



Some remarks on the sociology of translation: A reflection on the global production and circulation of sociological works

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Abstract

This article explores the emerging field of the sociology of translation and, at the same time, outlines the relevance of translation for sociology with respect to the global production and circulation of sociological works. Drawing on already existing accounts developed in interdisciplinary translation studies, it is argued that an awareness of the complex nature of translation is fundamental for a self-understanding of the sociological endeavour. The article is divided into three main parts which deal, first, with the role of translation in the international circulation of social theory and its importance for an intellectual history of the discipline; second, its intervention in sociological research and the methodological implications thereof, and third, with a reflexive approach to translation in the sociological field.

Keywords

cultural transfer, international circulation of social theory, sociology of culture, sociology of translation

This article explores the emerging field of the sociology of translation and, at the same time, outlines the relevance of translation for sociology with respect to the reception of sociological theory and the history of sociological works, as well as to methodological

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issues regarding sociological research and interpretation. By drawing attention to the key mediating role of this frequently ignored and nevertheless ubiquitous practice, it seeks to question the assumed immediacy of the reception of sociological inquiry. The often overlooked significance of translation in the international circulation of theory, itself partly a product of the dominant position of the Anglo-American academy in the world, also calls attention to the nature and unequal distribution of global information flows and helps to shed new light on processes of (cultural) globalization.

Although the sociology of translation is a relatively new field and almost unknown in the context of Anglo-American sociology, two different scholarly traditions have provided significant research in the area, especially in the past two decades. On the one hand, the discipline of translation studies, which has increasingly come to adopt sociological approaches for the study of intercultural relations and, on the other, the work of a strand of French sociology influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's approach to the sociology of culture, which explicitly focuses on the social nature of translation and its place in the field of cultural production. Before giving an outline of this interdisciplinary field more fully, it is thus necessary to briefly introduce these perspectives and indicate their relevance for a sociology of translation.

There is a significant body of writings on the practice of translation which go back to antiquity (in the reflections of translators like Cicero and Horace) and German Romanticism and, in the twentieth century, important essays by philosophers like Walter Benjamin, José Ortega y Gasset, Willard V.O. Quine, Jacques Derrida and writers like Ezra Pound, Vladimir Nabokov, Jorge Luis Borges and Octavio Paz.¹ However, translation studies (hereafter TS) is a recent discipline which emerged in the 1970s out of applied linguistics. Of particular relevance for sociological approaches to translation is what has been termed the cultural turn in translation studies, which coincides with a major expansion of the discipline. The term 'cultural turn' was first used in a collection of essays edited by Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere in 1990 entitled *Translation, History, and Culture*, to refer to a change in the object of study of TS away from a linguistic approach primarily devoted to translator training to a cultural studies approach, and is thus a markedly different development to what is known as the cultural turn in the social sciences, largely associated with postmodernism. In TS, the cultural turn signals a move away from textual concerns (largely seen in terms of equivalence and faithfulness of the translation to the original text) towards wider cultural concerns and the study of how translations function in their cultures of destination, and towards notions of cultural manipulation, ideology and power.

In more recent years, this study has been characterized by the increasing use of sociological theories, especially those of Pierre Bourdieu, applied to translation. Thus, one of the leading journals in the discipline, *The Translator*, dedicated a special issue to the theme of 'Bourdieu and the Sociology of Translating and Interpreting', published in 2005. In the same year, an international conference with the title 'Translating and Interpreting as a Social Practice' was organized, with the aim of contributing to a conceptualization of a general translation sociology. The selected outcomes of this conference have been published in an edited book entitled *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* (Wolf and Fukari, 2007).

On the other hand, the almost total neglect of issues related to translation in British and American sociology contrasts with the increasing interest it has attracted in French sociology in recent years. The notion of cultural transfers was used to define a new interdisciplinary field of study centred on the import and assimilation of foreign texts, forms and values, and applied to Franco-German intercultural relations (Espagne and Werner, 1988; Espagne, 1999). A special issue of *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, the journal founded by Bourdieu, on 'Translation: International Literary Exchanges', was published in 2002. Research has been carried out on the nature of the profession and self-perception of literary translators, and on the social role of translation in international literary exchanges by scholars such as Natalie Heinich, Gisele Sapiro, Johan Heilbron, Isabelle Kalinowski, and Pascale Casanova. Especially, in her pioneering book *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), Casanova enlarges Bourdieu's account of the field of cultural production to the international context, showing that literatures are constituted relationally in a highly unequal international field. This perspective, which places transnational literary exchanges at the very centre and in which translation plays a key intermediary role, offers the most elaborate account of the role of translation in the cultural field to date.

