

OUTLINE OF A SOCIOLOGY OF TRANSLATION INFORMED BY THE IDEAS OF PIERRE BOURDIEU

Jean-Marc Gouanvic

Concordia University

Laura Schultz

Translator

Abstract

In this article I put forward a sociology of translation informed by the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Founded on a theory of action, this theory may be defined as a theory of translation practice. Translation practice is examined here through the study of the translation of symbolic goods, specifically American literature into French. The notions of 'field', 'habitus' and 'illusio' are briefly analysed and applied to American literature in French. The habitus of Marcel Duhamel and Maurice-Edgar Coindreau are examined, as well as the illusio specific to the science-fiction field. Bourdieusian sociology serves as a foundation for raising questions that are often discussed in translation studies but not dealt with in the article –questions of ethics, censorship, resistance, power...

Résumé

Dans cet article nous présentons une sociologie de la traduction informée par les idées de Pierre Bourdieu. Fondée sur une théorie de l'action pratique, cette théorie peut être définie comme une théorie de la pratique traductive. La pratique traductive est envisagée sur l'étude de la traduction de biens symboliques, spécifiquement de la littérature américaine en français. Sont brièvement analysées les notions de champ, d'habitus et d'illusio, appliquées à la littérature américaine en français. Les habitus de Marcel Duhamel et de Maurice-Edgar Coindreau sont examinés, ainsi que l'illusio propre au champ de la science-fiction. Sur ces notions de sociologie bourdieusienne, se greffent certaines questions qui se posent en traductologie mais ne sont pas traitées dans l'article, les questions de l'éthique, de la censure, de résistance, de pouvoir...

Keywords

Bourdieuian sociology of translation. Field. Habitus. Illusio. American literature. French literary fields.

Mots-clé

Sociologie bourdieusienne de la traduction. Champ. Habitus. Illusion. Littérature américaine. Champs de littérature en français.

1. Introduction

The dedication of one of the first issues of *MonTI* to applied sociology in translation studies is all but insignificant. The new journal highlights that the social aspect is fundamental in translation and that sociology can offer an appropriate theoretical framework for addressing the issue. We would like to present a model for a potential sociology of translation that invokes the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu, whom we believe to be one of the sociologists whose theory is most applicable to translation¹.

One of the advantages of a sociology of translation founded on Pierre Bourdieu's social ideas seems to reside in that a Bourdieusian sociology of translation is based on a social theory of symbolic goods, and in that this theory does not reduce literary objects to simple consumer goods. Thus, Bourdieu's theory is not essentially a theory of the strategic functions of social practice. As a result, the discourse of translation is less likely to succumb to functionalism or mechanism. Certainly, Bourdieu's theory was not designed for translation, but there is nothing precluding a sociological theory of translation from drawing upon his ideas. He initiated a discussion on translation in a text entitled "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas", but did not pursue it further². We will strive modestly to continue this examination.

1. A number of sociologists have offered possible adaptations of their theory to translation, for example Niklas Luhmann (adapted by Theo Hermans) and Bruno Latour (Hélène Buzelin). Theo Hermans and Hélène Buzelin could be referred to in order to further grasp the conditions of application of their theory.

2. Bourdieu states: "The fact that texts circulate without their context, that – to use my terms – they don't bring with them the field of production of which they are a product, and the fact that the recipients, who are themselves in a different field of production, re-interpret the texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstandings..." (Bourdieu 1999: 221).

2. Theory of Literary Translation Practice

Bourdieuian social theory is a theory of action³, meaning that it theorizes practice, which we extend to translation, to translation practice. At first glance, this conception brings to mind that of Antoine Berman, who defines translation studies as a reflection on *experience*⁴, a term which literally denotes practice. Nevertheless, practice as defined by Berman is distanced somewhat from the way it is defined by Bourdieu. On the one hand, we have a philosophical vision of practice (Berman's *experience*), and on the other, a sociological vision of practice. However, it would be possible to imagine practice encompassing experience (or vice versa) considering the importance of philosophical reflection in the development of Bourdieu's sociological framework⁵.

