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Introduction

Poetry Translation: Agents, Actors, Networks, Contexts

Jeremy Munday and Jacob Blakesley

This number of *Translation and Literature* examines the agents, actors, networks, and contexts involved in the process of poetry translation. The five articles consider, in five twentieth-century cases, the conditions ‘on the ground’ in which these elements function; the interrelation between them; the translation strategies employed; and underlying ideologies. Taken together, they seek to illuminate the conditions of poetry translation and heighten awareness of the complex sociological and linguistic processes through which it operates.

Our collection in part positions itself within recent sociological approaches to translation, which have drawn above all on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (cultural production), Bruno Latour (actor-network theory), and Niklas Luhmann (social systems theory). Such sociological approaches, as a standard reference work explains, shed light on ‘the function of translation in the global distribution and reception of cultural goods; the influence of market forces on translation practices; the role of translation and interpreting in articulating socio-political and symbolic claims of the nation state; translation and globalization; translation and activism; and translator’s agency’.¹ Bourdieu’s framework has been particularly influential recently, positing the existence of literary ‘fields’ and of differentiated types of ‘capital’ (from economic to symbolic, cultural to social), and emphasizing the role of ‘habitus’ (identity and disposition) and *illusio* (roughly, the limits of awareness).² Indeed, the translator’s ‘habitus’ has been a central concept since Daniel Simeoni described it as one of ‘voluntary servitude’, a claim that is challenged by the findings presented here.³

The route to what has been called the ‘construction of a sociology of translation’⁴ can be traced back to the 1970s, when Itamar Even-Zohar’s pioneering work on translations

within literary polysystems appeared, causing a dramatic shift away from static notions of equivalence and towards the contextualization of translations within the target literary systems.⁵ However, as Edwin Gentzler contends, ‘Even-Zohar seldom relates texts to the “real conditions” of their production, only to hypothetical structural models and abstract generalizations.’⁶ When in the 1980s and 1990s Gideon Toury systematized Even-Zohar’s observations into a new paradigm called ‘Descriptive Translation Studies’, he emphasized translation as ‘a socio-cultural, and hence norm-governed activity’,⁷ and highlighted, in Michaela Wolf’s later words, ‘the nature of norms as social categories which are particularly crucial factors in the socialization process of translators’.⁸ More recent work has co-opted Luhmann’s social systems theory for the description of translation and its environment.⁹

Sociological approaches to translation benefited to a considerable degree from the work of André Lefevere and Susan Bassnett in the 1990s. It is instructive, in this context, to note the evolution from Lefevere’s 1975 volume on poetry translation, *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint*,¹⁰ with its close reading approach, to his later work. In *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992), he considers the two key factors governing a literary translation to be the translator’s ‘ideology’ (and whether this is either willingly espoused or else imposed by some form of ‘patronage’) and the dominant poetics in the target culture.¹¹ His posthumous work then applies Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital to English translations of the *Aeneid*.¹² This went some way to justifying Bassnett and Lefevere’s earlier claim that ‘the object of study [in Translation Studies] has been redefined; what is studied is the text, embedded within its network of both source and target cultural signs and in this way Translation Studies has been able to utilize the linguistic approach and move out beyond it’.¹³ Yet the ‘linguistic approach’, if by this we mean the application of functional, linguistic, and pragmatic categories for the classification of communicative acts of translation, remains central for the analysis of the expression of

ideology within that cultural and political network of signs, as is made clear in the work of Jones and Bollig in the current issue.

On the other hand, early sociological studies of translation (that is, studies of translation from within sociology) were also preoccupied with the ‘macro-contextual’ level. These analysed statistical trends in literary translation, relying on UNESCO’s readily available but unreliable Index Translationum.¹⁴ A notable exception based on more reliable data, namely national governmental statistics and those provided by national publishing institutes, was Valérie Ganne and Marc Minon’s 1992 essay, ‘Géographies de la traduction’.¹⁵ None of these studies, however, applied a strict sociological methodology. More recent publications have for the first time looked at translation trends using economic models, attempting to determine translation flows based on economic factors.¹⁶ If it is true, as John Milton suggests, that ‘economic factors appear to be something of a blind area’ in studies of literary translations, it seems they are becoming gradually more visible.¹⁷

