CHAPTER 7

Translators and (their) norms

Towards a sociological construction of the individual

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Communication-oriented theories like Toury's Descriptive Translation Studies seek to take human agency into account. Yet there has been inadequate conceptualization of the relationships between translators and norms, between the individual and the collective, or between agency and structure. Human agents must still be accounted for not only as professionals but as socialized individuals. The study of plural and dynamic (intercultural) habituses may thus become a key concept for understanding intercultural relationships. It can reveal how intercultural actors interiorize the normative structures not only of the source and target fields, but also of their mutual intersections. The comparative study of two twentieth-century Belgian translators, Ernest Claes and Roger Kervyn, here shows how translatorship can be redefined in terms of habitus, as an individuation of collective normative schemes related to the translator's personal history, to the collective histories of the target and source fields, and to the intersections between the cultures concerned.

Keywords: Descriptive Translation Studies, Gideon Toury, Pierre Bourdieu, sociology of translation, Ernest Claes, Roger Kervyn

Is descriptive translation studies too sociological?

At the end of the 1970s Gideon Toury introduced the concept of norms into Translation Studies. Norms function as various types of sociocultural constraints on human behavior: they are shared values and ideas on how to act, think, translate etc. appropriately in a certain context and for a certain group of people. From the receivers' viewpoint, Toury defines norms as "criteria according to which actual instances of behavior" like translation, are evaluated "in situations which allow for different kinds of behavior, on the additional condition that selection among them be non-random" (1995:55). Since then, the concept of norms has been used differently within translation studies and its "value has been both asserted strongly and called into question" (Schäffner 1998: 1). In particular, by focusing on the study of various and variable norms as the "very epitome" (1995:53) of a target-oriented approach, Toury's model for Descriptive Translation Studies has privileged collective schemes and structures instead of individual actors. It has lent itself to research into texts and their discursive embedding in a broader socio-cultural, and political context.

In this, Toury's project takes a sociological stand (Chesterman 2006: 12 might range it within a "sociology of translations as products", and we would agree). Since the end of the nineteenth century, the separation between sociology and psychology has been based on a rather radical division concerning the object of study. The notion of the individual is left for psychology, while sociology studies everything outside the individual, like groups, classes, milieus (on this historical development, see Lahire 2004: 695ff.). However, this leaves open the question of the individual as a sociological construct, as well as the link between the collective and the individual. Collective structures are not external to the people composing them; they are enacted by those people (cf. Douglas 1986). The social can certainly be grasped through objectivated forms, but this does not imply that those objectivated forms exist outside their multiple individual usages. Indeed, since Durkheim, the sociological "solution" for the exclusion of the individual is a personification of the collective. In Toury's seminal chapter on norms (Toury 1995: 53–69), such a personification of collective structures is omnipresent. Let me cite one passage at length:

Operational norms as such may be described as serving as a model, in accordance with which translations come into being, whether involving the norms realized by the source text (i.e. adequate translation) plus certain modifications, or purely target norms or a particular compromise between the two. Every model supplying performance instructions may be said to act as a *restricting* factor: it opens certain options, while closing others. Consequently, when the first position is fully adopted, the translation can hardly be said to have been made into the target language as a whole. Rather, it is made into a model-language, which is at best some part of the former and at worst an artificial, and as such nonexistent variety. In this last case, the translation is not really *introduced* into the target culture either, but is *imposed* on it, so to speak. Sure, it may eventually carve a niche for itself in the latter, but there is no initial attempt to accommodate it to any existing 'slot'. On the other hand, when the second position is adopted, what a translator is introducing into the target culture (which is indeed what s/he can be described as doing now) is a *version* of the original work, cut to the measure of a preexisting model. (Toury 1995: 60–61; author's italics)

