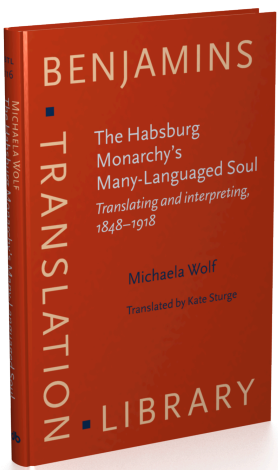
Benjamins Translation Library

116

Chapter 5. Theoretical sketch of a Habsburg translational space

https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.116.05ch5

Available under a CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 license.



Pages 115–120 of
The Habsburg Monarchy's Many-Languaged Soul: Translating and interpreting, 1848–1918
Michaela Wolf
[**Benjamins Translation Library**, 116] 2015. xvii, 289 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material, beyond the permissions granted by the Open Access license, written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights

John Benjamins Publishing Company

CHAPTER 5

Theoretical sketch of a Habsburg translational space

For a more detailed examination of the agents of mediation in the Habsburg setting, we need a sociological model that can reveal the social implications of translatorial action in all its multifarious forms. Bourdieu's sociology of culture lends itself excellently to this task.

To describe the social world as a chessboard would be the most succinct summary of Pierre Bourdieu's sociology. From his analysis of the social, Bourdieu derives "reasons for action" – the "raisons d'agir" that became the programmatic title of the political and sociological series he edited from 1996 until his death in 2002. In the course of his career, Bourdieu built up a toolbox of concepts that permitted him to analyse sociocultural webs of meaning in the tension between the actions of individual agents and the constraints imposed by society. He insisted that productive scholarship requires empirical studies to precede theory formation. Bourdieu was also, or especially, someone "qui dérangeait" (Bouveresse 2002, 15), a "troublemaker" (Baier 2002, 1): his public stand against neoliberalism and for the *res publica* made him an exceptional figure among intellectuals in France and beyond.

Bourdieu's sociology of culture provides a sophisticated contextualization of cultural products. Its starting point is the concept of modern society as a "social space" that has differentiated into many fields. Each of these fields, as a relatively autonomous "microcosm" (Bourdieu 1998, 58), is defined by relational structures, and each obeys its own functional logics. Thus individual processes of socialization or identity formation, for example, can only be understood in terms of the structures of the field that sculpts them, and not as linear developments. The dynamism of the social space is determined by the maintenance or modification of power relationships, so that Bourdieu speaks of a "field of forces" or "field of struggles" (Bourdieu 1993a, 30); the driving force of actions in the field is the field's own structural properties.

Several constitutive features of a Bourdieusian "field", then, distinguish it (sometimes substantially) from the more general "translational space of mediation" discussed so far (see also Wolf 2007b). These are, firstly, its definition as a field of forces; secondly, and even more importantly, the central role of agents. As

long as the various agents invest in the field on the basis of their own resources and interests, they contribute to the preservation or transformation of the field structure, in some cases including a growth in its autonomy (Bourdieu 1991b, 242). Consequently, a third feature of the social field is that its structure is not internally homogeneous but always diversified. In the field of literature or art, that heterogeneity is manifested in the relevance of at least two axes: production for a mass public (aiming primarily for commercial success; the principle of "heteronomy") and production for an avant-garde audience (aiming primarily for prestige; the principle of "autonomy"). These hierarchizing principles exert their effects not only within each field, but also between agents who may be acting in different fields. The fourth feature is the struggle of agents to secure their presence in the field, their participation in the "game", by investing particular stakes (*enjeux*) – the game is activated only through the practices of the players. In Bourdieu's terms, the competition between agents is based on the *illusio* or "collective belief in the game" (Bourdieu 1995, 230), the tacit acceptance of the conditions under which a literary or translational enterprise, for example, is worth the effort of being taken seriously and "played".