In both traditions, TS and French sociology of culture, research has predominantly been limited to literary translation. Recently, new research has been undertaken into the previously neglected major areas of news translation (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009; Cortés Zaborras and Hernández Guerrero, 2005) and localization (Pym, 2004), while the pivotal role of translation in the context of globalization has also been tackled (Cronin, 2003, 2006), and arguments for an enlargement of the discipline in response to global developments and power inequalities consistently formulated (Apter, 2006; Tymoczko, 2007). While research in TS on the social nature of translation as intercultural communication has been extremely fruitful and constitutes an important contribution to the sociology of translation, the need remains to approach translation as a matter of sociological inquiry which also concerns issues of sociology's intellectual history and of sociological method. The following section, which approaches the role of translation in the international circulation of theory, will make clear its importance as a key mediation in the way sociological theory is received.

Sociology in translation

Andre Lefevere, a prominent scholar in TS, in a book entitled *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, approached translation as a form of rewriting, together with other similar forms such as anthologies, critical editions, compilations and reference works, pointing out that, significantly, most readers today come into contact with rewritings rather than originals:

In the past, as in the present, rewriters created images of a writer, a work, a period, a genre, sometimes even a whole literature. These images existed side by side with the realities they competed with, but the images always tended to reach more people than the corresponding realities did, and they most certainly do so now. Yet the creation of these images and the

impact they made has not often been studied in the past, and is still not the object of detailed study. (1992: 5)

This is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's classic essay on 'The Task of the Translator' (1992), in which the author viewed translations as the afterlife of originals, thus emphasizing transformation and renewal rather than communication of meaning. Lefevere's characterization of rewritings as images is also interesting, as the role of translations is not essentially dissimilar to that of reproductions, through which most people come into contact with works of art. As derivative creations, rewritings and reproductions also share their basic characteristic of transience.² In both cases, the lack of attention to their important mediating role reveals an assumption of transparency and fails to address important factors that both enable and determine the transmission of meaning.

The second part of Lefevere's argument is that rewriters, as the title of his book suggests, manipulate originals in order to make them fit with the dominant ideological or poetological current of their time, which dictates the strategies that the translator will follow. In this way, it is not so much the context of the culture of origin but that of the culture of destination that determines which and how translations will be undertaken and received.

Translations are an important part of the texts that we read, functioning for us as originals, and this is true not only of literary rewritings but also of sociological rewritings. Most of us have come into contact with classical sociological theory and with a significant part of contemporary theory through translation, and rewritings are an important component of the intellectual history of sociology. However, few sociological studies of these translations, which are often undertaken by sociologists, exist. Sociological rewritings, the conditions in which they are produced and their relationship with other forms of scholarly labour and with the sociological field at large have been marginalized in a culture that values originals and the sacrality of authorship. Taking the case of what is arguably an exception, the classic translation by Talcott Parsons of Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1930 and the major text on which Weber's reception over the years in the Anglophone world has crucially depended (Kaelber, 2002: 134; Scaff, 2005: 205), we cannot fail to notice that scholarly attention has been especially devoted to an examination of Parsons's more famous conceptual choices (e.g. Baehr on the concept of 'iron cage') and/or to catalogue his shortcomings (e.g. Ghosh, 1994). A more illuminating take in the sociology of translation of sociological works is found in Scaff (2005), who offers a fascinating approach to Parsons's text, explicitly formulating important sociological questions and focusing on the conditions of production that determined the form in which the translation was finally published, so that in fact some of the 'errors' in the translation are attributable more to an 'incorrect correction' of Parsons's work than to Parsons himself.³

Nevertheless, as Uta Gerhardt notes, 'the translation of Max Weber's classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has never been dealt with as an achievement in its own right' (2007: 41). In spite of its rare status as a classic, the fact that the significance of Talcott Parsons's translation has been silenced in accounts of his work ultimately corroborates the inferior status which sociological rewritings – as second-order reproductions, mere copies – are attributed. Yet, their study can shed light

not only on particular texts and the transformations they undergo when they travel, but also on the nature of different academic fields from a comparative perspective and on the importance of the international dimension for the constitution of social theory. Thus, Gerhardt shows how Parsons's translation not only played a significant role in his understanding of Weber's theory of capitalism, but also served to challenge biologism and to combat misunderstandings in contemporary American interpretations of Weber. Gerhardt concludes:

Parsons' translation of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* was a stepping stone in the emergence of scientific sociology in the twentieth century. Whereas Weber had made serendipitous contributions to a non-positivist sociology in his lifetime until 1920, his achievement might have been lost to posterity during the 1930s had not Parsons' immensely valuable recognition of Weber's accomplishment saved Weber from otherwise near unavoidable dismissal. (2007: 59)

