Chapter 6. "Promptly, any time of day": The private translation sector

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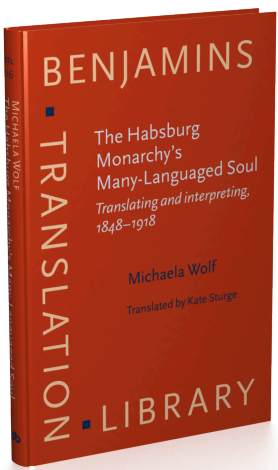

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CHAPTER 6

"Promptly, any time of day"

The private translation sector

No research has hitherto been carried out on the translation business that took place in the Habsburg Monarchy outside the influence of state institutions. The "United Interpreters' Agency for All the Languages of the Austrian Monarchy" mentioned in Chapter 4 supplied court interpreters and notarized translations; its successor, the "Court Interpreters' Agency for the French and Italian Language and Communication Institute for the Provision of Authentic and Simple Translations from All Other Languages", also handled translations in the area of general commerce and those not requiring notarization. Starting in the 1870s, the number of commercially run translation bureaus and individual translators began to grow considerably. In the address and advertising registers of Vienna and Prague, the cities' "yellow pages", the interpreting section covered both "sworn court interpreters" and "translation bureaus". An investigation of this fledgling economic sector reveals the importance of private commercial enterprise in satisfying the Habsburg Monarchy's communication needs within its multilingual space and across its frontiers. The everyday work of translation made a vital contribution to building "Habsburg culture" as a communicative space of polyphony and hybridity.

1. Commercial translation and its institutionalization

This chapter's study of the advertisements placed by translation bureaus and individual translators is based on the Viennese directory already discussed in Chapter 4, *Lehmanns Allgemeiner Wohnungs-Anzeiger nebst Handels- und Gewerbe-Adreßbuch für die k.k. Reichs-Haupt- und Residenzstadt Wien* (see also Wolf 2008b, 2013). A total of 718 advertisements were analysed, the first of which appeared in the directory's 1876 edition.

Figure 3 shows a steady growth in the number of advertisements over the period, indicating a rising demand for private-sector translations (interpreting is offered in just 4 per cent of all the advertisements). In 1876 the directory includes just one relevant advertisement, but there are six in 1883, and 1913 sees a peak of 37. With these growing numbers, greater diversity also emerges, initially in the advertisements' layout and size: in the early decades they run to a mere two or three

lines, but from the mid-1890s more and more entries are 12 to 25 lines long (occasionally up to 60 lines towards the end of the period) and have their own distinctive layout. At first it is mainly single individuals who offer their translating services; later on they are increasingly, although never completely, displaced by bureaus.

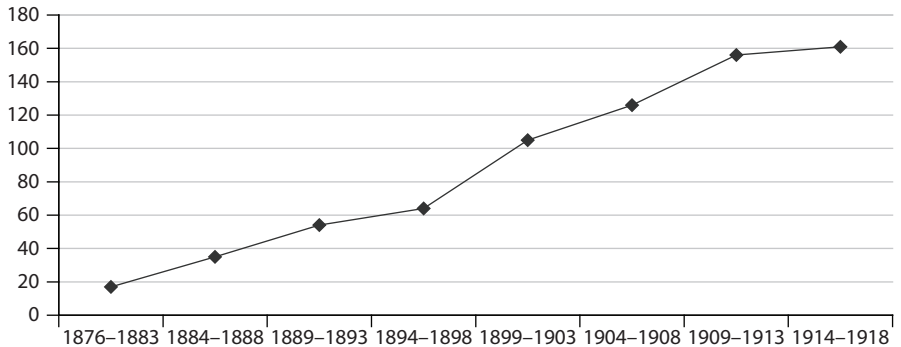

Figure 3. Number of advertisements, 1876–1918, Vienna

This rise in the number of Viennese translation bureaus is a further indication of the sector's growing professionalization. Between 1876 and 1918, a total of 475 individuals and 243 translation bureaus placed advertisements. From the turn of the century the number of bureaus rises, offering services in both central offices and subsidiaries. Interestingly, different kinds of institutions also begin to advertise translation services from around this point. For ten years starting in 1899, the Invalidenbank, a charitable institution supporting injured soldiers, offers translations of commercial correspondence and documents; from 1909 until the end of the Monarchy, the Berlitz School advertises translation work alongside its core business, language courses.

