

The translator's social environments: an interdisciplinary coexistence of Translation and Sociological Studies

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Abstract: *Sociological approaches to translation have been developed on the theoretical basis that translation is an activity that is closely affected by social parameters. Gambier, in his article "Pour une sociotraduction" (2006) stresses that the problem regarding the interrelationship between Translation and Sociology dates back to the establishment of Translation Studies as a scientific field. In addition, Toury (1999) claims that translation is mostly a socio-cultural activity stressing the nature of norms as social categories that are crucial factors in the socialization process of translation. The aim of this paper is to examine the connection between the scientific domain of Translation with Sociology and its impact on the practice of translation. In other words, it intends to offer a framework of reflection on the applications of sociological theories to the translation process and pose basic questions on the nature of translation as "a socially - oriented activity" (Hermans, 1997). Such an approach aims at investigating the implications of the social role of the translator for translator training. At first, the interdisciplinary nature of translation is discussed, mainly in relation to Sociological Studies. Within this framework, some basic sociological theories that had an impact on Translation Studies and the translation phenomenon are briefly analyzed. The research also touches upon the issue of how to integrate the social dimension of translation into translator training programs so that students get sensitized regarding the translator's role as a "social mediator". More specifically, some methodological approaches on how to teach the notion of socialization of translation in a translator training program have been suggested. The main conclusion that is drawn is that the social element cannot be regarded as detached from the translation phenomenon. This implies that if we neglect social practices, the branch within Translation Studies called "Sociology of translation" will simply outsource the problem of methodology.*

Keywords: *interdisciplinarity, Translation Studies, Sociology, translator training, translator as social mediator.*

Résumé : *Les approches sociologiques de la traduction ont été développées sur la base théorique que la traduction est une activité étroitement affectée par des paramètres sociaux. Gambier, dans son article « Pour une sociotraduction » (2006) souligne que le problème de l'interrelation entre traduction et sociologie remonte à la constitution de la traductologie comme discipline scientifique. En outre, Toury (1999) affirme que la traduction est principalement une activité socioculturelle soulignant la nature des normes en tant que catégories sociales qui sont des facteurs cruciaux dans le processus de socialisation de la traduction. L'objectif de cet article est d'examiner le lien entre le domaine scientifique de la traduction et la sociologie*

et son impact sur la pratique de la traduction. En d'autres termes, il entend offrir un cadre de réflexion sur les applications des théories sociologiques au processus de traduction et poser des questions fondamentales sur la nature de la traduction comme « une activité socialement orientée » (Hermans, 1997). Une telle approche vise à étudier les implications du rôle social du traducteur pour la formation des traducteurs. Dans un premier temps, la nature interdisciplinaire de la traduction est discutée, principalement en relation avec les études sociologiques. Dans ce cadre, quelques théories sociologiques fondamentales qui ont eu un impact sur la traductologie et le phénomène de la traduction sont brièvement analysées. La recherche aborde également la question de savoir comment intégrer la dimension sociale de la traduction dans les programmes de formation des traducteurs afin que les étudiants soient sensibilisés au rôle du traducteur en tant que « médiateur social ». Plus précisément, des approches méthodologiques sur la manière d'enseigner la notion de socialisation de la traduction dans un programme de formation de traducteur ont été proposées. La principale conclusion qui en est tirée est que l'élément social ne peut être considéré comme détaché du phénomène de traduction. Cela implique que si l'on néglige les pratiques sociales, la branche au sein de la traductologie appelée « Sociologie de la traduction » externalisera simplement le problème de la méthodologie.

Mots clés : *interdisciplinarité, traductologie, sociologie, formation de traducteur, traducteur comme médiateur social*

1. The interdisciplinary nature of translation

For the last two decades a series of articles refer to the interdisciplinary nature of translation, basically in relation to sociology. Moreover, many researchers connect the sociological with the cultural dimension in a series of systematic research on the field for the last thirty years (Angelleli, 2014; Pym, 2006; Douglas, 2020). The discussion about the disciplinary nature of translation is continually reinforced, a fact that can be explained, by the fact that the subject of research of Translation Studies is “located” at the point of contact among cultures.

