

Handout. Sociological Approaches (Bourdieu)

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Bourdieu – extensive output, applied to many domains, from literary translation to interpreting in the asylum context.

Gouanvic (1997:126) suggests that what is missing from polysystem theory and descriptive translation studies is "a social explanation of the role of institutions and practices in the emergence and reproduction of symbolic goods. Bourdieu's model seems the one best suited to account for the complexities of cultural products". In other words, polysystem theory and DTS describe the workings of the system in broad-brush, abstract terms, but do not explain, for instance, how a work comes to be canonized or how norms come to be elaborated and propagated. Gouanvic, among others, therefore criticizes "the remarkable absence of the social in Toury's work" (1997:126).

Core, interdependent notions in Bourdieu's work: **field**, **habitus**, **capital** and **illusio**.

Field: “a structured space with its own laws of functioning, its structure being determined by the relations between the positions which agents occupy in the field” (Hermans 1999:132). Which means also that it is a space where a range of assumptions, discursive elaborations, certain types of behaviour are perceived as legitimate and others aren't. The range of legitimate behaviour constitutes the *doxa*; behaviour which falls outside the *doxa* constitutes the *heterodoxa*.

Fields are sites of tension, competition, struggle – struggle over the definition of the field itself and what constitutes legitimate or valued behaviour within it (over the *doxa*); it is through this struggle or tension that fields evolve over time. “The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces” (Bourdieu 1983:312). Competition exists both within and among fields. Bourdieu at times refers to some fields as markets, suggesting that they operate like economic fields (e.g. linguistic field – value of accents, right kind of dialect, etc.).

Capital: takes three main forms: **economic** (money, possessions); **social** (contacts and networks in society that improve one's standing and opportunities for acquiring other types of capital); and **cultural** (education, qualification, and anything – including accent, clothing, etc. – that indicates valued cultural positions and status, including also material possessions such as paintings, or a large library). **Cultural capital** is “the means to acquire and maintain cultural status among those who enjoy similar status” (Hermans 1999:131).

All three forms of capital can be converted into **symbolic capital**: symbolic because arbitrary, not linked to any 'objective' worth or value; the value derives from a socio-culturally defined but arbitrary set of criteria. The availability of symbolic capital to specific types of social actors depends on the field. For example in the field of art, mass appeal may constitute a negative rather than positive value, blocking the artist whose work appeals to the masses from accruing cultural capital (though the artist would accrue economic capital).

Translated texts are part of the logic of the cultural marketplace, in the same way as non-translated texts.

Fields and configurations of capital evolve and change over time. Bourdieu talks about **symbolic violence** – which results from the struggle over the power to impose or acquire different types of capital and/or to redefine the field. “In the struggle to impose the legitimate vision, ... agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital, i.e. in proportion to the recognition they receive from a group” (Bourdieu 1991:106). The key word in relation to capital then is **recognition** within a dynamic, evolving definition of any given field and the types of capital to which it attaches value.

Habitus: “a set of *dispositions* which incline agents to act and react in certain ways. The dispositions generate practices, perceptions and attitudes which are 'regular' without being consciously co-ordinated or governed by any 'rule'” (Editor's introduction, Bourdieu 1991:12).

Interdependence of field and *habitus*:

- “the alchemy of *representation* ... through which the representative creates the group which creates him” (Bourdieu 1991:106).
- The degree of fit between field and *habitus* determines conformity to the *doxa* and shapes the struggle within the field.

Illusio: the feel for and belief in the game.

Interdependence of field, *habitus*, capital and *illusio*: “every position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field; and ... the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu 1983:312).

Applications in TS

Casanova, Heilbron, Sapiro and others attempt to place translation within the universe of international literary exchanges and to study it as a factor in the struggle for legitimacy in the literary and political fields. They are specifically concerned with the role translation plays in consecrating authors and texts and hence in the distribution and transfer of literary capital.

In Casanova's model, literary capital is relatively independent of linguistic capital. Literary or linguistic-literary capital "depends on prestige, on the literary beliefs attached to a language, and on the literary value which is attributed to it. These factors in turn depend on the age of a language, the prestige of its poetry, the refinement of literary forms developed in it, traditions, the literary 'effects' associated, for example, with translations, and their volume, etc. This is what is evoked when we speak of 'the language of Shakespeare', 'the language of Racine', or 'the language of Cervantes'" (Casanova 2010:289).

Casanova uses the idea of a floral configuration to describe the interaction between dominating and dominated languages and literatures; this is "a structure where the dominated languages are linked to the centre by polyglots, the more multilingual people speak a language, the more this language dominates the universe" (*ibid.*).

- (1) The centrality of a language can be measured by the number of multilingual speakers who speak it.
- (2) Extending this to the literary field means that the amount of literary capital enjoyed by a language depends on "the number of literary polyglots who use it" and "the number of literary translators who are instrumental in the circulation of texts from or towards the literary language" (*ibid.*).