Looking at the gender of the translators named in the advertisements, we find a contrast with the field of translation institutionalized by the state. Women were absent from that field, but in the commercial translation sector there are at least some traces of their existence. Of the 718 entries advertising bureaus or individual translators between 1876 and 1918, 603 (84 per cent) mention a male name, with 59 different names in total; for 85 names (12 per cent) only an initial is given so that gender is invisible (this includes the Invalidenbank and the Berlitz School). Only 30 advertisements mention female names (4 per cent, a total of eight different women), most of them recurring over several years.

All the advertisements include certain items of information for potential clients, though not always in the same form. These are the name and address (in later years also telephone number), source or target languages, and the subject areas in which translations can be commissioned. Regarding the languages, it is only during

the first years of the period that the languages spoken in the Habsburg Monarchy predominate – very soon, the range of languages offered widens to cover most of the western European languages. Around a third of all the advertisements claim to serve "all languages", a tendency that rises over the years. It cannot be ascertained which languages this actually included, but at the very least the phrase signals a wish to claim breadth of coverage.

Altogether, translation from 23 individual languages was offered in the period, along with some groups of languages: "Romance", "Slavic", "Germanic" and "East Asian". Table 11 lists the individual languages, but cannot be regarded as representative because almost half of the advertisements make no mention of the source languages on offer. There is no indication of source language in 326 of the 718 advertisements (an average of 45 per cent across the period), while 224 claim to translate from "all languages" (on average 31 per cent; the proportion is higher in later years), and only 169 (24 per cent) specify one or more languages. The highest number of languages named specifically is nine.

Table 11. Languages offered in the advertisements

Arabic	English	Russian
Armenian	French	Serbo-Croat
Bohemian	Hungarian	Slovakian
Bosnian	Italian	Slovenian
Bulgarian	Norwegian	Spanish
Croatian	Polish	Swedish
Danish	Portuguese	Turkish
Dutch	Romanian	

On average over the period, nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of the bureaus claim to translate from "all languages", whereas individual translators do so only in an average of 16 per cent of cases. Unsurprisingly, translation bureaus only specify one or more source languages in 28 per cent of their advertisements, whereas 54 per cent of advertisements by individual translators specify at least one language. Clearly, bureaus have far greater capacities than individuals in terms of the spectrum of languages translated.

Figure 4 shows the growth in the range of source languages offered. The decline in 1910–12 seems partly to reflect a tendency at that time for the translation bureaus to move *en masse* to the statement "all languages". There is also a statistical element: in these three years no advertisement names the highest number of languages, whereas in 1913 one offers nine languages again, bringing the average back up. When separated into translation bureaus and individual advertisers, the average number of languages per advertisement becomes particularly revealing:

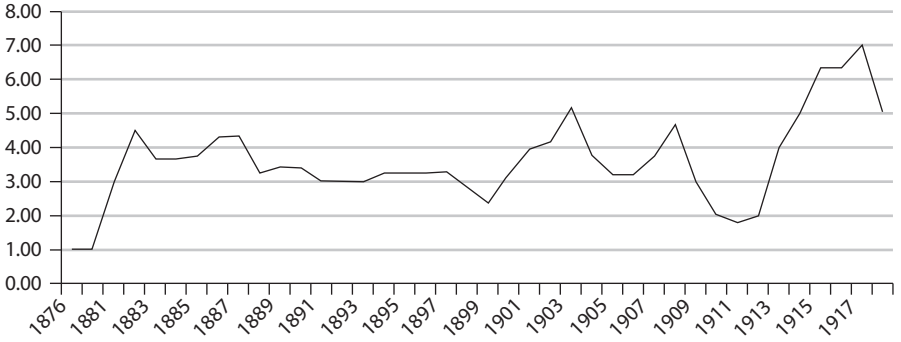

Figure 4. Average number of languages per advertisement, 1876–1918*

* Figure 4 includes only those advertisements that mention at least one language by name.

