Habitus of Translators as Socialized Individuals: Bourdieu's Account[*]

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Abstract—This paper is to investigate the *habitus* of translators, one of core notions of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological theory. It starts with the conceptulization of "habitus" under the umbrella of sociology of translation, then analyses the differential and interwoven relationship between "*habitus*" and "field", the *habitus* of translation agents (here exclusively referring to translators) who have taken a position in a given target field in a given epoch, and the determinant factors of the target field as the site of reception of the translation. A case of translator's *habitus* is taken as an illustration, with reference to the renowned Chinese translator Yan Fu. The interrelaiton of his *habitus* and the field, the social milieu in 1900s in China, is examined with respect to translation. Additionally, criticism is also discussed from researchers arguing Bourdieusian theoretical abstraction and methodological imprecision.

Index Terms—*habitus*, translator, field, sociology of translation, Yan Fu

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent emergence of a sociological outlook in translation studies seems to have been the result of a convergence of factors. It developed both in translation studies proper, in the wake of the TDS model of inquiry and also, in sociological circles, on account of a new interest for the space occupied by translations in the literary field. At the same time, this configuration of interests has taken place without much attention being paid to the uneasy relationships between sociologists and historians since the end of the nineteenth century. The different sociological perspectives emerging within the field have introduced a number of methodological approaches for investigating translation and interpreting activity as a social phenomenon, the social framework within which translators act was partially defined to change the discrepancy between the marginal status of translators and their central role in the construction of "meaning" in transcultural exchanges. With that perspective, this paper investigates notions in sociology of translation, a new but robust area, which has highlighted the central position of translators themselves in the translation process, and has identified translators' professional trajectories and social positioning as crucial to both the process and products of translation activity. The first part of this paper is an attempt to locate the interdisciplinary space where a socio-translation studies could establish itself. It focuses on the two interrelated areas: (1) how the notion of *habitus* is conceptualized from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's ideas; that is, how the translator encompasses the concept of *habitus* and exhibits his or her *habitus*; (2) how *habitus* is interwoven with field; that is, how the practice of translation, in Bourdieu's terms, is based upon a coincidence of two instances: the internal instance (textual productions and products, the producing agents and their "*habitus*") and the external instance of literary texts (what we have customarily called the literary institution and what Bourdieu calls the "field"). The second section outlines a historical case study in which sociological concepts contribute a particular interpretation of a typically major figure in the history of translation in China. To illustrate, a study of Yan Fu himself and his translations is examined to show a translator who, embodied in his "*habitus*" a -- social and biological trajectories, imports the foreign text into the target culture, thus orienting this culture toward a new social future.

II. SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO TRANSLATION STUDIES

During the past few years, the study of translation from a sociological point of view has come more and more to the fore within the descriptive translation studies (DTS) paradigm. Gouvanvic (1997, p.126) suggests that what is missing from polysystem theory and descriptive translation studies is "a social explanation of the role of institutions and practices in the emergence and reproduction of symbolic goods. Bourdieu's model seems to be the one best suited to account for the complexities of cultural products". In other words, polysystem theory and DTS describe the workings of the system in broad-brush, abstract terms, but do not explain, for instance, how a work comes to be canonized or how norms come to be

elaborated and propagated. Gouanvic, among others, therefore criticizes "the remarkable absence of the social in Toury's work" (ibid.).

The emergent sociological perspectives provide new sets of analytical concepts and explanatory procedures to theorize the social nature of translation practices across a diverse range of contexts. The French social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, together with Bruno Latour and Niklas Luhmann from Germany, have so far been the most influential in approaches that originate in the social sciences. Their respective understandings of what constitutes the social are varied, separately or in combination to explore fundamental questions shared by translation scholars interested in the social nature of acts of translation. Bourdieu has began to attract the attention of translation scholars, for example, Daniel Simeoni (1998) examines the issue of the specialized *habitus* of the translator and primary role it might play in translation studies and Hermans (1999). Sociological approaches have highlighted the central position of translators themselves in the translation process, and have identified trasnlator's professional trajectories and social positioning as crucial to both the process and products of translation activity.

A. *The Conceptulization of Habitus in Sociology of Translation*

"Habitus" is an old philosophical notion, originating in the thought of Aristotle, whose notion of *hexis* ("state") was translated into *habitus*. The term in contemporary usage was used in sociology by Marcel Mauss's and later re-elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. *Habitus* is a complex concept, but in its simplest usage could be understood as a structure of the mind characterized by a set of acquired schemata, sensibilities, dispositions and taste.(Scott & Marshall, 1998) The particular contents of the *habitus* are the result of the objectification of social structure at the level of individual subjectivity. Hence, the *habitus* is, by definition, same with the structural conditions in which it emerged. Bourdieu elaborates on the notion of *habitus* by explaining its dependency on history and human memory. For instance, a certain behaviour or belief becomes part of a society's structure when the original purpose of that behaviour or belief can no longer be recalled and becomes socialized into individuals of that culture.