This passage testifies to an (often implicit) continuous tension between the personified collective level of norms and the individual level of the translator (here as a hypothetical construct). In methodological terms, this means that a conceptualization of norms, of collective structures by definition, requires a conceptualization of the translator, of the agency "behind" the norms, and indeed of the relationships between the two. Not surprisingly, especially in Toury's chapter on norms, implicit or explicit references to the concept of translator are ubiquitous. In this sense, the observation that "there were no people doing anything in that chapter" (Pym 1998: 108) is somehow an oversimplification. The chapter opens with a definition of translatorship as:

being able to *play a social role*, i.e., to fulfil a function allotted by a community — to the activity, its practitioners and/or their products — in a way which is deemed appropriate in its own terms of reference. The acquisition of a set of norms for determining the suitability of that kind of behaviour, and for manoeuvring between all the factors which

may constrain it, is therefore a prerequisite for becoming a translator within a cultural environment. (Toury 1995:53; author's emphasis)

On occasion, the relationship between translators and norms, and between structure and agency, are touched upon in terms of traditional sociological approaches: "Norms are acquired by the individual during his/her socialization" (Toury 1995:55). The idea of socialization is taken up more extensively in "Excursus C: The making of a 'Native' Translator" (1995:248–254), where Toury presents the development of a bilingual into a recognized translator:

Socio-culturally speaking, what emerging translators thus undergo is *socialization as concerns translating*. During this process, parts of the normatively motivated feedback they receive are assimilated by them, modifying their basic competence and gradually becoming part of it. At every phase of its development, a native translator's 'competence' therefore represents a characteristic blend of nature and nurture, of the humanly innate, the individually assimilated and the socially determined. (Toury 1995:250–251; author's emphasis)

Toury leaves the relationship between nature and nurture, between translators and norms, between the (more) individual and the (more) collective relatively un(der)conceptualized. For him, "the relative role of different agents in the overall dynamics of translational norms is still largely a matter of conjecture even for times past, and much more research is needed to clarify it" (Toury 1995:62).

The translator as a socialized individual

The last few years have seen many attempts to integrate the notion of habitus into a descriptive approach to translation (Simeoni 1998; Sela-Sheffy 2005; Inghilleri 2003, 2005; Meylaerts 2006). For Sela-Sheffy (2005: 2), "[o]bviously, this concept corresponds to and reinforces the notion of norms of translation". Although habitus is a category that goes back to Aristotle (see Simeoni 1998), translation scholars mainly draw on the term as used by Pierre Bourdieu (1972), who designed habitus as the motor of a dialectic between a theory of effects and a theory of strategies. Bourdieu wanted to escape from a philosophy of the subject without sacrificing the actors, and to escape from a philosophy of structure without refusing to take into account the effects structure exerts on and through the actor. Habitus refers to the subjects' internalized system of social structures in the form of dispositions. The inculcation of social structures is a life-long process of interactions between structure and agency through various and variable individual and collective experiences. Dispositions engender practices, perceptions and attitudes that are regular but not necessarily fixed or invariant. Under the influence of social position and individual and collective past, every cultural actor thus develops (and continues to develop) a social identity: a certain representation of the world and of the person's position therein.

Nevertheless, since fine-grained analyses are lacking, especially in the case of intercultural contacts, the notion of habitus seems to confirm all too often what it was supposed to avoid, i.e. the precedence of structure over agency. It has thus frequently been criticized for being deterministic, static and one-directional (Sela-Sheffy 1997, 2005; Geldof 1997; Corcuff 2003), and rightly so. Attempts to apply it within Translation Studies have further laid bare its mono-cultural character, too much linked with structures and actors that refer to national societies only (Simeoni 1998). Intercultural actors develop perceptions and practices partly through cross-cultural habituses. By integrating the translators' intercultural habitus in its framework, Translation Studies can offer a much-needed correction to Bourdieu's theory, which is still more national than intercultural in nature (Meylaerts 2005). This should turn the habitus concept into an intercultural construct valid for less homogenous situations.

Recent insights insist on habitus as a *dynamic, plural* concept, as the object of confrontations with various field logics and thus of multiple definitions and discontinuities (Lahire 2001, 2003, 2004; Sela-Sheffy 2005). Every (inter)cultural actor appears as a complex product of multiple processes of socialization disseminated in various institutions (family, schools, friends, work, neighborhood, etc.). Attitudes, perceptions and practices are the result of an unstable interplay of multiple kinds of habituses, questioning the uniqueness and permanence of the individual person. The actors' plural and dynamic (intercultural) habitus therefore forms a key concept for understanding the modalities of intercultural relationships. It can reveal how (intercultural) actors interiorize dynamically and variably (institutional and discursive) normative structures of the source and target fields, and indeed of their mutual contacts and intersections.

