Agency and Role
Sergey Tyulenev

1. Relevance to TIS

The notion of agency is relevant to T&I studies in two ways: it can refer to translation/interpreting as a social activity and to the translator/interpreter as a social actor. The former is primary while the latter is derivative insofar as the actor's "typical 'action' […] alone marks [him/her] out as belonging to a particular category" (Weber 1978: 21). The translator's/interpreter's social role is predicated on the translation/interpreting agency. The first question to be asked, therefore, is what constitutes translation/interpreting as agency; based on that, the role of the translator/interpreter can be discussed. In what follows, the term 'agency' will be applied to translation/interpreting as a social function, and the term 'role' to the translator/interpreter as a social actor.

2. Theoretical foundations

The word 'agency' comes from the Latin verb *agere* ('to do'). Agency is "any human action, collective or structural as well as individual, which 'makes a difference' to a social outcome" (*Collins* 2006). Sociology attempts to account for human actions in terms of their motivations and social consequences.

The term 'role' is applied to individual actors and denotes culturally determined behavioral patterns (Linton 1936; Goffman 1956). The terminological usage of the word 'role' grew out of Shakespeare's famous metaphor of human life: "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players […]"

The most profound study of social action is found in works of Talcott Parsons. Social action is described by Parsons as consisting of four components: (1) an agent; (2) an end, "a future state of affairs toward which the process of action is oriented"; (3) a situation in which the action occurs and whose "trends of development differ in one or more important respects from the state of affairs to which the action is oriented, the end"; and finally, (4) "a certain mode of relationship between these elements" (1949: 44). Social action is the social actor's choice between available means towards desired ends in the context of the social system, whose influence takes the form of norms and values.

Other theories, such as Weber's social theory, symbolic interactionism (the Chicago School), social phenomenology, ethnomethodology, action-network theory (ANT), emphasize the role played by the actor in social interactions. The primary concerns of these theories are the degree of rationality of social action, its rules and the ways actors learn and negotiate them.

For instance, Erving Goffman's theory focusing on social roles (1956) is known as a dramaturgical approach. Goffman analyzes the performance of social roles in terms of impression management: actors act differently in different settings. Also in the mid-twentieth century, Ralph Turner developed a theory with a similar focus on social acting. Turner's was "a conceptualization of roles that emphasized the process of interaction over the dictates of social structures and cultural scripts" (Turner 1998: 384). Turner considered the emergence and exercise of roles in actors' interactions with other actors in organizational and other societal settings.

In his book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968), Robert Merton developed his version of

the role theory—a 'role-set' theory. Coming from the macro-sociological camp, Merton considered social roles as suggesting a particular type of behavior expected from the actor by the society (cf. the notion of norms above). Merton also studied the relationships between the various roles that one and the same individual might play. He found that roles are not always easily compatible, some are difficult or impossible to reconcile, producing role-strains or even role-conflicts, and actors may prefer to distance themselves from certain roles.

The degree of rationality of social action, on the one hand, and its being determined by social structures, on the other, underlies one of the most protracted controversies in sociology—the structure vs. agency dilemma. Depending on how a theory resolves this dilemma, it is said to belong to either macro- or microsociology, although there have been attempts to elaborate theories striking a balance between the two approaches (notably, Bourdieu and Giddens).

3. Evolution of the topic in TIS

The earliest T&I theories, which drew on action theory, were the skopos theory and the theory of translatorial action (Reiß and Vermeer 2013/1984; Holz-Mänttäri 1984). These theories are referred to as functionalist because, unlike earlier theories, they conceptualized translation/interpreting not as an attempt to establish equivalence between the source and target texts, but rather as a goal-oriented action determined by the required/likely function of the end product. To achieve his/her goal (Reiß and Vermeer used the Greek word of that meaning, *skopos*; hence the name of their theory), the translator/interpreter acts (Holz-Mänttäri theorized translation as 'translator's action'; hence the German title of her theory, *Translatorisches Handeln*) based on his/her analysis of the original text and by selecting translation/interpreting strategies in accordance with a brief (cf. Parsons' notions 'conditions', 'means', and 'end').

