

Inghilleri, Moira (guest editor), *The Translator*, vol. 11, no.2, 2005, Special Issue on *Bourdieu and the Sociology of Translation and Interpreting*. Pp. 250. £ 25.00 ISBN 1-900650-86-X

It is a truism of our age to note that Translation Studies is as concerned now with people and acts as it was formerly preoccupied with texts and words. These of course are not dichotomous concerns and studying translators without translations would be as misguided as looking at words outside the contexts of actions. It is noticeable in this respect that disciplines such as sociology and anthropology have been mobilised in recent years to examine translation as it plays out in human society in a variety of forms. The name and writings of Pierre Bourdieu have come to feature increasingly in sociological approaches to translation phenomena, notably through the writings of translation scholars such as Daniel Simeoni, Jean-Marc Gouanvic and Moira Inghilleri (special editor of the volume under review). Pascale Casanova's pioneering volume *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999) was evidence of a move within Bourdieusian studies itself to consider the role of translation in the creation of an international literary order. The primary interest of Bourdieu's work for Translation Studies lies in the manner in which it offers a way out of somewhat sterile methodological and epistemic oppositions between structure and agency. In other words, the tendency can either be to present translation as a galaxy of impersonal conventions and norms to which the translator as agent mechanically responds (low-level structuralism) or to offer translation as an example of the work of free floating agents, making autonomous choices and displaying all the unattached, unhindered freedom of the liberal subject. In Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, the key concepts of habitus, field and capital, allow for an analysis of practice that is embedded but not over-determined. That is to say, the strong ethnographic bias in Bourdieu's writings leads to a conceptualisation of social practice that is both constituted by and constitutive of the relationships of power and difference in which the practice finds itself. What this implies, among other things, is that researchers actually look at what people do as opposed to what we think they do and secondly, that we see the outcomes of social practices as not only bound up with relations of power and competition but as fundamentally open-ended in terms of how trajectories will develop over time.

Moira Inghilleri provides an excellent introduction to the philosophical backdrop to Bourdieu's thought and offers a clear explanation of the core concepts of habitus, field, capital and *illusio*. She also charts the influence of Bourdieu's thinking on translation and interpreting studies to date, pointing out on the way that what differentiates Bourdieusian-inspired thinking in Translation Studies from the culturalist paradigm is the refusal of the former to concentrate on 'the literary text as its primary focus' (p.142). To this end, the volume contains articles on legal translation, sign language interpreting, community interpreting and an extended discussion

on the relevance of the work of the theoretician of science Bruno Latour to the development of a sociology of translation and interpreting.

One of the earliest advocates of the pertinence of Bourdieu's writings to Translation Studies, Jean-Marc Gouanvic, is represented here by an essay which examines in particular, the contribution of three French translators Maurice-Edgar Cointreau, Marcel Duhamel and Brois Vian to the emergence of specific kinds of writing and literary genres in French literature. Gouanvic's contention is that close attention to the lived practices of these translators, their habitus, is crucial to an understanding of how they influenced the development of the field of French writing. In a wholly different context, Sameh F. Hanna examines the genesis of the field of drama translation in Egypt. The article is exemplary in its scholarship, offering fascinating insights through the use of core Bourdieusian concepts into the background to Tanyous 'Abduh's 1902 translation of *Hamlet* into Arabic. Although Abduh was roundly criticised by later commentators for what they judged his cavalier approach to textual fidelity, Hanna deftly describes the specific conditions underlying the emergence of Western-style theatre in Egypt and the interaction between these conditions and the specific interest and education of Egyptian translators who advocated greater or lesser foreignisation of Western theatre texts. Hannah pays particular attention to the role of Lebanese Christians and their incorporation into the Egyptian literary field which they in turn transform. Jan Blommaert is equally concerned with transformation but in terms of how the words spoken through an interpreter by an asylum seeker can get turned into other words by Belgian officialdom. What Blommaert highlights is the way in which apparently innocent routinised behaviour in interpreter-mediated interviews can in fact lead to powerful forms of exclusion in disallowing whole areas of communicative and cultural expression. The utterances of the asylum seeker are re-presented in such a way that they almost invariably undermine their legitimacy. The letters sent to unsuccessful asylum seekers by the Belgian authorities are not so much part of an organised conspiracy as the effects of the embedding of certain ways of interpreting (in both senses) language and narrative into structures of power where the powerless remain voiceless.

Similarly, Ernest Thoutenhoofd, is sceptical about the notion that the availability of translation and/or interpreting it in itself an unqualified good if the relations of power and capital underlying a field, in this case the educational, remain unchanged. Looking at the way attempts are made to integrate deaf children into mainstream education in the United Kingdom, Thoutenhoofd offers a trenchant critique of homogenising definitions of deaf culture which ignore issues of class and social difference. He also questions the extent to which the presence of sign language interpreters tend to aggravate rather than alleviate a problem in that they are seen as providing an access which is more apparent than real in light of the fundamental failure of the educational system in the UK (and one

presumes elsewhere) to address the particular linguistic and cultural needs of deaf children. M. Carmen África Vidal Clarmonte's examines a different set of needs, those framing the production and translation of legal texts. A classic, post-structuralist analysis of the fundamental plurality and indeterminacy of textual meaning is offered but unfortunately the article offers little in the way of illumination as to how legal translation might be carried out in a more politically self-reflexive regime.

Hélène Buzelin in an article, which along with Hanna's is one of the strongest in the volume, looks at how Bruno Latour's actor-network theory might complement work done in the Bourdieusian vein. Although the specific focus of Buzelin's enquiry is the cluster of agents and factors that cause publishing houses to translate particular texts from particular languages at a particular moment, the stress of actor-network theory is on how the world in all its messy unpredictability appears to the agent and on the need for embedded ethnography has much to offer scholars of specialist translation in professional settings. As Buzelin notes:

The translation process involves a multiplicity of mediators, some of which are technological, and that the latter are not simply tools but 'black boxes' incorporating stable forms of knowledge, consensus and presuppositions over what constitutes (good) translation. In short, this concept enables us to grasp both the complexity – and nonlinear character – of the translation process, and the hybridity of the translating agent. (p.212)

The incorporation of the non-human is indeed crucial as too often translation technology becomes the focus of hype, hope and hypocrisy and is not often afforded the careful analytic attention it deserves in any adequate formulation of what it means to translate in our century. The Special Issue of *The Translator* is admirably edited and specialist translators will find much that is of methodological use in seeking new ways to understand what we need to understand about translation in all its manifestations.

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