Translations have a key role in introducing new ideas, concepts and perspectives into fields which can never be seen in isolation from a wider international context, and it is often foreign theory, circulated and made available in translation, which helps to challenge established positions and open the way to key innovations. At the same time, translations, by virtue of the transformations they undergo in different contexts, travel to places that are beyond the reach of originals, and must truly be considered not their extension but their afterlife, in Benjamin's sense. Therefore, to ignore the relevance of Parsons's *Protestant Ethic, as a translation*, not only leads to a gap in the study of both Parsons's and Weber's work, but to fundamental misunderstandings regarding the way social theory travels across national fields.

Another example of how translation is made a central concern in the analysis of social theory can be found in the collected volume edited by Craig Calhoun, Edward LiPuma and Moishe Postone, entitled *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, which offers a reflection on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu in dialogue with several strands in Anglo-American social theory. In a concluding remark to the book, Bourdieu formulates a general approach to the logic of the international circulation of ideas:

Texts, as we know, circulate without their contexts, that is, without the benefit of being accompanied by everything they owe to the social space within which they have been produced or, more precisely, to the space of possibilities (in this case, scientific) in relation to which they constructed themselves. It follows that the categories of perception and interpretation that readers apply to them, being themselves linked to a field of production subject to different traditions, have every chance of being more or less inadequate. (1993: 263)

This complements his other statement that 'the meaning and function of a foreign work is determined at least as much by the field of destination as by the field of origin' (Bourdieu, 2002: 4), something which researchers in TS also have long insisted on.

We find a case study of precisely the sort of inadequacies that affect readings of foreign works in a chapter written by Loïc Wacquant which focuses on the transatlantic journey of the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In it, Wacquant examines the structural causes of the recurrent misinterpretations that Bourdieu's writings have encountered, arguing that

these are inscribed in the logic of the 'foreign trade' in ideas (Wacquant, 1993: 236). He specifically focuses on three main points: the question of Bourdieu's theoretical affiliation (pointing out that Bourdieu has been placed in all the major theoretical traditions, including Marxist, Weberian, Durkheimian and structuralist), Bourdieu's style, which has been the cause of bafflement and frustration to American and especially British readers; and the concept of habitus. One of the reasons for these conflicting reactions, according to Wacquant, is that the importation of Bourdieu's work to America and Great Britain has proceeded via fragmented and piecemeal appropriations, and translations have not followed the pace of originals. Another reason is related to the selective use made of some of Bourdieu's writings in different disciplines and the fact that disciplinary boundaries between sociology, anthropology, history and philosophy are more difficult to cross in the US than in France. Finally, the lack of familiarity with continental strands of social theory and philosophy, as well as American representations of the French intellectual field and of the peculiarities of the French, have also caused misinterpretations of, for example, the collective nature of Bourdieu's enterprise or caused it to miss its internationalist background. Wacquant concludes by reiterating that the structures of national intellectual fields act as crucial mediations in the foreign trade of theories, and that intellectual products should be exported with as much of their native context as possible (e.g. with a preface to foreign readers), and imported with full awareness of the distortions that they undergo in a different intellectual field.

This approach identifies important misunderstandings or, at the very best, partialities, in Anglo-American readings of the theories of Pierre Bourdieu and, most importantly, offers an account of how they are determined by the specific characteristics of receiving fields. However, to focus exclusively on the inadequacies of readings and interpretations in the receiving field ultimately fails to grasp how social theory travels and to account for the necessary transformations undergone by texts in a more positive light. Not only is a literal translation impossible because of the fact that no two single languages have exactly equivalent concepts and structures, but reception will also necessarily be different in a new context. An immanent critique of both Wacquant's and Bourdieu's approach to the international circulation of social theory thus emphasizes that the categories of perception that are applied to foreign works are determined by the nature of the receiving field, a fact to which these authors themselves have already drawn attention. In this context, it might be more productive to focus on what translated theory introduces and the kind of reception and dialogue that is established with existing positions in the receiving field, a good example of which is provided by other chapters in the collected volume which presents itself as an encounter between the theoretical practice of Pierre Bourdieu and different aspects of Anglo-American social theory (see, for example, the contributions by LiPuma, Calhoun and Cicourel, in Calhoun et al., 1993).

