



**Michaela Wolf, ed. *Übersetzen – Translating – Traduire: Towards a “Social Turn”?* Vienna and Berlin, Lit Verlag, “Repräsentation – Transformation. Translating across Cultures and Societies,” 2006, 367 p.**

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## COMPTES RENDUS

**Michaela Wolf, ed. *Übersetzen – Translating – Traduire: Towards a “Social Turn”?* Vienna and Berlin, Lit Verlag, “Repräsentation – Transformation. Translating across Cultures and Societies,” 2006, 367 p.**

This is an important book. As the first substantial anthology of research united under the emerging sociological turn in Translation Studies, it marks a fork in the path of traditional enquiry. Naturally, this sort of book carries the responsibility of bi-directional vision: forging ahead necessarily goes hand-in-hand with a careful retrospective assessment of the paths leading to this point. This, Michaela Wolf accomplishes admirably in both her choice of materials and her foreword, aptly entitled “Translating and Interpreting as a Social Practice – Introspection into a New Field.” I interpret this as an epistemological metaphor of sorts, “introspection” referring to a look inward, a reflection on past modes of knowing as we move beyond into new ones. Past modes, she explains, can be charted as an evolution from the linguistic approach of theorists like Eugene Nida in the 1960s and 1970s to the cultural turn introduced by Bassnett and Lefevere in the early 1990s, with its appropriation of polysystem theory and descriptive studies (Even-Zohar, Toury), and its eventual convergence with post-colonial theory emphasizing discourse-based relations of force between colonial powers and cultural minorities. As for the new sociological modes, they are marked by our current appropriation of theorists like Niklas Luhmann, Pierre Bourdieu, and Bruno Latour. Of these three, the one whose concepts resonate most consistently through the subsequent chapters is Bourdieu.

A word of warning: the book requires reading competency in three languages—English (12 chapters), German (10 chapters), and French (8 chapters)—to be assimilated in its entirety, a fact that is not necessarily problematic in a European context, but which may well hinder reception in a North American one. Of course, problems of this sort should not be overstated: if there is any readership that should be receptive to this sort of heteroglossia, it is one composed of translation scholars.

However, because embracing the principle of linguistic plurality does not, in itself, mean solving the problem of communicative functionality, it should also be pointed out that Wolf has taken care to provide all abstracts in English, and to separate the 30 pieces of this 367-page anthology into 6 sections of 4-6 chapters each, each section subsumed under a separate English-language title uniting its chapters under a single theme. And in this sense, the book, for its breadth of scope, achieves a singular structural balance. Wolf's editorial discipline is doubtless to thank. There is a striking homogeneity in chapter length, exactly ten pages for virtually every piece, including documentation.

Power relations between institutions and translating agents form the recurring theme of the first section, entitled "Symbolic Power in the Translation Field." All five of its chapters—with the exception of the first: Sabina Matter-Seibel ("Margaret Fullers Übersetzungen deutscher Werke: Soziale Entstehungsbedingungen und genderspezifische Aspekte," pp. 23-34) on Margaret Fuller and her translation of Goethe as a means of advancing the cause of women in 19<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal New England—draw directly on Bourdieu, either to frame the translator in his/her "habitus" (Hannes Schweiger, "Habituelle Divergenzen – Siegfried Trebitsch als Übersetzer und Vermittler George Bernard Shaws," pp. 45-54) or to demonstrate how the power relations constructing the "fields" of publishing influence the translation and circulation of texts. Denise Merkle ("Towards a Sociology of Censorship: Translation in the Late-Victorian Publishing Field," pp. 35-44), for example, is interested in the social stratification of late-Victorian England, and specifically in the role played by its two-tier publishing system in the success of Richard Burton's *The Thousand Nights and a Night*. Ileana Dimitriu ("'Symbolic Power' and 'Worldmaking' in Politically Over-Determined Times: Translation and Social Practice under Dictatorship," pp. 55-64), for her part, is concerned with translation as a vehicle for "symbolic power" in dictatorial regimes. Finally, Yvonne Lindqvist ("Consecration Mechanisms. The Reconstruction of the Swedish Field of High Prestige Literary Translation during the 1980s and 1990s," pp. 65-75) levies the concept of "consecration" to begin constructing a field of high prestige in the Swedish publishing system.