It was thanks to Bourdieu’s former student, Gisèle Sapiro, that quantitative analysis of translations began to be used systematically. In 2002, she and Johan Heilbron edited a journal issue on translation as international literary exchange,¹⁸ with notable contributions by Pascale Casanova on ‘Consécration et accumulation de capital littéraire’ and Hervé Serry on ‘Constituer un catalogue littéraire: la place des traductions dans l’histoire des Éditions du Seuil’. Sapiro’s edited volume *Translatio*, 2008, then examined a wide range of literary translations into and out of French, marshalling a considerable amount of data, though still partly relying on the Index Translationum.¹⁹ Here are essays of undeniable importance about the translation of Arabic, Dutch, Finnish, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Hebrew, and East European literature into French, and about translations from French into Arabic, Dutch, Finnish, and Hebrew. A subsequent collection edited by Sapiro in 2009, *Les contradictions de la*

globalisation éditoriale, extends to Brazil and Poland, and contains a number of studies analysing the intersections of literary translation and publishing houses.

This mainly macro-level approach is taken up here by Jacob Blakesley in his reconstruction of translation flows and networks of influence. Working from the perspectives of Bourdieu, Heilbron, and Sapiro, he sees translation as embedded in a series of power relations dependent on the hierarchy of languages and literary systems. Most particularly and innovatively, he adopts Franco Moretti's 'distant reading' approach to world literature to compare twentieth-century poet-translators in four major European traditions: English, French, Italian, and Spanish. Since this is an approach that is applicable to any quantitative analysis of translation, the methodological issues that come to the fore concerning the construction of the corpus are of wider interest: the overlap of language and nationality (whether, for example, to include anglophone poets from outside the United Kingdom, or francophone poets from outside France), how to deal with volumes that have appeared in multiple editions, and so on. Blakesley adopts what he calls a 'selective canon', focusing on European poet-translators who have appeared in major anthologies in their own language traditions regardless of nationality, and restricting the corpus to books in their first editions.

Such quantitative analysis allows ready identification of trends at the macro-level: the changing prominence of different source languages (English generally overtaking French from the 1950s), the effect of external circumstance on text selection (German disappearing as a source language from English during World War II, for example). The statistics also indicate the most frequently translated authors (Shakespeare easily outdistances all others), and serve as an entry point to the study of individual poet-translators or groups of them. Blakesley's study therefore provides precise context for the investigation of other translation networks, and for comparing other, isolated studies of poet-translators.

While Blakesley's interest lies in tracing possible networks of influence between different translators and traditions through 'distant reading', it is the question of agents and actors that is explored by the other contributors. 'Agent' has recently been a key, but ill-defined, concept in Translation Studies. Sometimes it is applied to the study of translators and their 'habitus' alone. In a volume itself entitled *Agents of Translation*, the term has been used to refer to a whole range of intermediaries between the translator and the end-user, who may challenge the dominant political or cultural values operating at the time.²⁰ A third use of 'agent', outlined by H  l  ne Buzelin, is as a more abstract, sociological concept: 'It designates an entity endowed with agency, which is the ability to exert power in an intentional way. Agents are usually understood to be human, although some paradigms, such as actor-network theory, maintain that non-humans are also endowed with agency'.²¹ Latour's 'actor-network' theory was proposed by Buzelin as a means of analysing the relationship between the participants in the translation process more precisely than through the use of a field or polysystem approach.²² In the second article in this number, Tom Boll applies it to the micro-level exchanges in the offices of a major publisher. Using the Penguin Archive at Bristol University, Boll reconstructs the translation policy and processes that underpinned Penguin's Spanish and Latin American poetry translation collections for over twenty years, from 1956 to 1979. What Toury would call 'Translation policy'²³ may be deduced from the interface between text type and human agents; for example, how the policy for the translation of a certain genre (in this case, poetry) is determined by editors in a specific publishing house.