Translation in sociology: methodological implications

In the chapter discussed above, Wacquant draws attention to what he describes as the 'ethnocentric reduction' of Anglo-American readings of Bourdieu, which have subordinated his writings to the interpretative modes of the receiving field. He further specifies:

This intellectual ethnocentrism – the propensity to refract Bourdieu through the prism of native sociological lenses – is of course in no way specifically American (or British), no more than it is applied uniquely to the importation of Bourdieu. *All academic fields tend to be ethnocentric* in this sense. The case of the United States, however, is special in that this urge is encouraged by the worldwide hegemonic status of American social science, which makes it less attentive and open to foreign intellectual currents than foreigners are, by necessity, to American ones. (1993: 243, emphasis in original).

This echoes Lawrence Venuti's characterization of translation as a fundamentally violent act of appropriation of the other: 'Translation is the forcible replacement of the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text with a text that is intelligible to the translating-language reader' (2008: 14).

This section on the role of translation in sociological research focuses on the methodological implications that derive from the ethnocentrism of translation, which always implies a degree of violence towards the original, as it rewrites it in terms that belong to the receiving culture. With this reflection I want to consider that translation is far from a neutral intervention and to highlight the importance of realizing its implications in a process that is often perceived as merely technical or transparent. Translation, a privileged medium of intercultural communication, brings the whole relationship between languages and cultures into play and expresses existing inequalities and power structures. Whether the latter are obscured rather than revealed will depend, at least in part, on the awareness of the implications of translation across cultures and on the strategies adopted for dealing with interlingual transfer.⁴

Thus, for Venuti, one of the leading figures in TS today, the global dominance of English is expressed not only in the low number of books which are translated into English⁵ but also in the way they are translated, following a strategy that denies the foreignness of the text and hides translation's very intervention. He has produced a critique of what he defines as domesticating translation, which is based on making a translated text read fluently, as if it was an original, thus rendering translation invisible, transparent. The effects of domesticating translation are to conceal the conditions under which it is made, starting with the translators' crucial intervention in the foreign text, and to create a recognizable, even familiar, cultural other. To this, Venuti opposes what he calls foreignizing translation, which disrupts the cultural codes of the translating language in order to do justice to the difference of the foreign text, and deviates from native norms to stage an alien reading experience (2008: 15–16).

A significant part of sociological research involves translation, either because it is based on cross-national samples or because it implies interlingual transfer between the object of research and its textual outputs. However, any issue related to translation and its methodological significance has been either systematically neglected or merely approached as a technical question.⁶ Yet, it could be argued that a reflection on the nature of translation can bring a better understanding of the character of sociological explanation, while the issue of translation also emerges in any foundation of sociology as a comparative endeavour. This is precisely Stephen Turner's approach in the book *Sociological Explanation as Translation* (1980), where he undertakes to go beyond Winch's account of the explanation of meaningful action as rule-governed behaviour

in confronting the ‘problem of rationality’ that emerges from such an undertaking in a debate centred on examples drawn from social anthropology of ritual beliefs which seem ‘irrational’ in the West (1980: 39). In Winch’s perspective, which stresses the mastery of rules and their grasp from within the form of life in which they are followed, this is considered irrelevant to the explanation of these beliefs. However, with no independent means to check on the adequacy of the translation, it finally becomes impossible to determine whether statements constitute interesting facts or bad translations (1980: 40). In this context, Turner argues:

Offering explanations across vastly different social contexts is a large part of the business of sociology. The difficulties appear most acutely in connection with the explanation of ritual practices and beliefs in nonliterate societies. It is necessary for any account of the explanation of these beliefs to face up to the problem of translating them, for the explanations are to be offered to literate scholars, not to natives. Winch does not face up to it, and the difficulties are such that no direct extension of his views would overcome them. (1980: 45)

For Turner, it is in the explanatory activities of comparative sociology that an adequate model is to be found based on puzzle solving, in which accounting for differences in concepts, practices and beliefs becomes part of the explanation. To Winch’s ‘within-society’ perspective, he opposes a comparative, or ‘outsider’s’ perspective, in which the practices of familiar contexts do not fit, and where problems of translation and of explanation appear as intimately connected:

[E]ach translation has a ‘sociological’ component, of practices that are assumed to be followed. The fact that we test translations, or at least intelligibly argue for and against them, means that the sociological component is tested as well. So we have a criterion for evaluating the validity of the sociological component in the same sense that we have criteria for evaluating the translation. The criterion is exactly the same, because it applies to the conjunction and not to the translation or the sociological component separately. There is a recognizable sense in which the sociological component is a comparative explanation. So here we are dealing with a sociological explanation that we assess as we assess a translation, and in this sense we are treating sociological explanation as translation. (1980: 60–1)