Casanova attempts to measure the amount of literary capital, replacing the opposition between centre & periphery with that between dominating and dominated languages.

Dominating languages "are endowed with a relatively large volume of literary capital due to their specific prestige, their age, and the number of texts which are considered universal and which are written in these languages" (*ibid.*).

Dominated languages (cf. weak/minor languages/cultures in Toury's laws) are defined as languages which "have been recently nationalized ..., are relatively deprived of literary capital, have little international recognition, a small number of national or international translators, or are little known and have remained invisible for a long time in the great literary centres" (*ibid.*). This is not a homogenous group and Casanova divides them into four distinct sub-groups:

- Sub-category 1: "oral languages, or languages whose writing system has only recently been established" (*ibid.*; which means they can't benefit from translation in the world literary market) – examples include Yarouba, Gikuyu, Amharic and some Creoles;
- Sub-category 2: recently created or recreated languages – such as languages which have become national languages following political independence or similar developments (Catalan, Gaelic, Hebrew, Welsh, Bosnian, Macedonian). Translation is very important for this group because it helps them acquire a literature and begin the process of literary exchange with international partners.
- Sub-category 3: established languages with long histories that are used in 'small' countries and have relatively few speakers: Dutch, Danish, Icelandic, Greek, Persian, Swedish, etc.
- Sub-category 4: languages with large numbers of speakers and great literary traditions which are not recognized or valued in the international literary markets, e.g. Arabic, Chinese.

Structural inequality evident in the imbalance between dominating and dominated languages/literatures reflects the struggle within any field in Bourdieu's terms and suggests that "translation must be defined as a power struggle" (*ibid.*:290).

"The inequality of the transactions that take place in this world goes unperceived, or is otherwise denied or euphemistically referred to, because the ecumenical picture it presents of itself as a peaceful world, untroubled by rivalry or struggle, strengthens received beliefs and assures the continued existence of a quite different reality that is never admitted. The simple idea that dominates the literary world still today, of literature as something pure and harmonious, works to eliminate all traces of the invisible violence that reigns over it and denies the power relations that are specific to this world and the battles that are fought in it. According to the standard view, the world of letters is one of peaceful internationalism, a world of free and equal access in which literary recognition is available to all writers, an enchanted world that exists outside time and space and so escapes the mundane conflicts of human history" (Casanova 1999/2005:42-43).

The significance of translation in this context depends on "the respective position of the three poles which found it", namely: (a) the source and target languages; (b) the author; and (c) the translator. (Casanova 2010:290).

Four possibilities:

- the translation into a dominated language of a text written in a dominating language;
- a text in a dominated language translated into a dominating language;
- the translation into a dominating language of a text written in a dominating language;
- the translation into a dominated language of a text written in a dominated language (a rare occurrence)

Casanova is particularly interested in the first two scenarios, which she analyses under the two headings: 'Translation as accumulation of capital' and 'Translation as Consecration':

Translation as accumulation of capital occurs when writers from a dominated literary field attempt to enter the world literary market by 'nationalizing' (i.e. translating) the great literary masterpieces which are considered to have universal value, e.g. Shakespeare, Racine, etc. This allows them to import capital and prestige, and Casanova describes the process of translating the major texts of a dominating language into a dominated language as a "diversion of capital" (*ibid.*:291).

Translation as consecration : "Translation is the foremost example of a particular type of consecration in the literary world. Its true nature as a form of literary recognition (rather than a mere exchange of one language for another or a purely horizontal transfer that provides a useful measure of the volume of publishing transactions in the world) goes unrecognized on account of its apparent neutrality. Nonetheless it constitutes the principal means of access to the literary world for all writers outside the center" (Casanova 1999/2005:133).

Translation as consecration involves "introducing the periphery to the center in order to consecrate it" (*ibid.*) and is dependent on the capital of the translator and other agents involved in this process. The translation of dominated authors is "an act of consecration that gives them access to literary visibility and existence" (*ibid.*:135) – that grants them a certificate of literary standing.

In initiating the opposite process, i.e. in making the centre – and what has been consecrated in the centre – known in the periphery by translating and importing its major works, translators/authors and/or other agents play "an essential role in the process of unifying literary space" (*ibid.*:134). They also perpetuate the dominance of the centre through this process.

Translation contributes to shaping the target field (struggle over the *doxa*), as when the Chinese Nobel winner Gao Xingjian began to translate modern French authors such as Beckett and Perec into a literary landscape that had been totally unfamiliar with the relevant stylistic, formal, and rhetorical innovations imported via these writers. This created a polemic within the Chinese literary field which contributed to questioning the *doxa* and reconfiguring the various positions within the field.

Relevance of *illusio*: "Not every writer proceeds in the same way, but all writers attempt to enter the same race, and all of them struggle, albeit with unequal advantages, to attain the same goal: literary legitimacy" (Casanova 1999:40).

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