Boll does far more, though, than investigate the evolution of policy-making at Penguin. He looks in critical detail at the interplay between the different actors (academic advisors and translators, as well as the role of internal editors and the publishing house itself), seeing how the dominant power is played out and a series identity is constructed. As Boll notes, 'The production of a translation ... might involve a whole sequence of negotiation over

the choice of translation method; the enrolment of translators, advisers, and authors of introductory matter; the selection of texts; editing of the translated manuscript; and presentation of the work for market.’ Importantly, in actor-network theory actors are proactive ‘mediators’ rather than passive intermediaries; their actions and interactions, propelled by specific motivations, shape the product (here, collections of poems) in sometimes unpredictable ways. Thus, Sir Allen Lane at Penguin espoused an overt translation policy geared towards providing high-quality texts to a mass audience at a moderate price, with an educational purpose in view. But, conscious of Latour’s wariness of analysis based on an undifferentiated concept (in this case, the ‘publishing house’ as a single, systematic organization), Boll looks closer. He makes sense of the wealth of detail revealed in internal memos and other correspondence, to show how Penguin’s translation policy was mediated inconsistently over this period, and how, at all times, negotiations between the various actors faced the distinct possibility of failure. The policy operated against a changing educational and cultural backdrop in the 1960s, and was fed by new knowledge about Latin America available from new U.K. universities.

Boll’s article, moving from archival data to a narrative for a whole poetry series, is a perfect example of the actor-network theory motto of ‘follow the actors’.²⁴ The other three articles in this issue trace the actors through the contexts in which they operate, and the interrelation of that context with textual choice in translation. Francis Jones analyses a substantial corpus of translated Serbian poetry published in the crucial period between 1992 and 2008, examining the expression of ideology, specifically of ethno-nationalism, in these translation projects. Adopting a definition of ideology of the type that has become quite widespread in Translation Studies, namely ‘any normative belief-system about social reality that a community regards as “commonsensical”’, Jones tackles a basic but important issue: how far, and in what ways, is the ideological element shifted in translation? In other words,

when working on a sensitive poem in a socio-historical context where ideologies are at stake, are translators prone to manipulate textually in line with their own beliefs, or do they prioritize a ‘reliable representation’ of the source poem?

Once again, the situation is complicated by the collaboration of a team of actors (various translators, living source poets, publishers, editors) and by the ‘positionality’ of the team, working from a non-globalized language (Serbian) into a dominant, global one (English). Given these circumstances, Jones describes how it is the team which generally takes higher-level decisions (such as the selection of texts and the general direction of the project, framed by paratextual elements) and in certain cases (the re-publication of an old translation) they may even exclude the translator; nevertheless it is the translator who is generally responsible for the micro-level textual choices in the target text. Yet Jones shows in his survey that blatant textual ‘ideologizing’ (the introduction of motivated ideological shifts) is not frequent, and requires the coincidence of various conditions, notably a fixed-form poem with overt sociopolitical content and prevailing translation norms that support manipulation. Where ideologizing does occur, it tends to involve the heightening or lowering of ideological signals, along the lines of ‘attitudinal intensification’ as expressed in current work on appraisal theory and translation.²⁵ A further factor is the attitude/disposition of the translator him/herself; Jones finds that translators’ semantic-stylistic strategies tend to remain consistent irrespective of source poets and poems. The question then becomes not just why and how some translators manipulate ideological stance, but why so many do not.

The last two articles here deal with these questions in different ways. Jeremy Munday examines in detail how a single actor may take multiple roles and use this to push for a specific representation in the target language. He uses archival material to investigate the work of the British poet Jon Silkin (1930-1997), perhaps best known as founding editor of *Stand* magazine in the 1950s. Silkin was a keen promoter of translation. This article considers