Translation is an important component in many ethnographic sociological accounts. However, its significance as anything more than a strictly linguistic operation has tended to be obscured, and its key role in determining the very production of sociological texts has remained unexamined. A perhaps paradoxical example of this is found in Paul Atkinson’s sophisticated account of ethnography as a rhetorical construct, which focuses on the conventions that govern the production and reception of ethnographic texts. While his detailed description contributes to a better understanding of how ethnography is textually produced, the author does not view translation as an effective element in this production. After an exhaustive examination of conventions used in different types of ethnographic texts, Atkinson merely comments on ‘the familiar metaphor of ethnographic description as “translation”’, noting that the self-effacing translator who is associated with a common-sense view of translation is not an adequate representation for the ethnographer, who inscribes himself or

herself in the text and does not simply 'read' an inert and passive 'field' (1990: 157–8). Needless to say, the very possibility of simply 'reading' any text without actively intervening and shaping the translation in important ways has been categorically denied in TS.

In this context, it is useful to look at the notion of cultural translation employed in anthropology, whose distinctive task, as Talal Asad points out, since the 1950s has increasingly been described in terms of 'the translation of cultures' (see 1986: 141–3). In this important essay, Asad discusses Gellner's critique of functionalist anthropology in interpreting and translating foreign cultures and offers a general approach to the notion of cultural translation, distinguishing it from translation strictly as a linguistic tool. First, translation is not simply conceived mainly as a linguistic process, but as involving 'modes of thought'. This implies that the anthropologist/translator has the tendency to read and reinterpret implicit meanings in a range of cultural practices, which makes his or her task more similar to that of the psychoanalyst than to that of the linguist (1986: 160–1). Thus, Asad remarks, for the anthropologist, linguistic patterns are not meanings to be translated, but rules to be systematically described and analyzed (1986: 161). Second, and crucially, no primary, original text to be translated exists. It is rather the anthropologist-translator who in his/her interpretation produces the ethnographic text, which in this sense is a translation with no original. Thus, in the case of anthropological 'translations', the unequal relationship between author and translator that predominates in literary works, based on the translator's subservience to the author and the original text, is actually reversed, as the translator becomes the real author and has final authority in determining meaning. In another essay in the same book, Vincent Crapanzano similarly emphasizes the ethnographer's hermeneutical task of clarifying the opaque and rendering the foreign familiar (1986: 51). The ethnographer, like the comparative sociologist, makes sense of the foreign; this is why theorizing translation can help us to understand the nature of anthropological and sociological explanation.

In considering cultural translation, it is necessary to bear in mind not just existing inequalities between languages, but also the dominance of Western academic discourse and the institutional practices from which it emerges. In Asad's view, it is only through emphasizing the conditions upon which rests the authority of ethnographers to uncover the implicit meanings of subordinate societies, that a meaningful critique of the nature of anthropological translations can be formulated:

The privileged position that Gellner accords himself for decoding the *real* meaning of what Berbers say (regardless of what they think they say) can be maintained only by someone who supposes that translating other cultures is essentially a matter of matching written sentences in two languages, such that the second set of sentences becomes the 'real meaning' of the first – an operation the anthropologist alone controls, from field notebook to printed ethnography. In other words, it is the privileged position of someone who does not, and can afford not to, engage in a genuine dialogue with those he or she once lived with and now *writes* about. (1986: 155, emphasis in original)

The possibility of genuine dialogue, if generally absent from even the most radical of anthropological writings, must perhaps be sought not through the accounts of the anthropologist-translator, but through the vision of a figure that has been thoroughly

marginalized in anthropological discourse: that of the native interpreter who often collaborates with the anthropologist. This is how Lévi-Strauss once described him:

[T]here lived in Kejara a native who was to be my interpreter and chief informant. This man, who was about thirty-five years old, spoke Portuguese fairly well. He said that he had once been able to read and write the language (although he could no longer do so), having been a pupil at the mission. The Fathers, proud of their success, had sent him to Rome, where he had been received by the Holy Father. On his return, there had apparently been an attempt to make him go through a Christian marriage ceremony, without regard for the traditional native rules. This had brought on a spiritual crisis during which he was reconverted to the old Bororo ideal: he then settled in Kejara where, for the last ten or fifteen years, he had been living an exemplary savage life. This papal Indian, who was now stark naked, befeathered, smeared with red paint and wearing the pin and the lip-plug in his nose and lower lip, was to prove a wonderful guide to Bororo sociology. (1973: 216–17)

In spite of this rewriting (in which Lévi-Strauss's original characterization of the figure of the native interpreter as a *marvellous professor* is transformed into the more conventional notion of *wonderful guide*), the important agency, as well as the conflict-ridden and paradoxical biography of this key figure on which the pursuit of ethnographic interpretation rests, can be perceived. It is perhaps only through a radical questioning which opens up the notion of cultural translation to the numerous stages of negotiation of meaning and appropriation of the other, making visible the rich heterogeneity that is manifest in the cultural contact zone, that a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between different societies and of the nature of cultural transfer can be reached.