In order to analyse what translation practice means, we will focus on the translation of literary texts, in this case American literary texts into French. If we consider American literature translated into French from James Fenimore Cooper (1820) all the way to, say, Henry Miller (1960), it becomes evident that the publication of translations of American writers into French is regulated according to existing divisions in the target French culture, or the culture of translation, as demonstrated by the theoreticians of the Polysystem school⁶. What constitutes these divisions? In Bourdieu's theory, these divisions are what the sociologist dubs *fields*, as heterogeneous space is specified into autonomous fields. It is the distribution of texts according to specific traits that contributes to define fields. In literature, fields are defined as: realist fiction, science fiction, detective novel, youth fiction, etc. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) was published in French in NRF/Gallimard's "Du monde entier" series in 1931 (*Ladieu aux armes*, translated by Maurice-Edgar Coindreau), while Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* (1954) was published in French by Hachette's "le Rayon fantastique" series (Hachette/Gallimard) in 1956 (*Les cavernes d'acier*, translated by Jacques Brécard), Dashiell Hammett's *The Dain Curse* (1929) was published in French by Gallimard's "Série Noire" in 1950 (*Sang Maudit*, translated by Henri Robillot; first publication in 1933 also with Gallimard), and Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884 and 1885) is published in French by A. Hennuyer's "Bibliothèque nouvelle de la jeunesse" series in 1886 (*Les aventures de Huck Finn, l'ami de Tom Sawyer*, adapt-

3. Cf. P. Bourdieu's work entitled *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (1998).

4. See Berman (1989).

5. This practical dimension of the social theory of translation is fundamental: it unquestionably dismisses the classic, widespread opposition between theory and practice. We will not dwell on this subject.

6. See Gideon Toury (1995) in particular.

ed by William-Little Hughes). Every of these texts, be it source or translation, belongs to its own specific literary space⁷: the fields of realist fiction, science fiction, detective fiction, and youth fiction in our examples. All of these fields correspond to distinctive literary genres, with the exception of youth fiction, which is defined by its receiving public and is multi-genre. These translation characteristics are not only related to reception: they are also traits of the entire translation process, from pre- to post-production. In particular, they relate to translation agents (translators, publishers and managers of series, literary agents, literary directors, editors in chief of magazines, critics, etc.)⁸.

3. Translation and Source and Target Literary Fields

Symbolic (literary) goods, whether indigenous or imported, find a place in the target culture's literary fields. This positions the works in a unique relationship with the social world (economic, political...). The relationship that takes place in the field is marked by the phenomenon of refraction, in such a way as the literary work's field acts as a prism, eliminating any future interpretations of the work according to reflection theories⁹.

If we compare, for instance, the volume of translations of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) to J.F. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), it is evident that there is a plethora of translations of Cooper's novel, with dozens of translations published since 1826. Conversely, *A Farewell to Arms* has only been translated once (which was done by Maurice-Edgar Coindreau and published in 1931). This situation came about because of an absence of international legislation related to the publishing profession and copyright laws until 1886, when the Berne Convention was signed (a Convention which the U.S. did not sign, as a matter of fact). The lack of a legal framework in 1826 is essential for the explanation of this disparity. Nevertheless, legal progress is but one aspect of more fundamental progress, founded on the autonomy of literature in relation to other marketable activities.

7. According to Bourdieu, it is impossible to discuss "literary fields" before the time of Baudelaire and Flaubert (in France). The literary "field" emerged as a result of the inversion of world economic values and the tendency toward autonomy concerning economic needs. See Bourdieu (1983).

8. All of the examples of translation that we have referenced thus far are characterized by their insertion into specific literary fields (in the Bourdieusian sense of the word). Differentiated, specific and autonomous literary fields did not yet exist in the United States of James Fenimore Cooper, Herman Melville, Harriet Beecher Stowe, etc. This leaves a sociological imprint on the translation of particular ways of life (see Gouanvic 2003).