Gambier (2006), who describes this relatively new interdisciplinary dialogue between Sociology and Translation Studies distinguishes between three types of interdisciplinarity. The first type is the interdisciplinarity of proximity of two or more scientific fields. This means that Translation Studies borrows concepts and tools from other fields depending on its needs. Gambier names this type of interdisciplinarity “pluridisciplinarité”, stressing that the random borrowing of analytic tools, without being integrated into a theoretical and methodological model with specific objectives, does not promote the interdisciplinary dialogue but rather causes confusion. The second type of interdisciplinarity concerns the integration of the scientific thought of other fields to translation and it is called “extradisciplinarité”. In this type of disciplinarity, Translation Studies welcomes the scientific thought and findings of other fields and vice versa which means that Translation Studies itself can offer to other disciplines different and interesting perspectives. The last type of interdisciplinarity is called “transdisciplinarité” in which case two or more cognitive areas transpose their borders for their reciprocal benefit. In other words, the borders of different scientific fields are reformulated. According to the previously mentioned definition of interdisciplinarity, two are the key-elements that seem to determine the translation procedure: the cultural and the social. The first level is the constructive and includes factors such as power, religion, economy e.t.c. The second level regards the participants in the translating process who continually internalize the previously mentioned constructions and act according to their ideology and values that have cultural implications. The close relationship between the social and the cultural level which is depicted in the so-called “cultural turn” in the field of Translation Studies, with

emphasis to the context of translations, is indisputable. As for the strategies used in translating the socio-cultural elements, general strategies that are ideologically-motivated, namely ‘foreignisation’ and ‘domestication’ are predominant (Abderraouf, 2019; Dorothy & Anne, 2019). Some other related issues hint to the role of the translator in bringing forth a set of influential factors to the interpretation activity. In his study, Thawabteh (2020) examined the notion of biased and unbiased translation through the analysis of various information versions exposed both in BBC and BBC Arabic. The authors concluded that where reciprocal tones were awaited for, the inverse was produced and this is traced back to a host of factors that include amongst others: the state of existing harmony between native and target language, the interpreter’s ideology, and what is regarded as harmonious with the target language culture.

2. The “sociological turn” in Translation Studies

Following the “cultural turn” of the 1980’s and 1990s that included to a great extent the social element, Translation Studies has started what is being called “a sociological turn” (Merkle 2008, p. 175). Translation process is seen as a social pratique with economical, political, ideological and cultural dimensions. According to the sociological approach to translation, there are many different factors that determine the success and quality of a translation, one of which is awareness of the various roles that translation plays in society and those that society assigns to the translator within an interrelated context.

3. Historical background

Until the late 90’s and the beginning of the 21st century, translation was not considered as a social activity but rather as a linguistic event. Among the factors which exercised some kind of control on the process of translation were infinite structures such as “equivalence”, a term that was defined syntactically and semantically, and not by the social network of all people with whom the translator interacted in order to perform a translation work. The basic criterion for translation assessment was “accuracy” that was defined narrowly in the framework of linguistic equivalence without laying emphasis on the needs of real people in authentic situations (Hanna et al, 2010). A translation was characterized as accurate in the sense that it transferred information without taking into account any other factors involved in the translation process such as the purpose of the translation, the historical circumstances, the social environment within which the translation action takes place e.t.c.

In a historical approach to the evolution of Translation Studies, we notice that up to the 60’s the cognitive field of Applied Linguistics and generally Linguistics was considered to be the basic discipline to tip off translation research. During the 70’s and mainly during the 80’s, translation theoreticians borrowed theoretical frameworks and methodologies from other cognitive fields such as psychology, anthropology, philosophy and cultural studies. Dizdar (2012, p. 53) mentions that the absence of institutional structures such as independent academic departments of translation, reinforced the dependence of translation research on other scientific fields, some of which have highly influenced the development of Translation Studies.

As far as the methodology of translation teaching is concerned, we notice that the first period of translation teaching is characterized by lack of a theoretical framework related to translation didactics issues. According to Kelly and Martin (2009, p. 294), translation is viewed as an innate talent that is cultivated through practice, an attitude that is partly explained by the successful occupation with the translation activity of people possessing as unique qualification their translation experience and lacking any theoretical training. Translators were either experts in foreign languages or bilinguals, self-taught to the majority or having received a kind of guidance by experienced translators. While Vermeer (1998, p. 60) stresses that translation depended on the knowledge of two languages, the source and the target language, and its teaching was based on the traditional methods of foreign language teaching.

We should also refer to the different attitudes regarding the broadest scientific field in which Translation Studies could be integrated. According to Liessman's analysis (Risku et al., 2010, p. 92), if it belongs to Humanistic Studies, its major role is to explore translator's role within society and cultural relations. Recently, technological innovation are on the move to enhance the quality of online translation; a field linked to computational linguistics studies where focus is shed on addressing the lacunae observed in the pragmatic competence of the translated text (Abadou, 2019). If translation theory is seen as a natural science, its basic aim is to understand the translation phenomenon as is the case with all natural phenomena. Finally, if Translation Studies is seen as an applied science, then it is closely related to the practice of translation and therefore it should aim at solving translation problems and improving translation strategies.

4. The impact of Sociology in Translation Studies

4.1. Sociological theories that have influenced the sociological approach to translation

Introduction

In this unit we will briefly refer to the sociological theories that have supported the sociologically oriented approaches to translation such as Bourdieu's, Luhmann's and Latour's work.