In the 1990s and 2000s, seeing translation/interpreting's agency from the macrosociological perspective has allowed theorizing translation/interpreting's contribution to important social processes, such as the creation of national/cultural identities, both modern and ancient (Brisset 1996; Gentzler 2008; McElduff and Sciarrino 2011; Tyulenev 2012b), or power negotiations between 'major' and 'minor' languages and cultures (Cronin 1995; Branchadell and West 2005; see also the specialized journal *mTm*). Translation/interpreting has been shown to be a powerful agent in social development and postcolonialism (Bandia 2008; Tyulenev and van Rooyen 2013; Marais 2014). Translation/interpreting has also been studied in its interaction with gender and sexuality (Larkosh 2011; Spurlin 2014). The strategies used to re-construct realities in interpreting have been discussed in Wadensjö 1998 and Angelelli 2004a.

Arguably, T&I research has benefited directly from macrosociological theories providing valuable insights into translation/interpreting's social function. So far, Niklas Luhmann's social systems theory and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields, which originated within the macrosociological paradigm, have been explored (Tyulenev 2012a; Casanova 2002; Angelelli 2004b; Wolf 2006; Sapiro 2008b; Inghilleri 2012). The world-systems theory has been adapted to show translation in an emerging cultural world system (Heilbron 1999).

Discussions of the translator/interpreter role arose as a reaction to the over-emphasis on the text of translation/interpreting (Pym 1998) and to the misconception of the translator/interpreter as a mere conduit of interaction, effectively a 'bilingual ghost' (Collado Aís 2002: 336). Elements of Goffman's theory, such as the notion of *footing*, have proved productive in Interpreting Studies (Wadensjö 1998; Metzger 1999; Roy 2000; Marks 2013; White 2014).

Although the role the translator/interpreter plays in the process of translation/interpreting never went completely unnoticed, until the late 1990s, it was discussed specifically only on occasion, and rather sketchily and essentialistically (presenting the translator/interpreter as a bundle of fixed characteristics independent of the socio-cultural context of his/her practice). One of the early examples comes from a Renaissance European treatise on translation by Leonardo Bruni (1426), who wrote that in order to produce a 'good' translation, a 'good' translator is needed, one who knows both the source and target languages and has a 'sound' ear "so that his translation does not disturb and destroy the fullness and rhythmical qualities of the original" (2002: 59; see discussion in Botley 2004 and Morini 2006).

More recently, Hans J. Vermeer criticized earlier translation theories, among other things, for viewing the translator "as a 'language mediator', a mere relay station or interface," while in his theory translators "participate in the communicative interaction, they gather information and they pass it on" (2013/1984: 40, 60). Justa Holz-Mänttäri saw the translator as an expert participating in a translatorial action, described systemically as a complex structure involving different actors (with whom the translator deals during the process of target text production) (1986: 352–4). Yet all these portrayals of the translator are purely functional and do little to relativize their intrinsic essentialism.

Starting in the 1990s, voices have been raised in favor of studying translators/interpreters as persons with biographies (Delisle and Woodsworth 2012/1995); as products of their unique socializations (Maylaerts 2008); as having their own political and ideological agendas (Brisset 1996); and as gendered individuals (Godar 1990; Simon 1996; von Flotow 1997; Delisle 2002; Santaemilia and von Flotow 2011). The role of interpreters as co-participants, visible in the interaction, has been studied in Wadensjö 1998, Metzger 1999, Roy 2000, Angelelli 2004b.

T&I discussions of the social role of translators/interpreters have gained fresh insights from several sociological theories. The most prominent are Pierre Bourdieu's theory with its notion of 'habitus' (Simeoni 1998; Gouanvic 1999; Angelelli 2004b; Wolf 2006; Inghilleri 2012), and microsociological theories, such as ANT, which allow for the observation of individual translators/interpreters in their social environments (Buzelin and Forlaron 2007).

Theorizing translator/interpreter agency has been, directly or indirectly, meant to socially empower translators/interpreters (Tymoczko 2007) and make them more visible (Venuti 1995). One may argue, however, that a clear line should be drawn between T&I research as a scholarly enterprise and activism meant to improve the social status of translators/interpreters.