9. See Bourdieu (1996).

Bourdieu designates such activities as belonging to the literary field. But what is a field? Bourdieu defines a field as follows:

[...] the literary field is a force-field as well as a field of struggles which aim at transforming or maintaining the established relation of forces: each of the agents commits the force (the capital) that he has acquired through previous struggles to strategies that depend for their general direction on his position in the power struggle, that is, on his specific capital. (1990a: 143)

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

However, in translation, the fact of importing a symbolic good in a receiving culture contains another determining factor linked to symbolic capital, which is related to imported works and the global legitimacy of the source language/culture. Thus, the rise in popularity of Americanism that hit Europe, particularly France, after the Second World War may be interpreted in terms of the legitimacy of American culture and way of life that was imposed upon post-war European countries. Translation is a clue to a more general American hegemony in business, science and technology, a hegemony then translated into symbolic capital in literary fields. As stated by John Brown (1971): “The most lucid of critics, notably Harry Levin who put forth ‘Some European Views on Contemporary American Literature’ in *The American Writer and the European Tradition* (University of Minnesota Press 1950), notes that the success of American writers is not entirely of an artistic origin, but it stems from the prestige of a people playing a global role” (our translation, p. 16).

4. The Habitus of Translators

What is the role of the translator under such conditions? Like the literary agent, publisher, critic (and all other agents that are involved in the importation of the source work, its publication and its reception in the target space or specific field), the translator invests his or her capacities in translating according to experience acquired in the translation practice of a given field.

Thus, the team of translators brought together one at a time by Marcel Duhamel for the translation of American novels for the “Série Noire” (Gallimard) was not created without difficulty, but through trial and error, and such long procedures were founded on Duhamel’s strict control of texts. Duhamel thus created a team of translators with diverse backgrounds, but rarely intellectual. The translators’ personal histories were such that they would have to adapt their primary habitus in order to be consistent with Duhamel’s style of translation, who gave an absolute priority to orality. Initially it was Janine Hérisson (secretary and then translator), Henri Robillot (translator), Minnie Danzas (secretary and translator), who were trained on the job. To get an idea of their style of translating, the notion of *habitus* is useful, in that it refers to the social trajectory of the translators at the time they acquired a *practice* of translation specific to the “Série Noire”. Bourdieu defines the habitus as follows:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce “habitus”, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (1990b: 53)

The habitus is based on the technical acquisition of method and style proper to a specific literary field (or, according to circumstance, general literary field), but it is also based in a relational way on the social space of producers. The habitus of a translator, founded on distinctions between practices, is constructed on competition with the translations of other publishing houses. The “Série Noire” was in fierce competition with les Presses de la Cité, whose series “Un Mystère” put forth translations that Duhamel generally considered inadequate. Moreover, competition was latent with La Librairie des Champs-Élysées¹⁰ (“Le Masque” series), who came up against the “Série Noire” particularly in the detective-fiction reading public. Translators, like any agents, define their actions in relation to one another. The action guidelines received from the literary or series manager come from the distinction that the manager attempts to promote in his or her literary practice and that gives his or her actions specific characteristics. We have analyzed the habitus of Marcel

10. In a note to Claude Gallimard from the early 1950s, Duhamel wrote: “‘Le Masque’ pays what it pays, but asks for 120 pages of *charabia*, cut up into books of 3 at 400 pages each, of which we most often keep the uncut version” (our translation).

Duhamel and Maurice-Edgar Coindreau (2007) and it was found that the habitus of Faulkner's and of Southern American writers' translator (Coindreau) was on one hand conditioned by his intellectual education, namely with his trajectory as a specialist in the Spanish language and culture which led to his *agrégation* in Spanish. On the other hand, his habitus was determined by his *Vendée* origins and *Chouannerie*, a bloody episode of the French Revolution. Coindreau saw Faulkner's experience as similar to that of the Chouans, which Faulkner confirmed. He recognized the homology between the Chouans and the characters in his novels, who had to live in the South after its defeat in the American Civil War. Coindreau did not translate other various writers, in particular Ernest Hemingway¹¹, because of a predilection for his work. Rather, it was because Gaston Gallimard expressly requested it of him, and Gaston Gallimard was a man that could not be turned down.