A reflexive approach to sociological translations

The third and final section of this article goes back to a consideration of sociology in translation in order to examine more closely the central issues raised by the methodological implications of translation in sociological inquiry. It discusses the violence exercised by the translation of sociological works into English and identifies the relevance of Venuti's distinction between domesticating and foreignizing translation in the context of the central position of the British and American academies in the international field of social theory.

The generalized assumption that reduces translation to a strictly linguistic operation at the most basic textual level which, as we have seen, has characterized both approaches to translated sociological works and to empirical research implying translation, can be identified in terms of what has been called the 'Jerome' model of translation (after Saint Jerome, whose Vulgate set the standards of translation in the West). As Bassnett and Lefevere argue, this model is characterized by the presence of a central, sacred text, the Bible, which is to be translated with the utmost fidelity, matching word by word (1998: 2). This ideal of interlineal translation became the norm not just for Biblical translation but also for translations of other texts, an ideal which could not be realized (or only at the price of effective unintelligibility) but perpetually haunted translators in their attempts to remain faithful to the original text (1998: 2). According to Bassnett and Lefevere,

To be able to elevate faithfulness to this central position, to the exclusion of many other factors, the Jerome model had to reduce thinking about translation to the linguistic level only. This could be done all the more easily because the text that served as the yardstick for fidelity was seen as timeless and unchangeable precisely because of its sacred nature. (1998: 2)

Even if sociology, in assuming that translation is a mere technical matter, still seems to predominantly refer to such a concept, Bassnett and Lefevere argue that the days of the Jerome model are numbered, at least in the West. This is because equivalence is no longer seen as the mechanical matching of words in dictionaries, but as a strategic choice made by translators (1998: 3). In other words, the importance of the historical and cultural context and their determining role in the production and reception of translations has been acknowledged.

The move away from the Jerome model is important for a reflexive account of the role of translation in sociology, because it places both the strategic decisions of the translator and the social context in which translations occur at the very centre of the process of interlingual transfer. And nowhere is the first of these factors more visible than in the statements that translators have felt obliged to produce in order to justify the choices they have made in the production of their texts. Translators' prefaces abound and have become an important source of reflection on translation. This is also the case for sociological translations. Thus, to take the example of the classical sociological translation referred to in the first section of this article, Talcott Parsons stated in his 1930 Preface to the translation of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic* that

The translation is, as far as possible, faithful to the text, rather than attempting to achieve any more than ordinary, clear English style. Nothing has been altered, and only a few comments to clarify obscure points and to refer the reader to related parts of Weber's work have been added. (1992: xxv–xxvi)

In other words, Parsons privileged faithfulness to the German text over readability or, in Venuti's terminology, he did not adopt a domesticating strategy in which the foreignness of the German text was fully subordinated to the norms of English conventions. In fact, the statement quoted reproduces very closely a remark made by Parsons in a letter he wrote in 1928 to the publishers Allen & Unwin to accompany a draft of his translation of one of Weber's essays, in which he noted: 'In general I have tried to be faithful to the text rather than to present a work of art as far as English style is concerned. It would be impossible to do anything else without almost completely recasting the whole manner of exposition' (quoted in Scaff, 2005: 215). This draft was severely criticized and only reluctantly accepted as in need of thorough revision, which led Parsons to aim for a more readable version and to avoid complex formulations, without renouncing, however, the reproduction of almost all of Weber's many italicized words and phrases, his use of inverted commas, and wherever possible, to keep Weber's paragraphs intact (Scaff, 2005: 218).

What Parsons's Preface also evidences is that in 1930 he did not perceive the style of German scholarly writing as too much of an added problem to English-speaking readers or to the task of the translator, a fact which was to radically change in subsequent

decades, when it became common among Weber's translators to refer to the specific difficulties associated with rendering his writing into English. For example, in 1946, Gerth and Mills distinguished between two stylistic traditions in the German language. While the first corresponds to the 'brief and grammatically lucid sentences' that are typically used in English, the 'other tradition is foreign to the tendency of modern English. It is often felt to be formidable and forbidding' (1991: ix). The practitioners of this second tradition

use parentheses, qualifying clauses, inversions, and complex rhythmic devices in their polyphonous sentences. Ideas are synchronized rather than serialized. At their best, they erect a grammatical artifice in which mental balconies and watch towers, as well as bridges and recesses, decorate the main structure. Their sentences are gothic castles. And Max Weber's style is definitely in their tradition. (1991: x)