his work as an anthologist and editor as well as translator, focusing on two translation anthology projects which occupied him over many years, in modern Hebrew and modern Japanese poetry respectively. These two examples strongly support André Lefevere's classification of anthologizing and translating as forms of 'rewriting', and also Charles Bernstein's comparatist view of poetry in which the social field is expressed in the relation between poems.²⁶ In each collection we see the crucial role of the selection of poets and poems (Bernstein's 'articulation of preference'), since the decision to include or exclude relates directly to questions of representativeness and the critical evaluation of each poet's value. This is most clearly manifested in Silkin's vivid correspondence, and difference of opinion, with his expert informants in Israel and Japan. Indeed, one of the key points that emerges in this study is how the power relations between different actors fluctuate. This is particularly acute in this case because Silkin, the initiator of the projects and with overall responsibility for them as editor, depended on his source-language informants (poets and/or academics in their own right) not only for their expert knowledge of the field, but also to provide Silkin, lacking knowledge of the source languages, with access to the texts. At the same time, exhaustingly, Silkin was dealing with collaborators at a higher level: editors at large publishing houses (the Hebrew anthology was initially going to be published by Penguin), owners of smaller publishers, and representatives of funding agencies, each with their own function in a publishing industry in which much depends on personal chemistry and individual preference. What comes across clearly in this study is Silkin's force of personality, and his desire, as editor and co-translator, for a forceful, creative translation strategy.

In the final article in this issue, Ben Bollig investigates in more depth the subtle interplay between translation strategies and contexts. By 'context', Bollig, also following Lefevere, refers to the ideological, social, and economic environment in which the texts are

produced, and the ideological interests, financial patronage, and status implications that are at stake. He concentrates on contemporary Argentine poets (notably Juan Gelman and Alejandra Pizarnik) and their translators, and investigates translator decision-making on textual and paratextual levels. Translator paratexts are a much-investigated site for the observation of translation,²⁷ often taking as their departure point Gérard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, which distinguishes between 'peritexts' (material that accompanies the text, such as the cover, blurb, and preface) and 'epitexts' (reviews, interviews, and other extratextual commentary, including the archive material discussed by Bollig and Munday). Bollig in effect analyses peritexts, specifically translator prefaces and footnotes, as a means of identifying a translator's strategies and the rationale for them. When considering Gelman's collection *Unthinkable Tenderness* (1997), edited and translated by Joan Lindgren, he makes the important point that such devices, in combination with the selection of poems and other material (essays), frame the anthology 'within an activist and human rights context'. This active, and activist, role for the translator is one that has become increasingly familiar in current Translation Studies, and Bollig's article serves both to illustrate how this may function in poetry translation and to chart how the resultant literalist translation strategy may shift readers' expectations and prepare them for future contexts. Such contexts include re-translations, in this case Hardie St Martin's versions, where, with Gelman now occupying a more central position in the canon, the focus shifts from activism to poetics, and to achieving a more creative translation.

Pursuing this link between context and strategy in the translation of Pizarnik and others, Bollig's piece concludes with a suggested description of the role of the different translators (as 'pioneer and activist', 'intercultural popularizer', 'intercultural actor', 'intercultural creator') and some questions that are highly pertinent for any study of actor roles in translation: the status of the source language and source text, the extra-textual

motivation of the translator, the publisher's purpose, the context of economics and power, changes in context between source text and target text, the function of anthologization and paratextual commentary, and patterns of translation strategies (rather than individual translation shifts). Perhaps the most sensitive point of all, and the most difficult to determine, is how these questions relate to the different actors in the process, who quite often undertake a range of sometimes overlapping roles.

These roles and contextual variables are highlighted across the five articles in this special issue. Combining a range of methodologies that include close and 'distant' reading, they demonstrate that poetry translation is a particularly fruitful site for the analysis of agents, actors, and networks, and of the underlying ideologies translations articulate or reflect. It is a very complex site where there are no 'simple' paths of causation between actors and translation strategies, and where translation is constructed by a multiplicity of voices.

Three unconnected reviews round out this number of *Translation and Literature*. They appear here by reason of their likely interest to readers of the rest, for whom it is hoped they will represent a bonus, but they were prepared as ordinary review contributions to *Translation and Literature*, not for the purposes of this special number.

¹ Moira Inghilleri, 'Sociological Approaches', in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, second edn (Abingdon, 2009), p. 279.

² For example, Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, translated by Claud DuVerlie (Cambridge, 1993).