individual translators as a group are relatively stable in their naming of languages, whereas the translation bureaus show great fluctuations. The reason may lie in the emergence around the turn of the century, the period of general growth for translation bureaus, of a few companies that dedicated enormous resources to advertising. The Zlapetal bureau, for example, took out an advertisement for the first time in 1900, and from 1900 to 1903 it offered its services in nine languages, boosting the average. A similar effect can be seen in 1886. The bureau A. F. Heksch, offering more and more languages as time went by, places its last advertisement in 1885, after which the average drops significantly.[1]

The subject areas in which translations are undertaken are an important indicator of the diversification and professionalization of the commercial "space of mediation" (in the sense to be outlined in Chapter 9). Across the years, around 15 per cent of the advertisements claim to cover "all subjects". By the end of the century, however, most bureaus and individual translators seem to have felt compelled to name specific subject areas as well. The most frequent one is commercial correspondence (126 mentions), followed by technical texts (120 mentions) and literature (93 mentions). Over time, the naming of subjects rises sharply, indicating a tendency towards specialization. Translations are offered in every conceivable subject area, along with particular text genres such as catalogues, brochures or magazines and, towards the end of the period, also reprographic services. Certified translations are offered in only around 5 per cent of all advertisements, probably because the Interpreters' Agency, representing sworn interpreters, was responsible for such work. Certainly, some of the names advertising certified translations also appear in the Agency's lists.

1. Alexander Heksch died in 1885, aged 39; see Chapter 9.

The range of qualifications cited by the bureaus is very wide, and cultural capital is most frequently referenced. Although such information appears in only a quarter of all the advertisements, the importance attached to it seems to grow: in the first ten years, no information at all is given as to the translators' or bureau proprietors' professional training, honours or titles, but it is included more and more often later on, especially from the 1890s. Initially, such references remain very general ("businessman", "bank official", "journalist"), and at first sight seem rather unrelated to the translation services offered. In a second phase, the translators highlight their linguistic expertise by describing themselves as teachers, especially teachers of languages. From the turn of the century, references to a translation-relevant profession – "translator", "official translator", "interpreter" – proliferate. In the advertisements placed by women translators, there is never any reference to qualifications.

A second line of argument regarding quality is the value of experience. A company may be described as long-standing and rich in tradition ("the oldest and first general translation bureau"), or clients are assured of its international reach ("First International Translation Bureau") and "lengthy experience abroad". References are also made to numerous years of professional translating experience, such as the claim made in one 1900 advertisement: "160,000 translations since 1880". A further category is more directly related to the actual work of translating, with mention of the speed and accuracy that can be expected. Around 12 per cent of all advertisements include such claims, with a rise beginning at the turn of the century. There seem to have been no limits to the creativity of the advertisers, from "T. done immediately, while the messenger waits, also by telephone" and "correct translation guaranteed" to "impeccable execution" and "translation perfect in every way". A fourth area of qualification stresses international and professional testimonials: "splendid", "first-class" or "the highest" references are promised, with additional details such as "relevant attestations from k.k. ministries and authorities at home and abroad". This category includes the "exceeding" or "very strictest" discretion that is guaranteed in around 5 per cent of the advertisements.

The price factor plays a surprisingly minor role. Very few of the advertisements include information on prices – overall, only 67 of them, or 9 per cent. The scant importance attached to this information by the advertisers becomes even more striking given that such references increased from the end of the century onwards, so that the average in the early years is even lower. It is only at the very end of the period that a somewhat more pointedly price-based approach arises, with banners such as "extremely reasonable, cheaper than everywhere else", or "the cheapest, depending on language and text". This indicates the beginnings of a price war among the bureaus (the proportion of bureaus including price-related information is higher than the overall figure, at 25 per cent).

