considered that all social action embedded in cultural settings had to be explored both in its historical contexts and in its institutional representations. Subsequently, the concept of culture was denied its analytical potential and was ascribed a notion of value: culture in itself was thus resubstantialized, dismantling the postulate of “freedom of value” within scientific research (Gebhardt 2001). This view survived until the end of the 1970s, when – in the wake of individualising, pluralising and globalising processes – critics of cultural anthropology pointed out the essentialisation of culture operating in dualisms such as “representative” versus “popular” culture or “high” versus “everyday life” culture, and ultimately called for a redefinition of the concepts involved in cultural and social practices (ibid.). These developments were taken up through various initiatives, for example the publication of a thematic volume of the *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* entitled “Kultursoziologie” in 1979 and the publication of a special issue on “Kultur und Gesellschaft” by the same journal in 1986, as well as a conference of sociologists from German-speaking countries, held in 1988 in Zurich and dedicated to the topic (Lichtblau 2003). One of the key questions dealt with in these projects was how “present-day societies constitute themselves as culture” (Rehberg 1986: 106). The discussion mainly focused on how to avoid mutual exclusion when defining the two concepts, and alternatively suggested viewing culture and society as interdependent, a definition which would help to transcend a deterministic view and foster an integrative approach.

Once it becomes obvious that all the elements contributing to the constitution of society are conditioned by specific cultural abilities of language and symbolisation (ibid.: 107), the concepts of “society” and “culture” are both revealed as constructions: culture “creates social structures and is shaped by existing ones” (Neidhardt 1986: 15, my translation). In these construction processes, translation undoubtedly plays a major role. Especially in the translational analysis of recent world-wide developments, such as migration or globalisation, where cultural, social and societal problems in the narrower sense are at stake, it becomes clear on the one hand that there is no benefit in encouraging the elaboration of separate analytical tools (stemming, among other sources, from sociology and cultural studies⁵), and, on the other, that some of the methodologies developed in the

5. On this topic, see Heilbron and Sapiro (in this volume).

wake of the “cultural turn” seem to no longer suffice for a thorough analysis of the contribution of translation within these multifaceted processes. An emphasis on the relationship between culture and society would help to avoid dichotomisation and allow us to transcend traditional deterministic views. In institutional terms, the question of whether we are witnessing the emergence of a new “turn” – the “sociological turn” – no longer seems relevant: cultural and social practices – and consequently their theoretical and methodological conceptualization – cannot be regarded as detached from one another. If we focus on “the social” yet neglect the conditions that mould translation as a cultural practice in terms of power, ideology and similar issues, the creation of a new sub-discipline within translation studies called “sociology of translation” would sidestep the problem of methodology. The questions pertinent to translation viewed as a social practice should instead be placed at the core of the discipline. Last but not least, such a position has the potential to better conjoin existing approaches with a “sociology of translation”, as well as to discuss more efficiently the interface of methodologies developed in sociology and cultural studies.

First glances at “translation as a social practice”⁶

The question of “the social” within translation had been dealt with throughout the history of translation studies in various forms and from varying perspectives. Here, I will give only an overview of the main considerations arising from such approaches. Although it has been recognized that the translation process is socially conditioned and that “the viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read” (Venuti 1995: 18), no comprehensive research seems yet to have been conducted with regard to the social implications of translation.

While system-oriented approaches do not insist on the theoretical conceptualization of the social implications of translation, they do – more than any other research designs – offer numerous links to socially oriented questions. Polysystem theory, for instance, has brought about fruitful insights into the functioning of translated literature within broader literary and historical systems of the target culture. This was a decisive move beyond the prescriptive models prevailing at the time when polysystem theory was elaborated, and placed the phenomenon of translation within broader “socio-cultural” contexts. The theory proposes that literature be understood as a dynamic, functional and stratified system; ‘system’ be-

6. For an overview on the “state of the art” of an emerging “sociology of translation” see also Prunč, in this volume.

ing defined as “the network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables ([or] ‘occurrences’/‘phenomena’)” (Even-Zohar 1990: 27). In Even-Zohar’s view, systems are highly hierarchical and are determined by their struggle for the primary position in the literary canon. Canonical repertoires tend to be consumed and conventionalized through repetition and are gradually driven towards the system’s periphery, whereas peripheral repertoires push towards the centre and, in this process, are often used as a means to enrich aesthetic values. Criticisms of polysystem theory emphasize, among other aspects, the dichotomic stance inherent in its “toolbox” of binary oppositions, such as “canonized” versus “non-canonized” literature or “centre” versus “periphery”. From a sociological point of view, however, it seems particularly relevant that throughout polysystem theory it is never made clear what driving forces are behind the ongoing dynamics in a system. According to Even-Zohar, it

suffices to recognize that it is the *interdependencies* between these factors which allow them to function in the first place. Thus, a CONSUMER may “consume” a PRODUCT produced by a PRODUCER, but in order for the “product” (such as “text”) to be generated, a common REPERTOIRE must exist, whose usability is determined by some INSTITUTION. A MARKET must exist where such a good can be transmitted. None of the factors enumerated can be described to function in isolation, and the kind of relations that may be detected run across all possible axes of the scheme. (Even-Zohar 1990: 34, original emphasis)