4.   Important Findings to Date

Translation/interpreting can be treated as either an action or a contributor to an action. As an action, translation/interpreting is studied in terms of its structure and properties; as a contributor to an action, the focus of inquiry is translation/interpreting's social function. Translation/interpreting mediates across differences, commonly understood as linguistic and cultural, but also intralingual and intersemiotic (Jakobson 2012: 127; Petrilli 2003: 19). Translation/interpreting's social function is unique and cannot be fulfilled by any other social phenomenon.

Translation/interpreting 'makes a difference' socially in that it enables/facilitates and affects, to a greater or lesser degree, social interaction. Translation/interpreting enables social interaction because social phenomena cannot interact directly. In the early nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher wrote that translation is needed not only between different languages but also

between different dialects of the same people across time and space, between "contemporaries who share a dialect but belong to different classes" and compeers who are "of different opinions and sensibility"; moreover, we need to translate "our own utterances after a certain time has passed, would we make them truly our own again" (2013: 43).

Translation/interpreting's ability to facilitate social interaction has long been recognized, whereas the effect that translation/interpreting may have on interactions remains underappreciated, even in organizations employing professional translators and interpreters (Angelelli 2004: 78–81; Koskinen 2008: 1, 70–2). Yet translation/interpreting's mediation is intrinsically of a hyaline nature, that is, the interacting parties see each other not directly but *through* translation/interpreting (cf. Brighenti 2010). Translation/interpreting is not transparent because it mediates between different semiotic (including linguistic) codes and different socio-cultural systems, all of which are unique, and so mediation between them inevitably requires selection, reduction, and augmentation, making shifts inevitable. Some translation/interpreting strategies may be found justifiable, some even beneficial, while others, inept or detrimental to the mediated communication. Translation/interpreting may provide (more or less open) commentaries on potentially unclear or otherwise problematic features of the source for the sake of the target audience. Translation/interpreting may also censor or expurgate the source text or utterance (Merkle *et al.* 2010), and the alleged neutrality of translation/interpreting is often 'obscured' in various institutional settings (Mossop 1988; Metzger 1999).

Translation/interpreting's structure and properties manifest themselves in its unit act, "the 'smallest' unit of an action system which still makes sense as a part of a concrete system of action" (Parsons 1949: 731). The unit act of translation/interpreting is the translated/interpreted communication event. TCE/ICE, in fact, consists of two communication events connected by mediation and involving at least three parties: A>B>C>B>A, where '>' is the direction of communication and A and C are parties (not necessarily individuals) that interact through mediator B. Strictly speaking, only B belongs to translation/interpreting qua social action because only in B can the operational nature of TCE/ICE—mediation—be observed; the mediated parties (A and C) provide materials for mediation. B is inextricably linked with A and C, and cannot function without them insofar as each translation/interpreting has a source/sources and there is always a target audience. This holds true with necessary qualifications even in the case of pseudotranslations (Tyulenev 2012a: 38–41, 112–13).

From the sociological point of view, the agent of translation/interpreting is not to be confused with a human individual. Machine translation is as legitimate an agent of translation as a graduate from a university translation/interpreting program. The translation/interpreting agent is not only someone who is called 'translator/interpreter' but also anyone or anything performing translation/interpreting, that is, mediating in a TCE/ICE. Function determines agent and not the other way round. In fact nowadays, the translation agent is often a combination of human and non-human agencies. Non-human agency is technology often used both in translation and interpreting: e.g., computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools or the equipment in interpreting booths. Both translation and interpreting are, therefore, a complex interaction between human and non-human agents (Quah 2006).

Moreover, translation/interpreting can be performed not only at the level of the 'entire' individual but also at the infra- or supra-individual levels, such as the "lightning translation" in the mind of an individual speaking in a language that is foreign to him/her (Kaluza qtd in Reiß and Vermeer 2013: 41), an entire nation-translator (Halperin 1985: 2–7) or intergenerational translation (Habermas 1988: 148). Translation/interpreting agency is also exercised as part of complex networks: the final version of a translation/interpreting act is often a result of contributions from

many agents and factors—teams of translators/interpreters, their project managers, editors, proofreaders, censors, patrons, the translator's/interpreter's expertise or the status of the source text, CAT tools, etc.— and versions of texts may follow such tortuous trajectories that it may be difficult to define their status in terms of 'source' or 'target' attributions (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 14–15; Milton and Bandia 2009; Federici forthcoming).