2. Battling for positions in the commercial translation sector

This sketch of the information given by translators to their prospective clients, or the qualifications with which they hoped to make their mark, hints at the dynamic interaction of the many different forces defining the commercial field of translation. One of these forces was the increasing autonomy of the field of private or commercial translations. The emergence of this field during the eighteenth century may be regarded as part of the creation of a literary market that was gathering pace at the time (see Bourdieu 1995, 48–9). However, it obeyed different rules, due to the differing market conditions governing the genesis of cultural products in the narrower sense and of the products required by the general commercial sphere. The emergence of a distinct, autonomous private translation sector (comparatively late, in the last third of the nineteenth century) was partly due to the reform of trade regulations in 1859, which liberalized the establishment of commercial companies. Although the state reserved the right to determine the overall direction and (especially) the limits of business activity, private entrepreneurial initiative now enjoyed a greater degree of self-determination. It was in the wake of this liberalization process that translation bureaus began to emerge. Before the advent of the bureaus, businesses' day-to-day translation requirements were probably handled by linguistically skilled individuals working in or around the companies involved.

The growing professionalization of the translation sector accelerated the process of autonomization. In this context, autonomization does not – as in the artistic or literary field – refer to the gradual liberation of artists from the patronage of clerical and political forces, but to the decoupling of translators' work from other frameworks, themselves unstructured and largely unorganized, and its gradual transformation into a set of relations of production coherently structured by the interaction of the dispositions, agents and requirements of the field of mediation. In this sense, the autonomization of the private translation sector is not dissimilar to the general process of institutionalization, but in terms of the properties of the agents and the capitals they deploy (to be discussed below), its structures are far more complex yet also weaker. Bourdieu emphasizes that autonomy does not consist merely in the independence granted by those in power (in the present case, clients commissioning translations from private enterprises or individuals), but also in factors such as the rise of characteristic traditions and autonomous institutions (such as interest groups or collectives) that impact upon the agents in the field (Bourdieu 1995, 381, n. 9). Although the rudiments of such institutions can be found in the present context – the Interpreters' Agency, for example – this does not amount to an institutionalization of the professional sector, if only because many of the translation bureaus were so short-lived.

In this sense, the mechanisms of autonomization affecting the many individuals who supplied the commercial translation sector were different from those experienced by the translation bureaus. Because of their multiple embedments in the general field of work (many of the individual translation advertisers were language teachers or professors; others were editors or journalists), individual providers were exposed to multiple sets of constraints rather than only the constraints of the translation field itself. The bureaus gradually left such secondary or tertiary constraints behind them as the private translation sector became institutionalized, and now became subject to the particular logics of the emerging space of commercial translation. The moment of transition into this new order can be observed in the cases of certain translators who made the move from individual provider to founder and manager of a translation bureau, thus coming within range of the new market's pressures. One example is A. F. Heksch, who offers his services as an individual translator from 1876; just five years later a translation bureau bearing his name is advertised. Similarly, Bertrand Walko and Edmund Wolschan began – judging by their advertisements – modestly as individual translators, but after only a few years had climbed the ladder to run two of Vienna's few large translation bureaus. On the other hand, in the late nineteenth century it was by no means uncommon for translators to have multiple sources of income, some closely related to the activity of translating. To name just two cases: Paul Gustav Rheinhardt (1853–1934) supported his family by running a small translation bureau while also working as an editor for various Viennese newspapers and magazines and as a writer, sometimes under the pseudonym Paul Reinhardt. In 1902 he edited the first volume of a major dictionary of writers and artists, the *Deutsch-österreichisches Künstler- und Schriftsteller-Lexikon* (Österreichisches Literaturarchiv 2003), which carries an advertisement for his translation bureau (Rheinhardt 1902, 527). Alois Sebera (1827–1909) also worked for numerous periodicals, including the *Botschafter* and the *Deutsches Volksblatt* in Vienna. From the early 1890s, he was the proprietor of a state-licensed translation bureau and a "literary bureau" writing prologues, epilogues, serious or light-hearted lectures in verse or prose, and occasional poetry of all kinds (Brümmer [1913], 388). This interplay of different literary and translatorial practices (the advertisements that Sebera placed between 1893 and 1899 specify no particular subject area; he also remains general in his claim to translate in "all languages") doubtlessly resulted in a dynamism within the space of mediation that may even be regarded as fundamental to its structure. Both individual translators and bureaus played their different parts in defining the state of the commercial translating "field". At the same time, they were themselves defined by its logic.