Duhamel's habitus is the exact opposite of Coindreau's. As much as Coindreau was a French intellectual, an *agrégé* of Spanish, Duhamel was obviously educated according to circumstance. He left school early (probably at the age of 12). Circumstance led him to England with his half-sister. There, he learned English by working in a Manchester hotel during the First World War at the age of 15. He then performed his military service in Turkey where he met Jacques Prévert and Yves Tanguy, who became life-long friends. In 1924, he settled at 54 de la rue du Château¹² with his friends. This small community would become one of the first cradles of the emerging surrealist movement. He tried his hand at translation without any intentions of being published. Just before the Second World War, he became involved with Tobis-Klangfilm, where he participated in the dubbing of American detective films with Bogart, Paul Muni, etc. During and at the end of the war, he made close ties with Éditions Gallimard, founding "La Série Noire" in 1945.

Coindreau and Duhamel's respective ideas on literature do not have much in common: Coindreau appreciated literature rather as historical failures overcome by fiction. Conversely, Duhamel's preferred novels represented struggles against the unjust domination of the underprivileged, not necessarily expressed seriously, but in a lighthearted way. This might explain why the translation of a novel such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) was abandoned by

11. In fact, Coindreau (1974) profoundly detested Hemingway. He considered that the genuine writers of the Lost Generation were not the Parisian expatriates of the 1920s, but Faulkner, Goyen and O'Connor.

12. It was with Marcel Duhamel's (1972) salary that they were able to live on rue du Château, as Duhamel was the manager of Hotel Ambassadeur, his father-in-law's property (his mother was remarried).

Coindreau and picked up by Duhamel after approximately 50 pages. Steinbeck's worldview is much more consistent with Duhamel's ideas, in particular concerning the importance of the federal state, the social consequences (on the rural class) of the 1929 stock-market crash and the critique of banks and financial institutions.

5. *Illusio* and Translation

In P. Bourdieu's theory, the practice of textual producers (writers and translators) is accounted for by the *illusio*, "that originating adherence to the literary game which grounds the belief in the importance or interest of literary fictions" (1996: 333). Literary fields feature a distinctive and specific *illusio* in accordance with readers' tastes. The *illusio* of science fiction is founded on the representation of alternate universes that are conveyed through themes representing environmental, biological and/or socio-historical otherness: stories of advanced technologies (for example, robots), planets inhabited by forms of extraterrestrial life, of past or future far-away lands. The expressive storytelling techniques that are employed are as complex as in any other genre. They are characterized through distinctive semiotic (lexical) techniques, the use of which Marc Angenot dubs "fiction-words" (1978), which designate the type and model whose entire meaning is to be conjectured by the reader (Gouanvic 1999: 76-77). In the translation of these fiction-words, the entire story is conveyed. In Isaac Asimov's *The Caves of Steel* (1954), fictitious technolects abound: *Laws of Robotics*, *Spacers*, *Subetherics*, *Textron*, *Keratofiber*, etc. These fiction-words create the *illusio* of the science-fiction narrative that the translator must translate in such a way that the reader will adhere to the fiction, creating a make-believe world that is just as convincing in French as in English. Now, obviously it is not the fiction-words that are difficult to translate. The fiction-words mentioned above are translated as *les Lois de la robotique*, *les Spaciens*, *Subéthérique*, *Textron*, *Kératofibre*... English and French are etymological sister-languages. American science-fiction writers create fiction-words from Greco-Latin roots, as do the translators. The translator's task is to deliver the novel's rhetoric, and to do so with a similar plausibility to that of the original: the fictionalizing of hypothetical science and technology, representation of human and extraterrestrial groups, and the effects of science on society. If the translator does not carefully perform his or her task, the translated text will not contain the same *illusio* potential as the original. This would lead the work to be "unsuccessful" with the francophone reader, who could then risk abandoning the reading of the novel or adopt a negative opinion of the original author who is lauded in his or her home culture. The

literary *illusio* is, as stated by Bourdieu, characterized by an adherence to the literary game offered in autonomous and specific literary fields. Translation consists in homologically reconstructing the original text's *illusio* in the receiving language and culture, and once a translator achieves the creation of a homological *illusio*, we are potentially presented with an ethical translation, which is due to the coincidence of the *illusio* of texts.