In this context, the translators' task is perceived in terms of privileging English conventions over those of the original German text, rewriting whole sentences and paragraphs ('we have not hesitated to break his sentence into three or four smaller units'; 'we have had to drive many a wedge into the structure of his sentences'; 'appositional clauses and parentheses have been raised to the level of equality and condemned to follow rather than herald the main idea'), omitting Weber's profuse use of inverted commas and italics ('we have omitted what to the English reader would seem self-conscious reservation and manner of emphasis'), and reorganizing footnotes ('We have taken some footnotes into the text and in a few instances we have relegated technical cross-references which stand in the original text to footnotes') (1991: x). In other words, in order to 'make accessible to an English-reading public an accurate rendering of what Weber said' (1991: xi), it has been necessary to clean and restructure his prose, which bespeaks a 'Platonizing tendency', 'betrays a self-conscious hesitancy' obliging the author to depend on the profuse use of quotation marks, and also to clarify the main theme, which 'often seems to be lost in a wealth of footnoted digressions, exemptions, and comparative illustrations', so that 'Whatever "ease" Weber may have in English is an ease of the English prose into which he is rendered and not any ease of the original work' (1991: x). Gerth and Mills offer the best example of an unreservedly domesticating strategy, which has also been adopted in more recent rewritings, although not often with such openness.

Thus, in their 1968 Preface to *Economy and Society*, Roth and Wittich note that Weber wrote more clearly than most of his contemporaries and that 'Weber does not stand in the tradition of German philosophical prose with its murky profundity that has usually suggested dangerous obscurantism to Anglo-Saxon readers' (1978: cvii). However, and in spite of this, they assert that

Weber's skilful use of German syntax permits more complex construction than is feasible in English. Thus, Weber is not really improved by 'streamlining,' by breaking up his carefully balanced and qualified sentences into a series of linear constructs. A more linear rendering was inevitable in the English version, but our inclination was to retain, and in some cases to restore, Weber's architecture. However, in most cases pragmatic prevailed over stylistic considerations. (1978: cviii-cix)

The inherent paradoxes of this approach, which attempts to have it all by renouncing neither the complex architecture of the foreign text nor to the readability required by English convention, are perhaps most clearly revealed in Stephen Kalberg's recent new translation of *The Protestant Ethic*, in which the author states that his aims have been to render Weber's text more accessible to today's readership, which is 'more general and less acquainted with the great works of the past' and 'to retain the integrity of Weber's study by offering a close-to-the-text translation': 'I have placed a premium upon *both* readability and accuracy. For many texts, fulfilment of both of these goals would not present a large challenge to a translator. Unfortunately, in this respect, *PE* deviates from the norm and strays far afield from the "user-friendly" ideal' (Weber, 2002: v, emphasis in original). This has led Kalberg to the familiar practice of radically shortening sentences and paragraphs but, at the same time, to retain Weber's frequent italicization and use of inverted commas. Further, readability and accessibility have been improved through the addition of identifying notes with reference to persons, places, and documents within brackets in the text or in new endnotes, the clarification of Weber's argument in occasional endnotes, and the listing of key terms in a new glossary. Ironically, the most salient feature of this new translation of *The Protestant Ethic*, is that both Weber and Kalberg appear as authors on the book's cover and that Kalberg's production of Weber's book is emphasized, so that new generations of students will be led to attribute the work either to their joint authorship or solely to the translator.

More generally, the prevalence of domesticating strategies through which a foreign text is violently made to conform to the conventions of the English language is not exceptional to the history of Weber's translations, but has become the norm in a language which, in the second half of the twentieth century, has come to occupy the central position in international linguistic exchanges. The circulation of social theory is today marked by the global asymmetries that characterize an international field in which

By routinely translating large numbers of the most varied English-language books, foreign publishers have exploited the global drift towards American political and economic hegemony since World War II, actively supporting the international expansion of British and American cultures. British and American publishers, in turn, have reaped the financial benefits of successfully imposing English-language cultural values on a vast foreign readership, while producing cultures in the United Kingdom and the United States that are aggressively monolingual, unreceptive to foreign literatures, accustomed to fluent translations that invisibly inscribe foreign texts with British and American values and provide readers with the narcissistic experience of recognising their own culture in a cultural other. (Venuti, 2008: 12)