What seems to be implicitly “meant”, but not openly expressed, are the conditions of the social interactions in question. What is the nature of the political and social relationships between the groups involved in these processes? And what are the criteria underlying the “generation” of a product or the “existence” of a market? These and other questions illustrate that Even-Zohar’s words remain directly related to the text – as Edwin Gentzler points out: “Even-Zohar seldom relates texts to the ‘real conditions’ of their production, only to hypothetical structural models and abstract generalizations” (Gentzler 1993: 123). Even-Zohar thus fails to integrate his “factors” (i.e. agents and institutions) into the frameworks of polysystem theory, and prefers to focus on the description of the existing relationships between them.

With regard to the mechanisms underlying the dynamics of the literary polysystem, which are supposed to condition the translation production process, Even-Zohar claims that some of the reasons for the continual shifts between periphery and centre – which, he says, can enable the introduction of translated literature into the system – are found in the “lack of repertoire” in the target literature (Even-Zohar 1990: 47). This seems to be a category of polysystem theory which has the potential to disclose the driving conditions of the literary system.

Even-Zohar defines repertoire as “the aggregate of rules and materials which govern both the making and use of any given product” (ibid.: 39; see also ibid.: 17 and 207ff.) and as “shared knowledge necessary for producing [...] various [...] products for the literary system”. He also postulates that there might be a repertoire for “behaving as one should expect from a literary agent” (ibid.: 40).⁷ Although the notion of repertoire is often linked to grammar or lexicon, it implicitly bears the social, cultural, economic or other aspects which generate cultural products, among them translations. Even-Zohar, however, never discusses these aspects explicitly, and fails to consider the agents operating at the base of “repertoire”.

Within the wider realm of systemic-oriented translation studies, a 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: what norms are applicable to whom and in what context, in what way are norms accepted, and how does a change in norms operate (Bahrdt 2000: 48). However, if we accept the significance of norms in moulding social structures, they become paramount to the discussion of social forces in translation. Norms operate in each phase of the translation process: in the selection of texts, by determining what source languages 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.

Toury calls attention to the relevance of norms for translator training institutes, and remarks on the importance of feedback. Translators undergo a socialisation process during which feedback procedures, motivated by norms, are assimilated. This helps them to develop strategies for coping with the various problems they encounter during actual translation, and in some cases translators might even adopt automatized techniques to resolve specific problems. This internalisation

7. Rakefet Sheffy, too, recognizes the social potential of “repertoires”: “Certainly, such [a repertoire-oriented] approach to systems is amenable to sociological perspectives” (Sheffy 1997: 36). For his part, Theo Hermans denounces the aspect of automatism in these processes of change, which “become self-propelling and cyclical: the canonized centre does what it does, and when it is overrun a new centre repeats the pattern, as if the whole thing were on automatic pilot” (Hermans 1999: 118).

process is reminiscent of the translator's *habitus*, introduced by Bourdieu and is conceptualized by Toury as follows:

It may also be hypothesized that to the extent that a norm has indeed been internalized and made part of a modified competence, it will also be applied to the production of more spontaneous translated utterances, in situations where no sanctions are likely to be imposed. [The translator's] behavioural varieties [...] may therefore prove a useful tool for checking not only the prevailing norms as such, but also their assimilation by individuals and, in the long run, the universals of the process of assimilation itself. (Toury 1995: 250)

The “agreements and conventions” underlying the practice of translation are continuously negotiated by the people and institutions involved. When considering translation as a norm-governed activity we must take into account the status held by translators within their specific setting and the references they make to the norms they constantly create, agree upon, maintain and break, applying them to different translation situations (Toury 1999: 20).