Section 2 is entitled “Social Inquiries into a Field Under Construction,” and its focus, again with the exception of one piece, is on the functionalist (Nord and Risku) and cognitive (Gutt and Risku) models developed in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s: Leona Van Vaerenbergh (“Die Soziale und Kommunikative Dimension des Übersetzens: Funktionalistische und cognitive Translationstheorien im Vergleich,” pp. 99-108) provides a comparative study of Nord, Gutt and Risku’s major theoretical tenets; Michael Schreiber (“Loyalität und Literatur. Zur Anwendung des Loyalitätsbegriffs auf die literarische Übersetzung,” pp. 79-88) points up the inadequacies of one of these tenets—Nord’s “loyalty” to be specific—when it comes to discussing literary translation; and Alexander Künzli (“Die Loyalitätsbeziehungen der Übersetzungsrevisorin,” pp. 89-98) provides a straightforward empirical study on the “loyalty” of translation revisers. The exception is Kaisa Koskinen’s chapter (“Going into the Field. Ethnographic Methods in Translation Studies,” pp. 109-118) advocating for ethnographic methodologies in Translation Studies. This is, however, an exception “in theory” only, for despite the departure from the functionalist framework of the other pieces, the author shares the intention implicit in the entire section: to re-visit existing models, point up their potential weaknesses, and to suggest possible remedies in models from other disciplines.

As for section 3, “Ideological Pressures on the Production of Translation,” all five of its pieces focus on the constraints imposed by ideology and competing language groups upon the selection of texts for translation, and upon translation methodologies. Two of these—Iulia Mihalache’s discussion of the West’s initiatives to translate and publish in postcommunist Romania (“Acteurs du savoir et du savoir-faire dans le marché de la traduction en Roumanie postcommuniste,” pp. 121-130), and Kayode Kofoworola and Beatrice Okoh’s mapping of the competitive, multilingual landscape of Nigeria, with its consequences on translation (“Landmines and Booby-traps: Multilingualism and Translation in Nigeria,” pp. 163-173)—are more concerned with assessing the global situation in their respective nations than with addressing specific ideological concerns. The other three have a much sharper focus: Elżbieta Skibińska (“La traduction au

service de l'idéologie : 'Liste des lectures françaises' en polonais dans les années 1946-1960," pp. 131-142) marshals publishing statistics deftly in support of her claim that the political powers in post-war Poland favored the importation of French fiction writers that conformed in their social realism and anti-capitalist messages to the new socialist regime. Rachel Weissbrod ("Coping with Anti-Semitism in Hebrew Literary Translation," pp. 143-152) discusses the preliminary and operational norms (Toury) observed by Israeli translators turning foreign literature with anti-Semitic elements into Hebrew. Finally, Louise Ladouceur ("La parole du texte : oralité et traduction théâtrale au Canada," pp. 153-162) examines the problematic English rendering of playwright Michel Tremblay's *joual*, understood as a discursive marker of the French-Canadian identity and therefore as an ideological "prise de position" against both Anglo-American and European-French cultural hegemony.