We thus need a conceptualization of the human actor as a socialized individual. We need a sociology at the individual level, analyzing social reality in its individualized, internalized form (Lahire 2003, 2004). Until now, Translation Studies has conceptualized this socialized individual mainly as a professional (Simeoni 1998; Sela-Sheffy 2005; Inghilleri 2003, 2005; Gambier 2006). Translators, though, are always more than mere translators. A socialized individual cannot be reduced to a profession: "The habitus of a translator is the elaborate result of a personalized social and cultural history" (Simeoni 1998: 32). Furthermore, in situations where the professional field is not (or is only weakly) differentiated, this individualized history is likely to make up most of a translator's habitus, particularly in periods prior to the second half of the twentieth century. Many social domains (politics, religion, arts, economics) have been evolving into relatively autonomous fields over the past two centuries (cf. Bourdieu 1971), and translation is no exception. Only a few major translator-training institutes were founded prior to the 1930s (Caminade and Pym 1995), and it was not before the 1960s and 1970s that their number started to increase and spread out geographically, with a real boom after the 1980s. The large majority of translations in human history would seem to be produced by what we would call "non-professional translators". Research on translation thus mostly deals with situations where, in Toury's terms, bilingual or multilingual speakers become translators (cf. Toury 1995: 241ff.). We find numerous situations where transla-

tors are simultaneously writers, critics, lawyers, philosophers, teachers, monks, priests, kings, diplomats, etc. In all these cases, insight is needed into these actors' *various* and *variable* internalization of broader social, cultural, political and linguistic structures, of both the institutional and discursive kind. This helps us grasp the actors' actual position-takings, their possible role in the dynamics of constraints on positions, and the evolution of their translational choices at the micro-structural and macro-structural levels. These choices concern a continuum ranging from the specific socio-stylistic aspects of habitus-governed translating to an individual's willingness or refusal to be a translator. They exclusively depend neither on individual preferences nor on collective norms but require instead an analysis of the relations between structure and agency.

The usefulness of a dynamic and plural subject-grounded category that goes beyond the purely professional is most evident in a professionally non-differentiated or weakly differentiated *multilingual* context where the various source and target languages, cultures and people share the same space within a particular institutional framework. This is precisely the type of context in which people's social and cultural history is often intricately linked to linguistic and cultural oppositions and tensions (cf. Even-Zohar 2005). How do translators find their way through complex webs of competing norms and socio-political, sociolinguistic structures? How are we to understand variations and evolutions in translators' profiles and choices in relation to the overall structural and normative model? Part of the answer lies in the individual's dynamic and varying internalizations of the norms and structures of the source and target fields, and of their mutual contacts and intersections.

Being a translator in interwar Belgium

Structures and norms

Let me illustrate this by focusing on the position and positioning of Belgian literary and legal translators during the first decades of the twentieth century. Translators had to work in a professionally non-differentiated, oppositional, bilingual (French–Dutch) context in which French had been the dominant language of the nation-state's institutions and elites since Belgium's foundation in 1830. Institutional monolingualism had helped controlling who was “in” and who was “out”. While Dutch was excluded from the powerful socio-political sphere, French was linked to socio-political and socio-cultural distinction and mobility, giving access to university and to higher-level prestigious jobs. This, of course, had fundamental implications for the linguistic habitus of all people in the field. Through prevailing institutional structures and via discursive practices that steadily confirmed the superiority of French and the inferiority of Dutch (see Meylaerts 2004a, forthcoming), the average adult of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries adult had interiorized the superiority of French in various and variable ways, from total submission to strong resistance.