As the dominant language in the scientific field, English provides academics from more peripheral tongues with the opportunity to participate in international scientific exchanges and to gain central recognition. This is the case of translated writers,⁷ who in this way contribute to the consolidation and advancement of central scientific capital. For example, had Manuel Castells written *The Information Age* in either Catalan or Spanish – his native languages – it is highly unlikely that it would have achieved the international significance it has today. In other cases, such as, for example, the work

of Ulrich Beck, it is only translation into English that ensures global audiences and promotes further translations into other, more peripheral languages. However, translation into English also excludes, not merely those valuable contributions that are inevitably left behind and thus remain limited to peripheral national fields, but also those that are incorporated and made violently to conform to the conventions of the dominant tongue. Norbert Elias' unfinished book on Mozart carries the subtitle 'Sociology of a genius', expressing the central paradoxes on which the construction of his analysis rests, and which have been rendered unintelligible by the English rewriting into 'Portrait of a genius'. Theodor Adorno finally took the decision to return to Germany after being told by an editor in America that his translation of *Philosophy of New Music* was 'badly organized' and, years later, having the manuscript of a journal article so drastically edited that he could not recognize his own fundamental intentions in the text, which he finally published in a faithful German translation (Adorno, 1998).

British and American sociology have neglected the important role translation plays in the discipline, both in mediating the international circulation of theory and in key methodological aspects of social research, a lack of interest that can in part be explained as a product of current global inequalities and the dominant position of the Anglo-American academy in the world. Sociologists have often undertaken translation as part of their scientific work. Yet, whether in the case of Parsons's classic version of Weber's *The Protestant Ethic*, or in less well-known instances, such as David Frisby's translation of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* or Eric Dunning's rendering of Elias' *The Germans*, this dimension of sociological work and its impact on the intellectual history of the discipline has remained largely unstudied. Perhaps more disturbing is the refusal to consider the mediating role of translation and its methodological implications in conducting sociological research, which obscures the social conditions in which it takes place, in a time when self-reflexivity is considered to be an important task of sociological endeavour. A perspective that places translation at the centre serves to leave behind a national angle and to assume a renewed understanding of the global circulation of social theory as based on highly unequal international exchanges which are essential in the constitution of the global scientific field.

Notes

1. For an anthology of essays on translation from Dryden to Derrida, see Schulte and Biguenet (1992). For an up-to-date collection with a wide selection of twentieth-century texts, see Venuti (2004).
2. This is why Benjamin was interested in both translations and reproductions, as the often disregarded processes and techniques which nevertheless brought large numbers of people into contact with cultural works, changing the relationship the masses had with culture. For an approach to reproduction which uses Benjamin's theory of translation, see Aguilera (2004).
3. He remarks, with respect to the story of the first translation and publication of *The Protestant Ethic*:

This chapter in the sociology of knowledge, or more specifically the politics and sociology of Weber translations, is unusually complicated and has not been told before. The history of the translation provides a lesson in the social construction of a text, and equally important, a precise answer to the questions that are central to any general sociology of translation: Who

translated the work? Why? When? and Where? As we shall see, the text we know as *PESC* is a product, to be sure, of intellectual decisions Parsons arrived at as translator, but it is also significantly the result of social forces and relationships at work at the time. Indeed, strictly speaking, it is not actually Parsons' intended translation *tout court*, but rather his proposed text as influenced by social circumstances and modified by editorial fiat and 'correction'. (2005: 207)

4. Roman Jakobson (in an essay written in 1959) distinguishes between three types of translation: (i) intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language; (ii) interlingual translation or 'translation proper' is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language; and (iii) intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems (e.g. film versions of literary works) (Jakobson, 2000). This article deals exclusively with forms of interlingual translation, which imply transfer between different languages.
5. Both British and American book production are characterized by a low number of translations. Since the 1950s the number of translations has remained roughly between 2 and 4 per cent of total book production, declining even further over the past decade. Translations accounted for just 1.4 per cent of books published in 2001 in Britain and 2.07 per cent of books published in 2004 in the United States (as compared, for example, with 22.9 per cent in 2002 in Italy or 7.3 per cent in 2004 in Germany). Conversely, since World War II, English has been the most translated language worldwide (Venuti, 2008: 11).
6. There is a significant debate concerning translation in relation to Thomas Kuhn's concept of incommensurability, which is primarily conceived in terms of the possibility of communication between different scientific paradigms (and thus of intralingual rather than interlingual translation). For important contributions to this debate, including Kuhn's own remarks on incommensurability and translation, see Rossini Favretti, Sandri and Scazzieri (1999). For an account of Kuhn's concept of incommensurability which distinguishes between earlier notions of scientists' incommensurability and later, mainly linguistic notions primarily related to analysts' incommensurability, see Demir (2008).
7. The notion of translated writers is used by Casanova (2004), whose characterization of the international literary field is echoed in this approach to the international scientific field, to designate immigrant writers who have adopted the dominant tongue.

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