Chapters 8 and 9 will turn to the field of literary translation, where the reasons for autonomization differed from the domain here provisionally called the

"mediatory space of the private sector". However, the autonomization process itself showed similar patterns. The legitimation and evaluation of the services offered in both fields, or sub-fields, came to rely no longer on religious and political powers but on market conditions, with different forces determining the operation of each field according to its own properties. A key factor in the two areas' configurations of power was the deployment of different forms of capital by their agents. Based on Bourdieu's argument that practical access to the various capitals defines an agent's opportunities for action and profit within a particular field, two forms of capital seem crucial for the present case: cultural capital and social capital.

Among the translators studied in this chapter, there is abundant evidence of many different forms of cultural capital. What Bourdieu calls "embodied cultural capital" – a person's long-term dispositions, internalized over time, which always remain marked by the circumstances of their acquisition (Bourdieu 1986, 245) – is articulated chiefly in the translators' naming of their qualifications. The languages offered in their advertisements are the foundation of this form of cultural capital: they are the very substance of the translators' activities and, depending on their specific value on the Monarchy's linguistic marketplace, they interact with the associated subject areas as the means for translators' position-taking in the space of mediation. The frequent references to the international networks of a bureau or individual translator are another component of embodied cultural capital, since such internationality is a factor of the stakes (*enjeux*) of education or knowledge invested by agents. However, it also overlaps with another type of capital, social capital, which refers to the social networks of the agents – in this context, international ones. Of all the translators placing advertisements, 12 per cent take care to stress their international experience.

The declaration of the subject areas in which translation services are offered shows the clear marks of embodied cultural capital. As mentioned, these areas diversify noticeably over the decades. In fact, cultural capital does not accrue solely from the quantity of different subject areas concentrated in the hands of a single translator or bureau, but also has a qualitative aspect: the greater the diversity of subjects offered, the more skills and knowledges are brought to the game by the agent concerned, and the more advantageous is that agent's position in the space of mediation. This applies not only to subjects but also to textual genres, a growing number of which are listed over the period. Equally, embodied cultural capital can be identified in a note that the translator previously worked on the team editing the Sachs-Villatte French dictionary (Bertrand Walko, 1902 advertisement).

The translators' professional training is an outcome of education processes and may therefore be considered a form of embodied cultural capital. Proliferating from the turn of the century, translation-related job designations are remarkably diverse. The most frequent is *Translator* (translator and interpreter; 20 occurrences,

starting in 1897), followed by *Gerichtsdolmetscher* (court interpreter; 15 occurrences, starting in 1905) and *Gerichtsdolmetscher und Translator* (13, starting in 1906). Thirteen translators describe themselves as *Dolmetsch* (interpreter; from 1908), and there is one occurrence each of *Amtstranslator* (official translator and interpreter), *diplomierter Übersetzer* (qualified translator), and *Linguist* (linguist). Because no more detailed data are available, we cannot tell what actual training these self-declared titles imply. Occasionally, additional information is given, such as "professor at the Academy of Commerce", indicating an academic training in languages. The trend to name translation-specific occupational titles is accompanied by the increasing use of related information such as internationality or expertise in numerous subjects. This is of prime importance for agents' position-taking in the space of mediation, especially in combination with other types of capital.