6. Conclusion

We see apparently that Pierre Bourdieu's theory is liable to contribute a fruitful framework to translation studies with its sociological analysis of practice. Bourdieusian sociology allows for all of the characteristics of translation to be addressed: from the influences on translation in the source society to the translation as a product in the target society, translation agents (most importantly the translator, but also the publisher, series director, critic...), and translation as production. This final aspect is the nodal point of P. Bourdieu's theory and makes his ideas particularly interesting from a translation standpoint. By placing oneself in relation to the practice (as defined by Bourdieu) of translation, it is not only possible to analyse it in its space, in relation to its agents and their habitus, the rules governing the text's *illusio* (which we outlined in this article), but it is also possible to examine the symbolic capital of the cultures in question, the homology of the translation and the original, and perform a contrastive analysis of source and target texts... With these notions it is possible to ask oneself questions concerning ethics, censorship, resistance, power struggles, and the limits of translation. In particular, questions may arise concerning other "translation" practices (in the greater sense of the term), such as adaptation by abridgment. The aspect of adaptation via abridgment in translated youth fiction is our current focus. After dealing with the translation of American realist novels from 1920 to 1960 (2007), we are addressing a new question: will an ethic of adaptation arise alongside the ethics of translation?¹³ Is it not strange that we hand children adapted novels that could be classified as unethical from a translation point of view? It is questions such as these that Pierre Bourdieu's theory applied to translation attempts to answer.

13. What then becomes of an adaptation, as adaptations are generally deemed to be ethnocentric and/or hypertextual? See Berman (1984).

References

- ANGENOT, Marc. (1978) "Le Paradigme absent: éléments d'une sémiotique de la science-fiction". *Poétique* (Seuil), 33, février. pp. 74-89.
- BERMAN, Antoine. (1984) "Traduction ethnocentrique et traduction hypertextuelle". *L'Écrit du temps*, 7, été. pp. 109-123.
- BERMAN, Antoine. (1989) "La traduction et ses discours". *Meta*, vol. 34:4. pp. 672-679.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1983) "The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed". *Poetics*, 12. pp. 311-356.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1999) "The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas". In: Shusterman, Richard (ed.) *Bourdieu: a Critical Reader*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers. pp. 220-228.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1990a) *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Translated by Matthew Adamson. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1990b) *The Logic of Practice*. Translated by Richard Nice. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1996) *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary World*. Translated by Susan Emanuel. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
- BOURDIEU, Pierre. (1998) *Practical Reason. On the Theory of Action*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- BROWN, John. (1971) *Panorama de la littérature contemporaine aux États-Unis* (Nouvelle édition refondue). Paris: Gallimard.
- COINDREAU, Maurice-Edgar. (1974) *Mémoires d'un traducteur* (Propos recueillis par Christian Giudicelli). Paris: Gallimard.
- DUHAMEL, Marcel. (1972) *Raconte pas ta vie!* Paris: Mercure de France.
- GOUANVIC, Jean-Marc. (1999) *Sociologie de la traduction. La science-fiction américaine dans l'espace culturel français des années 1950*. Arras: Artois Presses Université. Coll. "Traductologie".
- GOUANVIC, Jean-Marc. (2003) "De la traduction à l'adaptation pour les jeunes: Socioanalyse du *Dernier des Mohicans* de James Fenimore Cooper en français". *Meta*, 48:1-2 (mai). pp. 31-46.
- GOUANVIC, Jean-Marc. (2007) *Pratique sociale de la traduction. Le roman réaliste américain dans le champ littéraire français (1920-1960)*. Arras: Artois Presses Université. Coll. "Traductologie".
- TOURY, Gideon. (1995) *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*. Amsterdam / Philadelphia: John Benjamins.