The social field can be thought of as a multidimensional space of positions,[1] and the key questions of field theory cluster around the criteria for achieving these positions. If we follow Bourdieu in regarding the field as a system of social relationships, it is clear that in terms of the role of agents, position-taking within the field is a process of adaptation propelled by various determinants internal to the field. These include the individual's success or failure as a writer or artist, the growth of readerships or audiences, and so on.[2]

In a "science of cultural works", writes Bourdieu (ibid., 214), three steps are necessary to analyse a particular field. The researcher must analyse firstly the position of the literary or other field within the larger field of political and economic power; secondly the specific field's internal structure – the "structure of objective relations between positions occupied by individuals or groups placed in a situation of competition for legitimacy"; and thirdly the socially constructed and constructing dispositions ("habitus") of the agents occupying these positions.

---

1. One shortcoming of the Bourdieusian field is its conceptualization (at least implicitly) as a "national" field.

2. As this makes clear, Bourdieu starts from a model of the social world that seems to be almost exclusively arranged vertically, neglecting horizontal structures even in subcategories. The principle of hierarchy that underlies this theory, its dominant category of structure and differentiation, has often led to criticism of Bourdieu's work as being inadequate to the complexity of real-life relationships (see, especially, Bohn 1991, 136).

When studying the individual as a socialized subject, the insight that a field only becomes a field when the "game" taking place within it is acknowledged as such by the agents involved is an important one. It necessitates several sets of instruments for investigating the logic and mechanisms of the field. We may assume that the particular position of individual agents or groups of agents in the field – a conjunction of their habitus and their staking of their own "capitals" – is what defines their social status. As well as the notion of habitus, therefore, the examination of this capital's volume and composition is a further crucial epistemological tool.

Bourdieu draws on Marx's notion of capital, but extends it to all aspects of society, which he understands to be "accumulated history" (Bourdieu 1986, 241). To do full justice to the structure and workings of society, a concept of capital must embrace many different manifestations, rather than being reduced to its use in economic theory. Certainly, economic capital is the most significant form of capital for societies with highly differentiated, self-regulating markets; economic capital is "immediately and directly convertible into money" (ibid., 243) and thus holds a pivotal position. However, other forms of capital – cultural, social and symbolic – gain in importance if we accept Bourdieu's central hypothesis that, in post-industrial Western societies, the decisive factors in the reproduction of power are no longer economic class but dimensions such as culture, education or taste. Cultural capital is manifested in educational qualifications and the ownership of cultural goods, and appears mainly in combination with other forms of capital, especially social and symbolic capital. As a form of cultural capital, linguistic capital is of particular relevance to the phenomenon of translation. Linguistic capital consists in "power over the mechanisms of linguistic price formation, the power to make the laws of price formation operate to one's advantage and to extract the specific surplus value". In this sense, "all linguistic interactions" are "micro-markets which always remain dominated by the overall structures" (Bourdieu 1993b, 80). The discourses circulating on the market of language only acquire value through their relationship to that market; in other words, their value depends on the capacity of the social agents involved to assert themselves within the power relations obtaining on the market (Bourdieu 1991a, 67). As for the work of translators, their translation of discourses is clearly not simply a transmission of value-neutral information. The discourses they work with are necessarily "signs of wealth" and "signs of authority" (ibid., 66), which must be believed and obeyed in line with the laws of the market. Translations therefore on the one hand are constructed by the laws of the market, on the other participate in constructing them.

Equally important for our understanding of translation is social capital, the "aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu 1986, 248). The degree of social capital depends partly

on the density of the network of relationships it generates, partly on the intensity of its interaction with other forms of capital. In terms of translation, this form of capital operates mainly on two levels: in the networks of mediation that underlie every translation initiative and determine the texture of the translation product; and more narrowly in the translation-related institutions that supply their members with social relationships – social relationships which sooner or later yield direct benefits.

It is usually as a crystallization of these other forms of capital that symbolic capital arises. Symbolic capital has a cognitive basis, resting on both "cognition and recognition" of a principle of distinction. Only when distinctions are perceived and ascribed particular values can this form of capital be articulated (Bourdieu 1998, 85). It is often acquired through the mechanisms of legitimation or consecration, and in the translation context is manifested in the award of translation prizes or grants or the successful placement of a translation with a prestigious publisher.