³ Daniel Simeoni, 'The Pivotal Status of the Translator's Habitus', *Target*, 10 (1998), 1-39.

⁴ *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, edited by Michaela Wolf and Alejandra Fukari (Amsterdam, 2007).

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- ⁵ Itamar Even-Zohar, 'The Position of Translated Literature within the Literary Polysystem', in *Literature and Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, edited by James S. Holmes, José Lambert, and Raymond van den Broeck (Leuven, 1978), pp. 117-27.
- ⁶ Edwin Gentzler, *Contemporary Translation Theories* (London, 1993), p. 123.
- ⁷ Gideon Toury, 'A Handful of Paragraphs on "Translation" and "Norms"', in *Translation and Norms*, edited by Christina Schäffner (Clevedon, 1999), pp. 9-31 (p. 13).
- ⁸ Michaela Wolf, 'Sociology of Translation', in *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Vol. 1, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer (Amsterdam, 2010), p. 338.
- ⁹ For the use of Luhmann see, for example, Theo Hermans, *The Conference of Tongues* (Manchester, 2007), Chapter 5; Sergey Tyulenev, *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies* (Abingdon, 2011).
- ¹⁰ André Lefevere, *Translating Poetry: Seven Strategies and a Blueprint* (Assen, 1975).
- ¹¹ André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (London, 1992), p. 42.
- ¹² André Lefevere, 'Translation Practices and the Circulation of Cultural Capital', in *Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation*, edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, pp. 41-56.
- ¹³ Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, 'Introduction: Proust's Grandmother and the Thousand and One Nights: The Cultural Turn in Translation Studies', in *Translation, History, and Culture*, edited by Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (London, 1990), **pp. 1-13** (p. 12).
- ¹⁴ For the unreliability see Blakesley, below.
- ¹⁵ In *Traduire l'Europa*, edited by Françoise Barret-Ducrocq (Paris, 1992), pp. 55-97.
- ¹⁶ Christian Hjørth-Andersen, 'A Model of Translations', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 25 (2001), 203-17; Victor Ginsburgh, Shlomo Weber, and Sheila Weyers, 'The Economics of Literary Translation: Some Theory and Evidence', *Poetics*, 39 (2011), 228-46.

¹⁷ John Milton, 'The Importance of Economic Factors in Translation Publication', in *Beyond Description Translation Studies: Investigations in Homage to Gideon Toury*, edited by Anthony Pym, Miriam Shlesinger, and Daniel Simeoni (Amsterdam, 2008), pp. 163-73 (p. 164).

¹⁸ This was *Traduction: les échanges littéraires internationaux*, 144 (2002), under the issue title 'Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales'.

¹⁹ *Translatio: le marché de la traduction en France à l'heure de la mondialisation*, edited by Gisèle Sapiro (Paris, 2008).

²⁰ *Agents of Translation*, edited by John Milton and Paul Bandia (Amsterdam, 2009).

²¹ Hélène Buzelin, 'Agents of Translation', in *The Handbook of Translation Studies*, edited by Yves Gambier and Luc van Doorslaer (Amsterdam, 2011), p. 6.

²² Hélène Buzelin, 'Unexpected Allies: How Latour's Network Theory could complement Bourdieusian Analyses in Translation Studies', *The Translator*, 11 (2005), 193-218.

²³ Gideon Toury, *Descriptive Translation Studies* (Amsterdam, 1995), p. 58.

²⁴ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford, 2005), p. 12.

²⁵ Such as Jeremy Munday, *Evaluation in Translation: Critical Points of Translator Decision-making* (Abingdon, 2012).

²⁶ André Lefevere, *Translation, Rewriting* (London, 1992), p. 9; Charles Bernstein, *Attack of the Difficult Poems: Essays and Inventions* (Chicago, 2011), p. 132.

²⁷ See further *Translation Peripheries: Paratextual Elements in Translation*, edited by Ana Gil-Bardaji, Pilar Orero, and Sara Rovira-Esteva (Bern, 2012), and *Text, Extratext, Metatext and Paratext in Translation*, edited by Valerie Pellatt (Newcastle, 2013).