The fourth section has a rather confusing title: "The Social Construction of Images in Translation." Given the theme uniting its six authors, one could easily imagine it re-formulated to read "Images of the Social Reconstructed through Translation." In an important sense, this section moves methodologically in a direction opposite to that of the previous one. Whereas the authors in the latter are preoccupied with the influence of social realities (ideology, specifically) upon translation practices, those of this fourth section appear to take a reverse approach and study translations with a view to gaining insight into the social realities out of which they emerged. Through the study of technical translations from the court of the French King Charles V, Wolfgang Pöckl ("Übersetzer und Übersetzung im Umkreis des französischen Königs Karl V. des Weisen (1364-1380)," pp. 177-186) infers a social dynamic of reciprocity among court scribes and translators. A historical record rife with negative characterizations of translators allows Francine Kaufmann ("L'interprète serviteur de plusieurs maîtres," pp. 187-198) to trace the evolving social image of the interpreter from the middle ages, through colonial empire, and into a globalized modernity. Alexandra Lopes ("Landscaping Emotion(s) – Translating Harriet Beecher Stowe in Portugal," pp. 199-208) and Corazon D. Villareal ("Translating Folklore and Social Practice in the

Philippines,” pp. 209-218) examine their respective corpora to gain an understanding of the “geography of memory” in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Portugal and of social practices in the colonial Philippines respectively. Maria José Coracini (“L’identité du traducteur : l’être entre langues-cultures,” pp. 219-230) examines questionnaires distributed to Brazilian translators to get a sense of how they position themselves in the socio-cultural “space-in-between,” and Freddie Plassard (“Dans quel horizon théorique analyser les listes de diffusion de traducteurs?” pp. 231-239) examines Internet distribution lists to determine how they have effectively re-positioned translators into global networks.

“Issues in the Sociology of Profession” is the title of the book’s fifth section, and as expected, it focuses on the social dynamics of various professional sectors. Rakefet Sela-Sheffy (“The Pursuit of Symbolic Capital by a Semi-Professional Group: The Case of Literary Translators in Israel,” pp. 243-252) examines the strategies deployed by professional translators to elevate their occupational prestige. Hanna Risku and Richard Pircher (“Translatory Cooperation: Roles, Skills and Coordination in Intercultural Text Design,” pp. 253-263)—in a chapter that could be described as Risku’s “cooperation principle” in action and that could, therefore, serve well as a companion piece to Leona Van Vaerenbergh’s chapter earlier on—discuss the relationship between the translators and technical communicators working for an Austrian translation agency. If cooperation and social networking are the operating principles in Risku and Pircher, then a distinct lack thereof is Catherine Way’s observation as she points up communication failures between freelance translators of degrees and diplomas in Spain and the academic institutions for which they mediate (“Recognising Academic Documents: The Role of the Translator,” pp. 266-273). Teresa Tomasziewicz (“Le comportement de l’interprète communautaire dans des interactions conflictuelles,” pp. 275-293) and Graham H. Turner (“Re-thinking the Sociology of Sign Language Interpreting and Translation: Some Challenges Posed by Deaf Practitioners,” pp. 286-293), for their part, address the socio-dynamics of specific translation situations. For Tomasziewicz, the focus is on potential conflicts arising in situations of community interpreting, and for Turner the socio-dynamics of interpreting for the deaf.

Finally, Cornelia Feyrer (“Welten, Werte, Wirklichkeiten: Aspekte der sozialen Praxis von Translation aus der Perspektive der Didaktik,” pp. 295-304) stresses the importance of educating medical translators and interpreters in the types of social parameters likely to frame their professional activities.

The chapters of the final section, “Literary Displacements,” tend toward the translation historical. All but one—Vera Elisabeth Gerling’s analysis of gender representations in German anthologies of Latin American literature (“Genderdiskurs und Habitus: lateinamerikanische Narrativik in deutschsprachigen Übersetzungsanthologien,” pp. 329-338), which seems more at home in the section focused on power (section 1)—begin by framing a specific historical period, and then proceed to examine the influence of the period’s social dynamics on the migratory flows of translated works. Luc van Doorslaer (“Ideologisch inspiriertes Idyll. Deutsche Übersetzung der flämischen Literatur unter der ‘Flamenpolitik’ des Ersten Weltkrieges,” pp. 307-316) shows how the Flemish Policy (“Flamenpolitik”) of World War I Germany was highly favorable for the flow of Flemish-to-German translations from Belgium into Germany. Teresa Seruya (“Zur Koexistenz von nationaler Kultur und internationaler Literatur unter dem *Estado Novo* Salazars,” pp. 317-328), for her part, focuses on the laws controlling the importation and manipulation (specifically in the form of censorship) of translated literature in Salazar’s Portugal between 1939 and 1950. Maud Leonhardt Santini’s focus is on Paris from 1970 to the present, during which time the city became a hub for the Arab intelligentsia fleeing conflict in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iran and Iraq (“Déplacements arabes : immigration intellectuelle et traduction littéraire,” pp. 339-347). With the flow of Arabs into France comes, as might be expected, a surge in the French publication of works translated from Arabic.

