



Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari, eds. *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, “Benjamins Translation Library,” 2007, 226 p.

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COMPTES RENDUS

Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari, eds. *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, "Benjamins Translation Library," 2007, 226 p.

True to its title, *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* is an attempt to define the contours of a sociology of translation whose emergence is arguably underway. The volume consists of an introduction and four parts, containing a total of ten essays. In her detailed introduction, Michaela Wolf attempts to give an overview of (and sometimes assess), among other things, the central literature on translation as a social practice, the contributions of theories of sociology to the study of translation and the main developments in the sociology of translation. She also discusses the terminology of this new subfield, for example, "sociology of translation" (p. 31).

The first part of the book contains two essays, one of which is written by Erich Prunč. In it, Prunč tries to show how (European) Translation Studies has contributed to the "subalternity" of the translator (p. 40). He also discusses the reasons for the dichotomy of the minor status of the translator and his/her essential "role in the construction of meaning in a transcultural exchange" (p. 39). In the other essay, Theo Hermans attempts to apply Niklas Luhmann's ideas to translation. He sees (or rather imagines) translation as a "social system" (p. 66) in which the translator "disappears" (p. 62), thus foregrounding the social dimension of translation, i.e., its *communicational* aspects (pp. 62-63 and 66-67).

The second part comprises three essays. Jean-Marc Gouanvic shows us how Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of "field" (p. 81), "*habitus*" (p. 82) and "*illusio*" (p. 87) can be usefully applied in thinking about translation as "a social practice" (p. 80). He ends his essay with a discussion on the "producing agent's capital" (*capital de l'agent producteur*) and "international legitimacies" (*légitimités internationales*) (pp. 89-90) as well as the self-reflexivity of Translation Studies scholars (pp. 91-92). As for Johan Heilbron

and Gisèle Sapiro, they suggest an “outline for a sociology of translation” (p. 93), inspired by Bourdieu’s theory, which will help overcome the limitations of the “interpretative approach to the text” and the “economic analysis of transnational exchanges” (pp. 93-94). In the third paper, Wolf attempts to “enhance” Bourdieu’s “theory of cultural production” (p. 109) in order to make possible an adequate “conceptualisation of a ‘mediation space’” (*ibid.*). She uses Homi Bhabha’s *Third Space* (p. 113) that, she maintains, can account for various transfer operations between fields and better reflect the specificity of the “translation domain” (p. 110).

In the third part, composed of three essays, Mirella Agorni proposes a new model for Translation Studies which will bring together the otherwise diverging quantitative (descriptive) and qualitative (explanatory) approaches. She advocates “localism” (p. 126) (derived from Maria Tymoczko’s work), a concept that can help researchers explore an activity as complex as translation, whose practices vary in different cultures. In the following essay, H el ene Buzelin adopts Bruno Latour’s theory in order to shed light on translation “in the making” (p. 135). Her analysis concentrates on findings compiled during two-years of fieldwork on literary translation in three Montreal-based publishing houses. In the section’s final essay, Andrew Chesterman tries to place “translation sociology” (p. 172) at the centre of Translation Studies, in an effort to bridge the discipline’s different approaches and prevent its further fragmentation. Translation sociology, he argues, can provide Translation Studies with “bridge concepts” (*ibid.*) like “practice” (p. 176), “discourse” (*ibid.*), “*habitus*” (p. 177), “norms” (p. 178), “brief” and “strategy” (*ibid.*).

In the fourth part of the book, Daniel Simeoni ponders the place of Translation Studies in the human and social sciences through a discussion of the evolution of history and sociology, while calling for the analysis of non-normative cases and translation choices (p. 201). As for Yves Gambier, he stresses the need for a “*socio-traductologie*” [sociology of Translation Studies] (p. 205), suggests possible orientations for this sociology and ponders the potential impact of these orientations on the field.

The book as a whole deserves praise for several reasons. First, it encompasses a broad array of approaches to the social aspects of translation and Translation Studies. For example, some studies have been inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, Bruno Latour, Niklas Luhmann and Bernard Lahire, whereas others rely on ideas and methods taken from ethnology and anthropology. Moreover, the book covers, though unevenly, both the “sociology of translation” (as a central issue) and the “sociology of Translation Studies.” Its scope is not only national, but also transnational and international. Although it cannot claim exhaustiveness in approach or method, it does draw a very broad conceptual map that will certainly inspire further research.

In addition to acquainting us with new or refined aspects of familiar theories—such as Gouanvic’s insightful work on “*sociologie de la traduction*”—the book is interesting in that it paves the way for the melioration of other theories. For example, Wolf attempts to “enhance” Bourdieu’s theory by using Bhabha’s *Third Space*, while Simeoni tries (once more) to improve on norm theory by borrowing Bourdieu’s concepts of “field” and “*habitus*.”

Moreover, the book is not without its share of theoretical novelty. Buzelin’s utilization of Latour’s concepts certainly contributes to the study of the concrete aspects of translation by bringing to the fore the production of literary translations “in action” and the various agents involved in the process. In addition, a new model for Translation Studies is proposed by Agorni, while Heilbron & Sapiro and Gambier outline new approaches to the study of the social dimension of translation and Translation Studies. Hermans’s use of Luhmann’s theory to shed new light on the social aspects of Translation Studies is also a novel theoretical approach. Yet, it remains to be seen whether a theory that excludes human agency can explain the social aspects of translation. In other words, the following questions require clear answers: how can translation (as an imagined system) “remember” (p. 64), choose or “decide” (p. 67) without human agency? Will such approaches not further marginalize the translator and confirm Prunč’s apparently legitimate claim? Other scholars, such as Chesterman, attempt to bridge the gap between the

various approaches and methods used in Translation Studies with the aim of consolidating the discipline. Yet, there is sometimes a tendency to overlook the differences between the various approaches from which they take their concepts. The result is the danger of creating confusion and incompatibilities; for example, “bridge concepts” (in Chesterman’s essay), “*habitus*” and “strategy” may not be compatible if used together. Specifically, Simeoni’s use of the “*habitus*” concept in conjunction with the “field” concept is an incomplete application of Bourdieu’s ideas, since it overlooks the principles at the centre of how a field functions. One wonders whether norm theory will be able to deal adequately with the subjective and non-normative aspects of translation just by borrowing one or two concepts from Bourdieu’s theory and overlooking the rest of his conceptual framework whose nature is essentially relational and interdependent. As for Wolf’s attempt to “enhance” Bourdieu’s theory by using Bhabha’s *Third Space*, I believe it is built on somewhat of an underestimation of the social traces that translations leave behind, be they accounts given in prefaces, interviews, articles, diaries, autobiographies, letters or (re)translations. When given the scholarly attention they are due, translations and peritextual materials can give us insights into how decisions were made in the past and help present and future translators (and other agents) situate the work of their predecessors in the space where their work was performed. It is indeed a dilemma not to be able to talk (yet) about translation as an autonomous and dynamic “field.” Clearly more work is required to come to terms with the concept of “translation field”—independent of the traditional literary, and other, fields—in which translators and other agents interact.

This book raises many important questions about translation and Translation Studies as a social practice. Unfortunately, the scope of a review has allowed us to discuss only some of them. Clearly, the book is a very welcome contribution and the most convincing proof to date of the emergence of a social (and sociological) turn in Translation Studies.

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