In his theoretical work, Toury gives the social role of norms a major position – but without conceptualizing them in terms of their socially conditioned context and of the factors involved. Consequently, a sociological framework based on a concept of norms should include the analysis of both the contingent elements responsible for the reconstruction of norms and the internalisation of norms, which ultimately contribute to a specific “translational behaviour” partly based on the negotiation skills between the various subjects involved in the translation procedure. Most of these elements are pointed out by Toury, but he has not so far linked them to a socially driven methodology. Nevertheless, Toury seems quite aware of the need to accentuate societal questions more strongly:

I believe it is about time [to supply] better, more comprehensive and more flexible explanations of the translational behaviour of individuals within a social context. (Toury 1999: 28–29)

Theo Hermans further develops the norm concept by focusing on its broader, social function, and particularly stresses its relevance in relation to power and ideology. Hermans has, perhaps more explicitly than any other scholar, 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 1996: 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 behaviour, involving a degree of ‘interpersonal coordination’ among those taking part (selecting and attuning an appropriate code, recognising and interpreting the code, paying atten-

tion, eliminating ‘noise’, etc.)” (ibid.:29; see also Hermans 1997:7). In addition, the relative positions and interests of the participants have to be taken into account in order to contextualize the social dimension of the creation and reception of translation.

Hermans finds that empirical studies have yet to elaborate a theoretical framework which encompasses both the social and ideological impact of translation. In his opinion, emphasis on the analysis of norms could be a first step towards such a framework. Norms are, after all, involved in all stages of the translation procedure and thus define “the contours of translation as a recognized, social category” (ibid.:42). A further step into the conceptualization of “the social” within translation – which would include the concept of norms – could be the elaboration of methodological instruments to help give detailed insight into the social conditions of the translator’s and other agents’ labour, and into the social forces that drive the translation process. Systemic approaches to translation have taken these questions into account, but have not yet managed to elaborate them within a coherent theoretical framework.

The view of translation as social practice is also central to the work of André Lefevere. In particular, the notion of “rewriting” is one that denotes both the manipulative interventions on the level of the text and the cultural (literary) devices 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 determined mainly by ideology. Lefevere not only ascribes a social dimension to this notion (Lefevere 1998:48), but also extends it by means of Bourdieu’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” (ibid.:41).⁸ The rewriting concept also draws on other concepts closely linked to Bourdieusian categories – economic capital as an important contribution to the final shape of a translation, and “status” (viz “social and/or symbolic capital”), which is responsible for positioning the “patrons” in their respective literary system and is vital for the conceptualization of a sociology of translation.

Through their concentration on the role of various participants in the translation enterprise (initiator, commissioner, source and target text producer, user, receiver, etc.) with the aim of accomplishing the declared *skopos*, a good deal of the functional approaches can be regarded as sociologically motivated, having shifted their main focus from texts to the mediators of these texts. Attempting to

8. The slightly fuzzy use of the notion “cultural capital” by Lefevere cannot be fully associated with the Bourdieusian notion. See in detail Wolf (2005b:103).

transcend the equivalence postulate, functionalism-oriented scholars explore the professional domain of translation, which is linked with a view of translation as an intercultural communication act (Nord 1991:9). For *skopos* theory in the narrower sense, however, it seems that a vague notion of culture is rather an obstacle to a sociological perspective, because the concept of culture – idio, dia and para-culture (Vermeer 1990: 32) – suggests social restraint yet does not fully consider it as an object of investigation. The social forces behind the communicative acts that select and prepare the *skopos*-ready cultural product for reception in the target culture are not conceptualized in a discursive net. Doing so, would ultimately allow us to foreground the constraints informing the decisions taken in favour (or against) a declared *skopos*.

Justa Holz-Mänttari's "translational action model" might *a priori* serve as a better basis for a sociologically driven translation analysis. Her model seeks to develop a framework that would allow for the cooperation of the subjects participating in the social make-up of translation. The model poses as its parameters the specific qualification of the persons involved, the necessity of cooperation, and the agents' professionalism resulting from these requirements. All these factors enforce the idea of translation as social practice. Yet when Holz-Mänttari claims that a translation – at least ideally – is produced according to prior agreement of all subjects involved, we are reminded of Hans Hönic, who argues that this kind of notion is based on a horizontally conceptualized model of society, one which in fact does not correspond to the hierarchical relationships that exist between the agents in Holz-Mänttari's model (Hönic 1992: 3; see also Wolf 1999). These hierarchies could be revealed by studying both the connections existing between the various agents and the conditions underlying their relationships.