From the second half of the nineteenth century, however, some Dutch-speaking groups reacted to their internalized inferiority. After the First World War, this gradually led to calls for monolingual Dutch administration, justice and education in Flanders, the north of the country. Of course, such a change in language policy was bound to be a much-debated and sensitive process. Only in the 1930s, one century after Independence, had the most important linguistic laws created monolingual Dutch institutions (administration, education, justice) according to the principle of territorial monolingualism (Dutch in the north and French in the south). This evolution towards institutional monolingualism was prepared by regulations pertaining to legal, judicial and administrative translation, determining which specific documents or laws had to be translated from French into Dutch.¹ Obligatory institutional translation thus protected the minority language rights of Dutch. The most emancipative Flemish groups were nevertheless opposed to this type of institutional translation and struggled for its abolishment, their ultimate goal being monolingual Dutch administration in Flanders (see Meylaerts forthcoming).

During the whole interwar period, tensions between the two language groups were thus particularly heightened, as can be seen in many discursive practices. Even after institutional reforms, the interiorized sociolinguistic inferiority of Dutch speakers did not disappear altogether. It was a product of people's collective and individual confrontations with discursive and institutional structures. Individuals, and especially intercultural actors, internalized this intricate web of oppositions in various and variable ways. Sharing a group habitus leaves space for variations both within individuals and between individuals.

This period was also characterized by a real boom in literary translations from Dutch into French (literary translations from French into Dutch were scarce since educated Flemish were able to read in French). The normative model of these translations seems perfectly adapted to their socio-linguistic and socio-political functions (see Meylaerts 2004a, 2004b). Translations of regionalist Flemish novels functioned as a way to perpetuate a retrograde, peaceful image of Flanders. In the eyes of the French-speaking upper classes, these novels confirmed all the clichés of an ideal world where “Flemish” continued to be synonymous with popular life and backwardness, a world at the opposite of the claims to sociolinguistic emancipation coming from some Dutch-speaking groups. This uniform selection strategy was seen by the French-speaking elites as “simply Flemish”. In other words, the target culture had a very pronounced set of preliminary norms. A similar observation can be made for the operational norms. Let me give two aspects of special interest for the present discussion. First, Dutch dialects, prominent in the source texts, were never translated into Walloon or French dialects. The French speakers would have perceived the use of dialect as incompatible with the translations' pa-

1 For example, the Equality Law (*Gelijkheidswet*) was passed in 1898. From then on laws were only valid if they appeared in both French and Dutch. In practice this meant that legislation was first written in French then translated into Dutch.

triotic function of glorifying the French-speaking nation-state. Instead, translations switched between standard French for narration, and colloquial levels for dialogues. The social and regional differentiation of the Dutch dialects was reduced to the social differentiation of sociolects. This reinforced the cherished formula of “simply Flemish”, without affecting the status of French as the prestigious national vehicular language. A second type of operational norm was the preservation of Dutch toponyms and patronyms, sometimes even the nicknames of the characters. This option clearly identified the geographical setting and the characters as Flemish. For the French-speaking upper-class target readers, these Dutch names evoked a familiar world of villages where they sometimes lived themselves (as the local landlord), with their reassuring sociolinguistic hierarchy and with characters bearing the names of their servants (Dutch proper names were also commonly used in French-language literature of the time, which made the option all the more acceptable). This was not the dangerous Flanders with its claims to sociolinguistic emancipation. The introduction of undoubtedly Dutch heteroglossic elements in the French translations did not therefore affect the prestige of the national vehicular.

Translators

Given the prevailing language hierarchies, French speakers did not bother to learn the disdained minority language. Translators were consequently mostly Dutch speakers who had become bilingual at French-language schools. They had a hard time in this oppositional setting. Considered by the dominant French-speaking groups to be one of the cornerstones for continuation of the hierarchies, the translators were called traitors by combative Dutch-speaking groups. How do individual translators find their way through this intricate web? How should we understand changes in their profiles and in their choices in relation to the overall structural and normative model? Part of the answer lies in the individual’s dynamic and varying internalization of the structures and norms. To see this, we can sketch out the socio-biography of two Belgian interwar translators.