As a whole, social agents as possessors of capital are the structural elements that systematically influence practice. This is how, within the various fields of forces, concentrations of power arise around the agents who possess most capital. Such nodes of power impact crucially on the translation market, where translation clients or initiators with high concentrations of capital use their power to invest in the field. That translators themselves are the least likely to gather such power in their hands can be seen by analysing their habitus – another of Bourdieu's most important and multilayered concepts.

Bourdieu argues that the actions of agents in the field are socially determined, and calls the system of dispositions within which they act their habitus. This "product of history", generating "individual and collective practices", ensures "the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought and action, tend to guarantee the 'correctness' of practices and their constancy over time, more reliably than all formal rules and explicit norms" (Bourdieu 1990, 55). For Bourdieu, habitus is not a category that enables planned and deliberate action, and therefore it is not expressed by the actions of the agents, but is "inscribed in the present of the game" (Bourdieu 1998, 80) and is an inseparable part of that game. The habitus's capacity to generate actions, perceptions and judgements is due above all to its being inscribed in the body – though a body that is already prepared, so to speak, by history and society, in other words is the outcome of multiple processes of learning and conditioning. On the one hand, the habitus is already structured (in its embodiment); on the other, it is itself a structuring principle (in its generation of actions and judgements) (ibid., 81).

The notion of habitus proposed by Bourdieu constitutes a paradigm change in sociological thinking: a retreat from the concept of "social action" that regards action as a result of conscious decisions or of compliance with particular rules. Apart

from the principle of embodiment, it is the historicity of Bourdieu's habitus that most importantly counters "social action" with its ahistorical rules, for the concept of habitus implies constant transformation. The habitus is a socially constructed system, as is also articulated in its creative capacity to generate new behaviours in new situations. Finally, habitus is a highly productive figure of thought capable of registering socially constituted dispositions (Krais and Gebauer 2002, 5).

The translator's habitus may be regarded as a secondary habitus that takes shape only gradually in the course of a professional lifetime, building on and in dialogue with a primary habitus that has been evolving since childhood. Here, certain criticisms of Bourdieu's concept of habitus arise. One is that it pays too little attention to the theory of socialization and neglects learning processes that begin only later in life (Schwengel 1993, 146). Another is that by overemphasizing primary socialization, Bourdieu posits a problematic analogy between the psychological and the social. Not only does he fail to defend this analogy adequately, but it seems to assume a unified psyche, a notion jettisoned by sociologists long ago and certainly since Simmel's discussion of fragmentation (Bohn 1991, 140). This objection is fair in the case of the generation of translators' social practice, since the "secondary" translator's habitus is marked strongly by the conditions of the respective field and impacts upon that field perhaps more strongly than his or her "primary" habitus.

A claim of particular interest for translation research is that the habitus can be identified through the activities to which it gives rise – that the habitus of a person or collective can be reconstructed by studying their actions (Krais and Gebauer 2002, 26). This offers a way of bringing together social and textual analysis of translation. For example, the criteria underlying particular translation decisions could be correlated with the habitus of translators at a particular historical moment, and it might be possible to explain why in a certain time-space certain translation strategies were applied (perhaps strategies that see the translated text as textual production rather than reproduction, or as the outcome of an intensive process of negotiation). In other words, this assumption allows us to identify which conditions are more likely, which less likely, to facilitate negotiation. Evidently, while the translatorial habitus emerges from practical action, it is also capable of creating values and producing knowledge that is tied to practice (ibid., 30). This reveals the constructive character of translation and its manipulative potential.

Applying the notion of symbolic goods to the process of translation underlines once more the power relationships within which translation is constituted. As we build the foundations of a translation sociology, the goal will be to discover the social implications of translation and anchor them in a complex model for analysing translation as moulded by ideological, political and economic factors. The following chapters offer some first steps in such an undertaking, looking at several translation-related fields in the Habsburg Monarchy. My aim is to address

translation phenomena and their agents not as discrete items, but in their dynamic relationships within a social field of tension. As far as possible, I will take account of Bourdieu's characteristically unceasing revision of his concepts, his frequent interrogation of his own hypotheses, his perpetual switching of perspectives in order to resituate himself. Bourdieu's thinking as a "never-ending construction site" (Schultheis 2002, 136) will guide my arguments in what follows.