The category of the power relationships operating in translation has become an important research topic over the last few decades. Apart from certain informative articles, such as Peter Fawcett's "Translation and Power Play" (1995), which can be regarded as one of the first systematic investigations into the implications of power and translation, the collection of essays edited by Román Álvarez and Carmen-África Vidal (1996) set the course for a more detailed examination of translation viewed as a politically motivated activity. Álvarez and Vidal seek to analyze the relationship between the production of knowledge in a given culture and its transfer, as well as the location of knowledge within the target culture. They concentrate on the figure of the translator, "who can be the authority who manipulates the culture, politics, literature, and their acceptance (or lack thereof) in the target culture" (ibid.: 2). As for Lawrence Venuti, the central value he gives to the question of power relations in translation is already revealed in his view of translation itself. He conceives of translation as "cultural political practice, constructing or critiquing ideology-stamped identities for foreign cultures, affirming

or transgressing discursive values and institutional limits in the target-language culture” (Venuti 1995: 19), and articulates the implications of these limits for the translator’s position in society alongside the social implicatedness of translation (Venuti 1998: 3).⁹ The link between the manifestation of power and domination in the creation of a translation and the phenomenon of the translator’s “invisibility” seems obvious. Once we acknowledge that this invisibility has been (and still is) an essential requirement of acceptability, there are undoubtedly aspects of power at work as long as the translator’s presence in the target text is masked by “fluent” strategies, or so Venuti would argue (1995: 22). The more visible the translator is within the text, the less likely it is that he or she can be ignored, marginalized or insufficiently rewarded (Arrojo 1997: 130).

“Power” is thus not only – as stated by Edwin Gentzler and Maria Tymoczko – “the key topic that has provided the impetus for the new directions that translation studies have taken since the cultural turn” (Gentzler and Tymoczko 2002: XVI), but also one of the driving forces of a social view of the translation process, and as such a key issue to be analysed in what has been labelled “sociology of translation”. As will be shown, Pierre Bourdieu offered one of the most influential frameworks for studying of the factors which condition the power relations inherent in both the practice and theory of translation. Those factors help to shed light on questions such as the impact that translation can have or actually has on social change, or the relation of social factors of dominance to the selection and ultimately the shaping of translations.

To sum up this short survey, the assertion of Gentzler and Tymoczko that translation is “a deliberate and conscious act of selection, assemblage, structuration, and fabrication” (ibid.: XXI) hints at the paramount importance of analysing social aspects in translation and calls for discussion of both the translator’s task creating knowledge and his/her contribution to the shaping of culture *and* society. In addition, poststructuralist concepts produce deeper insights into these procedures, as they tend to question basic categories of social sciences such as action, subject, society or social structure (Stäheli 2000). This opens up new perspectives on the functioning of translation and interpreting as a social practice, including self-reflexivity as a crucial issue in the development of the analytical instruments of a sociology of translation. The next section will explore the major questions that have so far been asked concerning the development of a sociology

9. See also Venuti (1992: 10). The association of “power” and the social implications of translation is also discussed by Erich Prunč. As he points out in this volume, a social practice approach to translation calls attention to the process of negotiation based on agencies of power, since the differentials between cultures in terms of power and prestige correlate with the prestige and social position of the agents involved in the translation process.

of translation, and will look at the sociological methods that have been adopted to deal with these questions within a translational context.

The methodological framing of a sociology of translation

Traditional approaches to translation studies have shown a certain awareness of socially driven questions in translation. They have not, however, coherently synthesized the various issues raised, and little work has been done on the theorisation of these questions. Obviously, there is quite a difference between a more or less vague consciousness of research deficits and systematic research on social aspects of translation.

In a recently published paper “Translation and Society: The Emergence of a Conceptual Relationship”, Daniel Simeoni (2005) aims to disclose the reasons for the delayed attention given to social issues in translation studies. He states that although, over the centuries, discourses characterising the practice of translation have always been fundamentally social in nature, the observations remained mostly limited to the particular text under discussion. Even in the 1980s, with an increasing emphasis on the environment of translation, the major contributions “remained attached to a primarily formal, and only secondarily social, worldview” (ibid.: 4). One of Simeoni’s major arguments is that a “sociological eye” was regarded as secondary in the establishment of the academic field, which in the course of a more “contextualising” comprehension of translation rather accentuated the culturalist paradigm; he argues that this has to be seen in the broader context of scientific conceptions which traditionally have been nationalistically induced (ibid.: 12).¹⁰

Nevertheless, the “sociological eye” has been sharpened in the last few years. This section will look into these developments which can be discussed under the umbrella notion of a “sociology of translation”. It seems as though several different “sociologies” can be identified so far: one which, in the classical sociological tradition, focuses on the agents active in translation production, another which emphasizes the “translation process”, while a “sociology of the cultural product” scrutinizes the construction of social identities. A cluster of approaches delivers the theoretical and methodological groundwork for a view of translation and interpreting as a social practice, drawing on the works of various sociologists, and,

10. Simeoni also argues that on the institutional level, academic tradition in Europe has been influenced by a “proverbial provincialism of research in national institutions” which, for a long time, did not consider acceptable the entire cultural-studies paradigm as developed in North America (Simeoni 2005: 7).