An end of TCE/ICE is not an "anticipated future state of affairs but only the difference from what it would be if the actor should refrain from acting" (Parsons 1949: 732). In the case of translational/interpreting action, an end is primarily the production of a version of the source text (in whatever semiotic medium). Parsons' formalistic definition allows theorizing translation/interpreting as an action found anywhere between or at the extremes of the rationality/intentionality axis. T&I research into translation/interpreting as a process has shown that the translator's/interpreter's behavior has both rational and irrational aspects. Translational/interpreting action is not infrequently unintentional: the translator/interpreter cannot (fully) predict all possible results of his/her action. Moreover, the notions of rationality and intentionality cannot be applied to the non-human translation/interpreting agent.

The TCE/ICE situation is the state of affairs preceding and coterminous with a translational/interpreting action. Conditions and means are to be distinguished: "The situation constitutes conditions of action as opposed to means *in so far as it is not subject to the control of the actor*" (Parsons 1949: 44; italics in original). The TCE/ICE situation includes the source text—a verbal or non-verbal organized structure of data—which is to be transferred by means of a translational/interpreting action from the source to the target domain. The definition of the TCE/ICE situation also suggests a discussion of the social context, which makes the translational/interpreting action necessary or superfluous, possible or problematic, ordained or forbidden. A classical example of describing social contexts in which translation takes center stage in literary systems is found in Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory (1990: 47): translation plays an important role in a young literary polysystem, in a 'peripheral' or 'weak' polysystem, or in a national literature experiencing a crisis. Social settings also feature prominently in Dell Hymes' sociolinguistic model of communication, which Angelelli (2000) applied to the study of interpreting.

The concept of conditions of translational/interpreting action makes it clear why the translator/interpreter cannot be considered the unit of T&I research: there is a risk of overemphasizing his/her freedom from social constraints. Individual freedom in society is a matter of degrees; it is never absolute. In this respect, translating/interpreting agency is always socially conditioned/constructed. While translators/interpreters have a certain amount of control over the means of reaching an end of their translational/interpreting action, the degree of their control is constrained.

In his theory of action, Parsons stressed that the means the agent chooses are "subject to the influence of an independent, determinate selective factor[,] a normative orientation" (1949: 44–5). This normative orientation is the manifestation of social constraints influencing human agents. (Can norms be seen as operational rules in the case of a non-human translation agent, such as a translation memory software?) In T&I studies, the influence of various norms and conventions on translator/interpreter behavior has been studied since the late 1970s (notably, Toury 1978; Chesterman 1993; Nord 1991, on the basis of skopos theory; Angelelli 2004b, Sapiro 2008a, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory). Some T&I scholars argue for more personalized configurations of constraints determining translational action (e.g., Baker 2006, employing the notion of narrative; Maylaerts 2008, borrowing Bourdieu's notion of habitus and Lahire's concept of socio-biography).

The repertoire of choices the translation/interpreting agent has before him/her includes the possibility of error, "the failure to attain ends or to make the 'right' choice of means" (Parsons 1949: 46). T&I norm-based approaches give prominence to norms as a factor determining translational/interpreting action, yet this is not sufficient. It has been suggested that norm-based approaches be complemented with the notion of error as another explicative parameter (Wilss 1982/1977: 196–215; Kußmaul 1986; Malmkjær 2004).

In translational/interpreting action, the relationship between actors, ends, and the situation (conditions+means) can be described by showing how TCE/ICE functions. Communication events consist of three basic elements: utterance (the expression plane of what is communicated), information (the content plane), and understanding (what is deduced from the utterance by the receiver of the message) (Luhmann 1995: 137–75). When one person says: "It's raining" (*utterance*), the other may deduce the *information* 'take an umbrella' and demonstrate his/her *understanding* by taking an umbrella. In relation to the three parties, TCE/ICE can be interpreted as B understanding A's utterance by selecting one (or a few) of all possible pieces of the information implied by A's utterance. B's understanding becomes the utterance aimed at C. Finally, C also selects one (or a few) piece(s) of the information of B's utterance and that constitutes C's understanding. Thus, presented schematically, TCE/ICE functions as follows: A: Utterance$_1$ > Information$_1$ ≅ B: (Understanding$_1$ = Utterance$_2$) > Information$_2$ ≅ C: Understanding$_2$.