As a form of capital inextricable from the person, the embodied cultural capital brought into play in the shape of professional designations is closely connected with habitus, in that it is a product of agents' internalized competences. Simeoni describes the translatorial habitus as tending, for historical reasons, to be submissive; in his view, this has contributed significantly to the low status of the profession (Simeoni 1998, 11). It is impossible to know in detail how far that diagnosis holds true for the translators discussed here, but Simeoni's arguments – especially with regard to translators' submissive and norm-confirming behaviour – may not apply in this particular situation, because the commercial translation sector was not yet fully consolidated. Rather, we may assume that the habitus of these translators, located at the intersection of the social practice of agents and the social structure of the field, was shaped by the struggle for consolidation within a still fluid space of mediation, and thus by an especially energetic deployment of all the skills that they could bring to bear.

The advertisers' emphasis on their professionalism may also be read as a sign of embodied cultural capital, since professionalism rests on learned skills and accumulated knowledge. The "prompt execution of work" is advanced as a prime imperative in performing translations, articulated in expressions such as "promptly, any time of day" or "done immediately, while the messenger waits". The matter of accuracy, also mentioned above, is another significant factor in highlighting professionalism. Among the most revealing claims in terms of the translators' embodied cultural capital are the references to academic training or outstanding subject expertise. In 5 per cent of all the advertisements, the bureau is said to provide "academically correct" translations; 2 per cent claim to "make use of academically trained assistants: lawyers, physicians, etc.", others "first-class specialists from the various nations". A few stress that translations are made "not simply uncritically from the dictionary". The designation "the only institute under academic direction" also hints at the battle to attain the greatest legitimacy in the field.

Another form of cultural capital, institutionalized cultural capital, comes into play most obviously in diplomas and titles, which are in fact rather sparsely deployed in the advertisements. Only 6 per cent of the translators appear with the title "Dr", and one translator describes himself as having a "diploma in translation" – what this qualification may have entailed is unknown. The third sub-form of cultural capital is objectified cultural capital, which appears mostly in the shape of books, machines, and other transmissible objects, and as such is difficult to separate from economic capital. Such cultural "movables" might be found in those translation bureaus that additionally offer their services as a "typing bureau" or "typesetting office". Reprographic services for magazines, advertising brochures or catalogues also indicate the presence of objectified cultural capital.

Social capital stands as a metaphor for social power, and describes the resources that rest on membership of a particular group. The volume of an agent's social capital "depends on the size of the network of connections" that he or she can "effectively mobilize" (Bourdieu 1986, 249). In the advertisements studied here, it is primarily the testimonials promised by the translators and their references to internationality that can be considered factors of social capital. Testimonials are mentioned in 15 per cent of all the advertisements, indicating the high value accorded to this form of capital. The translators apply various methods to enhance their credibility, mentioning everything from "references and attestations from k.k. ministries, authorities and lawyers" to "membership of the General Association of Writers" or employment as the "special correspondent for *Prensa Española*" – this latter also stressing the translator's access to international networks. As mentioned, these references to international connections lie at the interface of cultural and social capital, but can be regarded as social capital in that they point to a network of relationships, which Bourdieu describes as "the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (ibid.). The frequency with which the translators vaunt their internationality underlines their aspiration to make a name for themselves.

The dynamics of the Monarchy's commercial translation sector were, then, determined by the interaction of the various forms of capital in the field, and in this sense they did not differ substantially from the translation market today. The unequal distribution of capital in the space of mediation is ultimately what defines its structure and the specific impact of its different capitals. This becomes clear in the various lines pursued by the translation bureaus' and individual translators' advertisements as regards qualifications: on the one hand, increasing reference to subject specialisms signals the sector's diversification and professionalization; on the other, the sector is established through the ascription of meanings via symbolic capital. Greater use of translation-related occupational designations and appeals to

tradition, internationality or relevant experience are all ways of consolidating the advertisers' position within the space of mediation. Their efforts were supported by the pro-entrepreneurial commercial reforms of 1859, but up to 1914 the institutionalization of the translation sector did not gain significant ground. This was because of weakly developed structures, which in turn resulted partly from the high fluctuation of translation bureaus and the multiple occupations that many translators still seemed forced to pursue.