The (im)possibility of being a translator: Ernest Claes

Ernest Claes (1885–1968) was a best-selling Flemish author of the interwar period and is still famous today. However, he also had a professional career as a legal translator in Parliament, notably as the first director of the Dutch Summary Report of the Parliamentary Debates.² Born into a family of poor Flemish peasants, Claes was raised in Dutch (dialect). An intelligent boy and promising pupil, he received the bishop’s

² In 1932, the Summary Report of the Parliamentary Debates started publishing a Dutch translation of parliamentary debates. The French-language Summary Report had been around for 60 years.

financial support to attend a prestigious French-language Catholic *collège* in Flanders. Claes felt uneasy among pupils who mostly belonged to the French-speaking or bilingual upper and middle classes. This inferiority was accentuated by the prohibition of Dutch at school. After secondary school, Claes studied Germanic philology at the then French-language Catholic University of Leuven in Flanders. Through his French education, he was bound to interiorize the superiority of French language and culture, but not without developing resistance to it. During his secondary school years, Claes opposed the ban on Dutch and participated in prohibited meetings of the Flemish Students Association. At Leuven University and the years after, he was an active member of several organizations seeking Flemish emancipation in areas such as university education in Dutch. Nonetheless, as a bilingual he had the ideal profile to become a professional translator. Bear in mind that minority language rights had been enshrined in law about a decade before Claes graduated. Claes must have been aware of the ambiguous role of translation with respect to the linguistic hierarchy, especially for those Dutch-speaking minority groups who were struggling for monolingual Dutch administration in Flanders and thus for the abolishment of some types of obligatory institutional translation. When he applied for a job as a legal translator in Parliament in 1913, Claes addressed his letter of application to the President of the Chamber in Dutch, not in French. This letter put Dutch on a par with French and thus questioned the prevailing sociolinguistic and institutional hierarchies; it was perceived as a provocative, norm-breaking choice. Despite these acts of minor resistance and his support for Flemish emancipation, Claes remained a legal translator for his entire professional life.

Claes's struggle with his own linguistic habitus was more pronounced in his literary career. In theory he could have chosen to write his novels either in Dutch or in French (many of his Flemish bilingual contemporaries wrote in French). Arguably, his choice to write in Dutch only was a way to *resist* his interiorized inferiority. It was generally seen at the time as a means of promoting Dutch as a literary language and to participate in the emancipation of the Flemish people. The same holds true for the literary genre, the regionalist novel, he excelled in. In complete opposition to their French translations, these picturesque stories had an emancipating function for the Flemish reader: they gave voice to the people. Claes's choice of the minority language was so exclusive that he never wrote in French nor translated his own novels into French, even though he remained a legal translator. Those of his colleagues who did translate their literary works into French were attacked as traitors. Unlike them, Claes's resistance to this inferiority became a straightforward refusal to be a literary translator. He preferred to check on his French translators and control their work as an invisible hand. Note that his resistance did not reach the point of forbidding French translations of his novels and thus defying the preliminary norm. However, he was opposed to any operational norm that would downgrade the image of the Flemish people and literature, as in the use of Dutch proper names. In the translations that he revised (e.g. Claes 1928), Claes replaced those names with French equivalents, suggesting a less obvious link between "Flemish" and "rustic". Claes did however support the operational norm of translating

Dutch dialects into colloquial French, since he considered that French dialects would hinder an eventual breakthrough in France (a vain hope in most cases: French translations of Flemish novels were not successful on the French market). In his various translational choices, this intercultural Flemish bilingual hovered between submission and strong resistance to the prevailing norms and structures, between the acceptance and the rejection of his interiorized inferiority.

The impossibility of remaining a translator: Roger Kervyn

As an exception to the rule, the most prolific translator of Flemish novels into French during the interwar period was of French-speaking origin (see Meylaerts 1999, 2004a). Roger Kervyn de Marcke ten Driessche belonged to the majority culture for which he translated, so at first sight would not have to care about minority opposition to certain translational norms. Kervyn was a typical upper-class adult of the period. Born in Ghent (Flanders) in 1896, he lived mostly in Brussels. Son of a French-speaking Flemish aristocrat and a Dutch mother, he was raised in French, totally in accordance with the sociolinguistic habitus of the time. Still, from his early childhood on, he also learned Dutch through his mother's family, through contacts with domestic servants and in the streets of Brussels. He lived in a smart Brussels neighborhood but near the Marolles, the most famous working-class quarter of the city, known for its picturesque mixture of Dutch and French dialects. Kervyn went to a very prestigious French-language secondary school where Dutch was forbidden. All these aspects would have contributed to his internalization of the superiority of French language and culture. At the same time, he was exceptionally in contact with the bilingual world of the Marolles. After secondary school, Kervyn studied law at the French-language University of Brussels. Very quickly he abandoned this profession to become a writer (thanks to the possibilities allowed by the family fortune). Kervyn belonged to the elites who cherished the French-speaking nation and opposed Flemish emancipation. His works and his correspondence contain evidence of these dispositions.