Social action, therefore, can be described as unfolding in a situation of double contingency. Parsons explains: "There is a *double contingency* inherent in interaction. On the one hand, ego's gratifications are contingent on his selection among available alternatives. But in turn, alter's reaction will be contingent on ego's selection and will result from a complementary selection on alter's part" (cited in Luhmann 1995: 522–3). An action, in which both ego and alter narrow down available alternatives, moves, step by step, toward a clarification of the interacting parties' positions: "At first, alter tentatively determines his behavior in a situation that is still unclear. He begins with a friendly glance, a gesture, a gift—and waits to see whether and how ego receives the proposed definition of the situation. In light of this beginning, every subsequent step is an action with a contingency-reducing, determining, effect—be it positive or negative" (Luhmann 1995: 104–5). In this sense, all communication can be interpreted as translation (Steiner 1975). Translation/interpreting's social function of mediation is, intrinsically, contingency reducing: in the beginning, the interacting parties face the overwhelming complexity of the situation, which they cannot tackle without some type of translation/interpreting. Translation/interpreting turns the initially incomprehensible and unmanageable into something that ego and alter can comprehend and manage. This seems to be true at all levels of interaction—from infrapersonal through interpersonal to intercultural.

The Luhmannian model of communication is helpful for theorizing translation/interpreting as a selection process. Another helpful resource is Hymes' sociolinguistic model of communication, mentioned earlier, which has been applied to the analysis of interpreting in Angelelli 2000 (arguably, it is also applicable to translation). Because it takes into consideration as many as thirteen speech components, one of the advantages of this model is that it helps to discuss similarities and differences between various forms of interpreting/translation.

As has been shown in T&I studies, especially in the "cultural" turn (Bassnett and Lefevere 1990: 4), interpersonal communication is inevitably a dialogue of enculturated individuals. Hence, it is important to understand how translation/interpreting contributes to intercultural interaction, which may follow different scenarios, from mutually beneficial to detrimental (for a repertoire of possible scenarios, see Tyulenev 2014: 36–40). Until recently, translation/interpreting was

studied mostly in mutually beneficial intercultural interactions. Recently, however, numerous case studies have examined translation/interpreting in situations of conflict or rivalry (Copeland 1991; Baker 2006; Inghilleri and Harding 2010; Inghilleri 2012; a special case of translation agency in postcolonial intercultural asymmetries, "thick translation," is exemplified in Appiah 2013).

Finally, the agency of T&I scholarship and the role of the T&I scholar has also been discussed. T&I scholarship contributes to the translation/interpreting professional project (Tyulenev 2014: 67–80). In the sociology of professions, each occupational group is seen as striving to secure for itself a socially recognized niche. Such recognition is reinforced if the occupational group develops its own theoretical apparatus and terminology.

As regards the translation/interpreting professional project, many scholars argue that the scholarly study of T&I is indispensable, generating knowledge about translation/interpreting as an occupation, on the one hand, and as a social phenomenon, on the other. The former is put primarily to vocational use: future translators and interpreters are trained based on T&I theories, allowing new generations to benefit from the accumulated knowledge and experience of their predecessors. Learning about translation/interpreting as a unique phenomenon ensures T&I Studies' place among the other social sciences as none of them studies translation/interpreting in all its manifestations and as profoundly as T&I Studies. Moreover, academic programs that prepare students for a professional career as a translator/interpreter enhance the visibility and respectability of the profession.

To play their role, T&I scholars observe translation/interpreting praxis, whether past or present, and learn from the previous generations of scholars by familiarizing themselves with their works. In this way T&I scholars contextualize their research and enable themselves to contribute to the discipline in innovative ways.