- **Bourdieu**

Some of the concepts of Bourdieu's approach that have exercised strong impact on the sociology of translation are the following:

Capital: every type of resources that can be used in the "power game" within a social field. There are four types of capital: the economic (assets, income, heritage), the cultural (attitudes and behaviour which make up all cultural goods that a person acquires as well as his competences and education), the social (relations, interrelations, social networks, team belonging) and the symbolic capital (recognition, prestige).

Field: a social field into which particular interests are expressed. It functions independently following its own rules. It includes competitive forces that fight for the control of rare goods and these are exactly the different forms of capital. The social field is made up of less or more autonomous fields and each field constitutes a field of power in a game of specific rules but with an uncertain result.

Habitus: a system of conceptions, schemes, moods and attitudes which are formed both conscientiously but, mostly, sub conscientiously during childhood and then during adulthood with the individual's participation in various teams. When individuals are socialized in similar circumstances, they develop similar habitus, that is called "team habitus" (social class, gender, nationality, profession).

The previously mentioned concepts have been applied repeatedly in the study of translation, although not all researchers have agreed about their significance to the translation system. In general, the basic point of discussion regards the extent to which translation constitutes a field with its own laws and competition and many different theoretical approaches have been expressed on this matter.

- **Niklas Luhmann**

According to Luhmann, every social system functions according to its own laws which come from the internal hierarchy of its parts and based on these it is self-produced. This means that society itself is a system, such as law, religion, economy, art, mass media e.t.c. Changes come from the interaction and constructive consistency of the autonomous, functionally differentiated systems and subsystems. Hence, translation constitutes a system made up of partial complex systems that reproduce the elements of which they are made up. These elements are communications which are produced and reproduced by a communication network and Luhmann believes they cannot exist out of this network. Hence, these social systems are systems of communication which act according to certain expectations.

Luhmann's theory has been integrated in the translation thought (Tyulenev 2012, Hermans 1999, Poltermann 1992, Denise, 2008). According to Tyulenev, translation can be regarded as a social system in its relation to other systems, within a framework of a dynamic relationship of interaction. Vermeer refers to Luhmann and the theory of social systems, adjusting it to Skopos Theory and indicating the complexity of translation as well as the translator's freedom and responsibility.

- **Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law**

The Actor-Network Theory was expressed in the 80's by a research team, namely Michel Callon, Bruno Latour and John Law. According to their theory, society is formed by its networks and sociology just supervises the action of networks. These networks are constituted by an *actor's* initiative, they are characterized by hierarchical relations of representation and power and their empowerment depends on internal interrelationships or their relationship to other networks.

The translation process is important for the maintenance of these networks with which actors secure the communication among them on the basis of a common meaning that is continually in the process of negotiation. The Actor-Network Theory is used as a model for the depiction of the relations that are developed among *actors* in the translation process, connecting all the people involved in the translation process such as the translator, the author and the publisher.

4.2. The basic domains of sociologically - oriented translation research

In the field of Translation Studies, the sociologically oriented research involves three main domains that can methodically be summarized into: the translation, the translator and the translation as a social pratique. The first of these domains is the sociology of translation as a product, covering among other issues the selection, production and guarding of the translated texts. The second domain is the sociology of the translator as the most important, although not the only one, actor in the translation process, who is defined socially in various ways. The last domain is the sociology of translation as a process, where translation is recommended to be studied as a social pratique.

Gambier proposes certain domains that could be further investigated regarding translation and the translator. As far as the translator is concerned, the research could be directed toward the following fields:

- The collection of certain elements relating to the translator's life and habits investigation
- The translators' entrance to the professions (the first translation work that they have been assigned)
- The collection and analysis of collective work in various fields of translation and interpreting

As far as the translation is concerned, the basic fields that he suggests to be further investigated are related to:

- The position of translation as a strategy in the international relations at all levels the analysis of translation needs in certain domains
- The relationship between the industry needs and the offer as well as the Schools of Translation that are continually increased.

4.3. Toury's approach

Toury (1980, 1995), one of the basic representatives of the Sociological Turn in Translation, introduces the concept of norms that offers a steady basis to construct the social framework of translation. When he claims that translation is basically a sociocultural and hence guided by norms activity, and that translation activity involves adjustments, and as a consequence, changes, agreements, conventions and ways of behaviour, he stresses the nature of "norms" as social categories which are very important in the process of the sociology of translation. In other words, he claims that translation norms are learnt by the translator through a process of socialization by which he evolves and acquires what we call translation competence. The translator's behaviour is not neutral, but depends on certain socio-ideological conditions and restrictions meaning that it is adjusted to certain norms. His role is sociological and he is not just a mediator who transfers words and structural systems from one language to another. There is no denying that his choices are individual, however, they are directed to a certain degree by the norms that are in force in the social environment where he lives and works. These norms concern which texts to be translated, the translation methods and the type of equivalence to be achieved between the original text and its translation.