When it comes to being critical of this type of anthology, I prefer not to speak of individual pieces as laudable or questionable, as the so-called “stand-outs” or “better-left-outs.” Rather, it is to the epistemological underpinnings of the book as a whole that I turn my attention. Conceptual transferability between a lending discipline and a borrowing one seems to be

the book's chief ambition. This is necessarily a two-step process, the first being a convincing argument for the research value of integrating sociological conceptualities into Translation Studies, the second being the integration itself, the fulfillment of specific research objectives using the borrowed conceptualities and methodologies. When it comes to the first of these two steps, the book is without doubt successful. The focus of Translation Studies has indeed evolved in the last twenty years in a widening circle from the micro-structures of the text to discursive context, and ultimately to the human relations shaping the latter. A movement in the sociological direction is the logical next step, and every piece in the anthology bears witness to this.

However, there is still a substantial step from here to the actual examination of translation phenomena using the sociological conceptualities and methodologies currently favored. Our discipline is still at a stage of infatuation with theorists like Bourdieu. By this, I mean that we not only derive great hope and enthusiasm from his discourse, but that we also seek to appropriate this discourse and wield it as quickly and—I daresay—as cheaply as possible. Many of the pieces in this anthology attest to this sort of enthusiasm when appropriating concepts such as “field,” “position,” or “position-taking.” My own experience translating Bourdieu has convinced me that he was a structuralist at heart. His vision of the social is synchronic and highly system-based. His fields are carefully circumscribed, often assuming the visual-spatial dimensions of a Cartesian plane, on which the institutions under examination are “positioned” according to a specific array of criteria. Bourdieu’s “positions” are the result of a literal positioning upon this plane, one that would mark each institution’s standing with regard to all others under examination. I cannot help but think that the “field” achieves its most viable form in this graphic systematization of collected data. In other words, it is not the concept itself that is as important as *the labor of its re-construction*. Without the latter, a “field” becomes little more than a synonym for power-determined socio-context, a notion at least as old as Foucault.



This begs the question: should translation theorists be referring to a Bourdieusian “field,” or to a “position” assumed within it, when offering any type of social contextualization involving power relations? When Hannes Schweiger (p. 47) writes, for example, that Shaw “zählt zu den Häretikern im Feld,” or that Shaw’s translator Siegfried Trebitsch “nimmt die Position eines an bürgerlichen Normen orientierten Schriftstellers ein, der sich als politisch uninteressiert versteht...” is he really referring to a Bourdieusian “field” and a “position-taking,” or is this simply biographical contextualization masquerading in fashionable Bourdieusian language? When Ileana Dimitriu (p. 55) writes: “I shall focus on the literary translation field under the Soviet regime in Eastern Europe,” my immediate question is “has this field been re-constructed?” Or is the author really only asserting here that her focus will be on a number of translation practices that were influenced by power relations under the old Soviet regime? It is perhaps unfair to demand painstaking field re-construction as the price for using Bourdieu’s term. I do think it is fair, however, to demand more feasible types of follow-through in the use of this concept. Even in the restricted format of the 10-page chapter, some empirical data can be brought to bear, and some relative positioning of agents and institutions demonstrated. Many of the pieces in this anthology fail in this regard. There are others, such as Denise Merkle’s work on late-Victorian publishing, that fare better in drawing conclusions from a relative positioning of institutions considered synchronically. And finally there are a rare few that do indeed move in a distinctly Bourdieusian direction. Elżbieta Skibińska’s piece, with its meticulous collection and deft graphic positioning of data from Polish publishing houses from 1945 and 1960, is impressive.