At the same time, it is imperative that T&I scholars realize that they are as much products of their socialization as are the practitioners whom they study. Scholars, too, may have "split loyalties" and experience "a conflict of roles" (Koskinen 2008: 9). Therefore, T&I scholars need to exercise self-reflexivity in order to attenuate bias in relation to the studied phenomena. The importance of such reflexivity has been stressed in T&I literature (Pym 1998: 27; Tymoczko 2002: 16, 22–3).

5.   New directions

TIS has already applied a number of sociological theories. Yet other theories also show promise, notably, as has been demonstrated above, Parsons' sophisticated theory of social action (1949; 1959; Parsons and Shils 1951). Translation and interpreting need to be investigated in terms of the ratio and properties of collective and individual translation/interpreting, as well as of translation/interpreting's infra- and supra-individual manifestations. For example, the functioning of translation at the infrapersonal level (within an individual) is one of the under-studied directions of T&I research. Yet "[s]emioticians emphasize the mediatedness of experience, arguing that we are always dealing with signs and codes, not with an unmediated objective reality" (Chandler and Munday 2011: 270). T&I studies can definitely contribute to research into how the individual uses signs and codes in the process of making sense of reality.

Human translation's interworking with non-human agents also needs further study. The sociological theory, which specifically discusses social reality taking non-human actors into consideration, is Michel Callon and Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory. There have been

attempts to apply several ideas of ANT to the study of translation (Buzelin 2005; Bogic 2010), although a full-scale application still awaits its researcher.

Translation/interpreting seems to have more social functions than one (Tymoczko 2006: 16; Renn 2006). The question of the relationship (or a hierarchy?) of these functions calls for focused research. The plurality of translation/interpreting's functions is relevant when the ends of translational/interpreting action are discussed. Sociological-anthropological functionalist theories may provide a guiding light (Malinowski 1944; Merton 1967).

Sociological theories bridging the gap between micro- and macrosociological theories will help researchers to overcome the reductionist vision of translation/interpreting as a purposeful activity. For instance, in his structuration theory, Anthony Giddens argues that agency is not necessarily intentional or in accordance with the agent's volition. That is why Giddens' theory of action is referred to as "purposive," rather than "purposeful" (Baert 1998: 101).

Another important characteristic of translation/interpreting's social agency that is gaining momentum in T&I studies is translation/interpreting ethics (Pym 2012/1997; Basalamah 2009; Inghilleri 2012). The application of sociological theory of one of the most influential sociological theorists discussing issues of ethics today, Jürgen Habermas (1984; 1989a; 1989b), to the study of translation/interpreting has just begun (Tyulenev 2012c and 2013).

The potential of studying the translator's/interpreter's role is far from exhausted. So far, the translator's role has been discussed mainly in terms of translators'/interpreters' visibility, self-esteem, and the socially relevant results of their work. In sociology the concept of role is significantly broader and may provide new inspiration. Applications of sociological theories discussing social roles (Goffman, Turner, Merton) may shed more light on translators'/interpreters' experiences and the interaction of their different roles in different settings.

6. Key texts

- Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 is Bourdieu's own systemic presentation of his theory.
- Goffman 1956 is one of the basic texts on the dramaturgical theory.
- Habermas 1989a is the foundational publication on the public sphere; Habermas 1984 and 1989b expound his theory of communicative action.
- Luhmann 2013 is an accessible presentation of Luhmann's complex theory as a series of lectures he gave in the early 1990s.
- Tyulenev 2014 is a systematic overview of sociological theories and paradigms intended specifically for the translation student.

7. Sample/model studies

- Angelelli 2004a and b, Koskinen 2008, Sela-Sheffy and Shlesinger 2011 are studies of the translator's/interpreter's social role and professional profile.
- Inghilleri 2005, Wolf and Fukari 2007, Diaz Fouces and Monzo 2010 are edited collections exploring various directions of the sociological turn in T&I studies.
- Monographic applications of concrete sociological theories can be found in Sapiro 2008b (Bourdieu), Tyulenev 2012b (Luhmann), Marais 2014 (sociological complexity theory).

- Merkle 2010 and Woods 2012 are studies of various manifestations of censorship in and through translation.

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