Kervyn nevertheless became the most important translator of Flemish regionalist novels during the interwar period. Although an aristocrat, he had enough knowledge to translate from Dutch, a language at the time mostly ignored if not disapproved of by his social milieu. At the same time, Dutch was finding its way into the institutions of the nation-state. Kervyn's translations then proved to be highly successful. The translator shared to a large extent the sociolinguistic and cultural habitus of his target public, and brilliantly interpreted its aesthetic tastes. He perfectly followed the preliminary norm of selecting Flemish regionalist novels. Moreover, as an example of the socio-stylistics of habitus-governed translating (Simeoni 1998), Kervyn constructed a continuous mixture of literary language with more colloquial and vulgar registers, and did so beyond the speech of the characters. More colloquial and thus perceived as more "simply Flemish" than his bilingual Flemish colleagues' version of this operational norm, popular undertone was highly appreciated by the French-speaking readers. Often it

had a picturesque, comic side-effect, again in harmony with the dispositions of the target public, only asking for more of the same. At times Kervyn also ventured into the “Marollien” dialect in his translations. As a mixture of Dutch and French, it was the only dialect that might fulfill the patriotic function of the translations. However, this initiative was blocked by Flemish authors like Claes, for the reason mentioned above.

At the height of his success Kervyn stopped translating. Why does a successful translator quit the job? How individual and how collective is such a decision? From 1932, the year in which his reputation as a translator was firmly established, Kervyn expressed increasing disdain for the type of literature he felt obliged to translate. The translator wanted to go beyond the expectations of his public and dreamed of translating “modern” Flemish authors. All his attempts failed, since his readers and publishers swore by “simply Flemish” novels. His personal aesthetic evolution, perhaps due to more elaborate contact with Flemish literature, preceded in part the more conservative literary and sociolinguistic habitus of his readers. Still, next to this individual intercultural habitus, more collective, structural factors influenced the individual’s decision. About the same period, Kervyn was particularly upset with some very negative reviews of his translations, written by Flemish critics in the French-language press. The fact that these Flemish critics used the dominant language did not necessarily imply internalizing the dominant perceptions of translation and intercultural contacts. The Flemish bilinguals condemned both the unilateral selection criteria (preliminary norm) and the style of the translations (operational norms) for giving a one-sided rustic, condescending, old-fashioned image of Flanders and of Flemish literature, confirming the perceived superiority of the French-language literature and nation. They sought a more modern selection in a less popular style. Although his personal preferences went in the same direction, Kervyn felt caught between two opposites. He stopped translating at the moment when the gap was growing between his personal history and the collective history of his public, and there was an increase in the collective weight of the emancipating intercultural Flemish. The end of his translating was effectively co-determined by the internalization of divergent source and target structures, as well as their problematic intersection. It was the end of a success story.

Conclusion

Translators have to find their way in an intricate web of competing norms and structures, especially when working in an oppositional, professionally non-differentiated multilingual context. Variations and evolutions in their profile and choices are linked to the individual’s dynamic and varying internalizations of the norms and structures of the source and target fields and of their intersections. Therefore, a close investigation of their plural and dynamic habituses is necessary for the study of intercultural dynamics.

In more general terms, translatorship amounts to an individuation of collective schemes related to personal history, the collective history of the source culture, the

collective history of the target culture, and their intersections. Given the interplay of constraints to which translators as social agents are subjected, a subject-grounded category is required if we are to understand which influences are active, to what extent, and when. A dynamic and plural habitus concept can help explain the extent to which translators play a role in the maintenance and/or dynamics of norms. It can give evidence of the (sometimes profound) tensions between expected choices and unexpected variations. In short, “norms without a habitus to instantiate them make no more sense than a habitus without norms” (Simeoni 1998:33).

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