There are also pieces that appear to adorn their introductions with Bourdieu’s now commonplace terms—“symbolic power,” “cultural capital,” etc.—for the sole purpose of spinning their discourse in the direction of academic fashion, and then fail to follow through in the rest of the piece with any other Bourdieusian concept, *even if it speaks so directly to the author’s argument that it practically begs for application*. “Symbolic capital,” for example, is the arch-concept to which Rakefet Sela-Sheffy broadly refers when invoking Israeli translators’ desire to gain

respect from other professional spheres. At the core of the chapter, however, is the “mystification,” the belief-system that literary translators generate around their activity in their pursuit of this respect. Conspicuously absent here, and begging for reference at least, if not necessarily detailed examination and application, is the concept of the “illusio.” This is the expectation created in the informed reader of any article framed in Bourdieusian terms and addressing the cohesion of a particular field through a self-generated belief system. A reader might interpret such an absence as a missed opportunity. He or she might also conclude that the author’s brief, initial interface with the fashionable sociologist is rhetorical at best, and that the piece might have done just as well without it.

My final quibble is with the rhetoric of territorialism that occasionally marks this anthology. A book that purports to strike out on a new path is inevitably faced with the arduous task of defining the distinctiveness of its new approach. This can be done in one of two ways: either the book posits the new approach as a complement to previous lines of enquiry, or it creates “straw men” out of the latter, dismisses them implicitly as misleading, false even. The chapters in this anthology are at their best when they are forging complementary bonds between the new “social turn” and earlier models with a basis in social determinism: the functionalist and functionalist/cognitive models of Nord and Risku, for example. At their worst, they persevere in the rhetoric of the cultural turn, which marked its territory by creating a straw man out of previous approaches grounded in structural linguistics. “Translation occurs between cultures, not between languages,” the rhetoric went, and so go Wolf’s opening lines: “The idea that translation takes place between cultures, not languages, has already been claimed as early as 1945 [...]” (p. 9). Surely we are beyond this disjunctive mode of arguing that is as vacuous as it is polemic. Indeed, the translation theoretical forerunners laying the groundwork for the “social turn”—Wolf invokes both polysystem theory and descriptive Translation Studies, for example—are all theories owing their conceptual groundwork to the structural linguistics that spawned them and never stopped informing them. The need to underscore the distinctiveness of a sociological approach is quite understandable, but why not an opening claim

that is conjunctive, rather than disjunctive? Why not take this opportunity to dispense with the old rhetoric of antagonism? Surely every approach contributes to the construction of the edifice.

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**Piotr Kuhiwczak and Karin Littau, eds. *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Clevedon, UK, Multilingual Matters, 2007, 186 p.**

This compact anthology does everything it claims to do: its contributors, all writing concisely and expertly while keeping their personal stamp, condense the relationship of culture, philosophy, linguistics, opera, cinema, and politics to translation and condense as well translation history and literary translation, not to mention over two millennia, into 147 pages (excluding bibliography and index).

And therein lies its risk for Translation Studies.

So, let us turn first to the negative implications, i.e., how this will give the skeptics of Translation Studies evidence in charging our interdisciplinary with dilettantism and derivativeness.

After all, with a companion like this it will no longer be necessary to have recourse to *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (1998) in order to avoid reading directly the disciplines which inform the interdisciplinary nexus of Translation Studies. Indeed in 94 words, Gunilla Anderman in "Linguistics and Translation" (p. 47) fills the one conspicuous gap in the *Encyclopedia*, i.e., the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. In fact, some contributors even refer to a source text via another Translation Studies scholar's accommodation of that source, making their summation thrice removed from the informing discipline.