According to Toury (1980, pp. 53-57), the norms that intervene and influence the translation process are distinguished into three categories:

- Initial norm: it concerns the translator's basic choice, whether to be loyal to the original text or to embrace the norms that characterize the language and culture target.
- Preliminary norms: these norms concern factors that determine the text - types to be translated and the integration of the translated product to a certain civilization.
- Functional norms: these are the norms that determine the translation decisions to be taken during the translation process, mainly, linguistic choices.

4.4. Teaching the sociological dimension of translation in translator training programmes

If one of the goals of translator training is to train translators working in the framework of a professional team, then teaching the translator's social role must constitute a major objective of translation theory. Robinson (1997, p. 6) identifies translation theory teaching with the acquisition of two types of knowledge: the internal and external, stressing in both cases their social character. He considers that from the part of society (external knowledge) the basic function of translation theory is to develop translation rules and ensure their application by translators. On the contrary, from the translators' part (internal knowledge) translation theory helps translators solve translation problems and defend their translation choices when they receive some kind of critique. He comes to the conclusion that these two types of knowledge are major reasons for the theorization of translation and they are both sociological, because they produce arguments for the significance of translation theory, not by need from pure knowledge but by the translators' need to live and work in a society since translation is controlled by social networks. In addition, translators directly or indirectly are bound to the inter/intera social and personal identities which render the task more difficult to bring forth a clear context of the translated passage. Moreover, Yves (2006) clarified that translation, in simple terms, is communication in context. Actually, translated texts are facts related to the target culture that needs to be investigated in special contextual and situational setting.

There exists other assumption that consider the analysis of two approaches to translation where one targets minimizing the sense of foreignness in the translated text, the other ignores the target reader's consideration and focuses only on aspects related to not losing the primary meaning of the text (Chouit, 2019; Slimani, 2019).

The question that is raised is how to teach the notion of socialization of translation in a translator training programme. This is said with reference to the co-existence of two concepts related to culture namely universal and cultural words (Al Kouali, 2021; Mona, 2008). Situations introducing students to the socialization process could be integrated in the teaching of translation, such as student exposure to authentic translation environments, discussions on various professional matters, the contribution of professional translators as consultants in the classroom and opportunities for authentic translation activities. It is quite important for students to realise their active role in the political, economical and cultural life of the society where they live and work. Cronin suggests that we overcome the traditional theoretical translation course and implement courses that constitute a

combination of sociology and translation history, providing to students with the appropriate conceptual tools that would allow them to be visible in society not as simple translators but as intellectuals. Not far from this, Michael (2005) insisted on the need to consider the two orientations namely those emERICALLY oriented and the ones related to the field of cultural studies because both of them have a word on the quality of the translated extract.

5. Conclusion

The Sociological Turn in Translation Studies over the past few decades has begun to suggest that it is no longer fruitful to think of translation as basically the creation of an equivalent target text and only peripherally as a socially-oriented action. Beyond the business context, translators are social beings and their social affiliations have a significant impact on how they work and how they understand and use language. It is increasingly essential that we learn to integrate the two basic sides of the translator's work, the linguistic and the social, the textual and the professional in order to be able to respond to the increasing demands of the translator's profession.

It is therefore absolutely necessary that we integrate the social dimension of translation in the translator training process so that future translators acquire a deeper knowledge of their social role. The integration of the sociological nature of translation in translator training programmes can contribute so that the traditional gap between theory and practice to be gradually bridged, by not just teaching to future translators a set of techniques for resolving translation difficulties, but mainly by helping them to develop an awareness of the institutional role they are playing within society as well as the limitations of translation as a means of inter-community communication.

Also, knowledge of the sociological dimension of translation will probably have a positive impact on students' attitudes regarding the theoretical approach of their training and prevent them from being indifferent or even rejecting translation theory. As a consequence, the sociological approach to translation will help raise the low social status of the translator which can be explained by the existing diversity in translators' tasks and profiles, from the low-end non-professional linguistic mediators to the highly professional and highly qualified experts. Baker states (2008, p. 22) : "After the sociological turn, a more recent turn in Translation Studies takes for granted the highly professional translators who belong, to the same world as their clients and urges for a more socially aware, empowered, and ideologically committed translator to gate keep the flow of ideas, information and capitalism itself".

It is therefore important that the question pertinent to translation viewed as a social practice be placed at the core of the discipline. The present paper aims toward the development of a pedagogical approach that reflects the translation profession of today, preparing translation students for the challenges that await them tomorrow. Within this framework, the present research can contribute so that the newly developed translation approaches shift attention to research fields which so far have been under-researched such as professional institutions and their social role, questions of ethics in translation, sociopolitical aspects of translation, translation on the global market and many more.

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