There are some attempts to integrate the notion of *habitus,* one of core notions of formulating Bourdieu's theoretical approaches to the relationship between agency and structure, into a descriptive approach to translation. (Simeoin 1998, Inghilleri 2003) According to Bourdieu (1992, p.97), *habitus* refers to the subjects' internalized system of social structures in the form of dispositions. The inculcation of social structure is a lifelong process of interactions between structure and agency. Through various and variable individual and collective past, every cultural actor thus develops a social identity: certain representation of the world and his position. For Bourdieu, individuals act in habitual, conventionalized ways that are to a large extent the product of the incorporation of social structures, structures that are themselves the product of historical struggles and which are therefore subject to change.(Baker, 2009, p.282)

The *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1991, p.53) of a translator as a producer may be defined as a durable, transposable disposition acquired by the socialized body, which invests in practice the organizing principles that are socially constructed in the course of a suited and dated experience. That is to say, the *habitus* of a translator is "the elaborate result of a personalized social and cultural history"(Simeoni, 1998, p.32). And a review of the history of translation from a sociological perspective shows the *habitus* of translators involves the internalisation of subalternity and marginality (ibid.) Translator see themselves as the guardians of the word and as the gate keepers and constructors of culture. They know they have the power to select, to transform and to define, which also provides them with the key to socially accepted values and truths.

In today's world it would appear as natural. The language skills needed for the exercise translation will typically have acquired in a translator training institution. These acquired dispositions however do not turn him or her into a translator. To become a translator, he or she will have to implement his or her activities with respect to a given field. The relationship between the actualized dispositions of the translator's *habitus* and the translator's position vis-a-vis a text to be translated, that is vis-a-vis a text belonging to a given field, this relationship takes shapes as the activity of translating becomes a matter of routine, when the *habitus* has been internalized as an integrated part of the operation of translation in the field. Nevertheless, the concept suffers from attack on its abstraction of definition. Analyses of notion of *habitus* is lack for a lot of field logics, and especially for intercultural contacts, *habitus* seems put too much emphasis on structure over agency. (Sheffy, 1997)

Observing a sociology at the individual level, analysing social reality in its individualized way, we can draw a conclusion that translators, though, are always more than mere translators. A socialized individual cannot be reduced to a profession. 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*, say, in the period around early 1900s in China. Many social domains (political, religion, arts, economics) have been evolving into relatively autonomous fields over the past two centuries , and the translation is no exception.

B. *Interwoven Relationship between Habitus and Field*

"Field" is another core concept used by Pierre Bourdieu. A field is a setting in which agents and their social positions are located. The position of each particular agent in the field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, agent's *habitus* and agent's capital (social, economic and cultural) (Bourdieu, 1984). Fields interact with each other, and are hierarchical (most are subordinate of the larger field of power and class relations).

Further, "field" is "a structured space with its own laws of functioning, its structure being determined by the relations

between the positions which agents occupy in the field" (Hermans, 1999, p.132). It means also that it is a space where a range of assumptions, discursive elaborations, certain types of behaviour are perceived as legitimate and others are not. Fields are sites of tension, competition, confrontation, struggle of various forces individual and institutional – struggle over the definition of the field itself and what constitutes legitimate or valued behaviour within it; it is through this struggle or tension that fields evolve over time. As Bourdieu put it (1983, p. 312), "The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces". Among all cultural producers, translators have a special role to play owing to the fact that the work which is to emerge in the field already exists as a foreign text in the source field. The struggles of translators to impose themselves in the target field are not entirely of the same sort as those engaged in by a writer in the literary field.

Translation, like other forms of written production, is open to a scholarly analysis. But it is unlike other written works in that at least four elements intervene in its operation. These are the source text (and its determinants), the target text (and its determinants), the translator as a subjectivity, and the translator as a subjectivity, and the translator as historicity. These elements entertain relations which tie them together, and which can be described in Bourdieu's terms through the notion of *habitus* and field.

With key notions of *habitus* and field, Bourdieu develops a philosophy of action by constructing a fundamental relationship between the social trajectory of the agent (based on his or her incorporated dispositions, or *habitus*) and the objective structures (specified under fields). This is a "two-way" relationship (Gouvanic, 2005, p.148) the social trajectory that constitutes the *habitus* contributes to the structuring of fields, which in turn structure the *habitus*. It is within the context of particular fields and through the habitus-embodied dispositions acquired through individuals' social and biological trajectories and continually shaped and negotiated vis-a-vis fields- that social agents establish and consolidate their positions in social space. Field and *habitus* are intrinsically interrelated together, none can be defined without referring to the others. *Habitus* is a deeply embodied phenomenon that structures a field and at the same time is structured by the field. Bourdieu's theory of cultural action is thus not only a sociology of the institution but also of its agents. It is a sociology of the text as a production in the process of being carried out, of the product itself and of its consumption in the social fields, the whole seen in a relational manner. For Bourdieu, practical instances cannot be adequately described if we neglect one of the elements nor if we make distinctions between things which should not be thought of separately. (ibid.)

On a global level, the object of research in translation studies ultimately becomes the analysis of the differential relationship between the *habitus* of translation agents (including publishers, critics, etc.) who have taken a position in a given target field in a given epoch, and the determinant factors of the target field as the site of reception of the translation. Additionally, the object of translation research is a differential analysis of source and target texts as exhibitors of pertinent traits studied in the *habitus* of agents and in the fields in question. In this sense, for Bourdieu there exists neither internal nor external dimensions but a concurrence of both. It is upon this foundation that I present a sociology of translation below, considering a case of a patriotic Chinese translator during the first decades of the twentieth century.

III.   YAN FU AS A SOCIALIZED IDENTITY

Individual figures of translators have been investigated in historically oriented works. Research in this area has focused on a diverse array of actual sites and activities. These include topics on the analysis of translation strategies and skills of a specific product modelled on a systemic linguistics in the history, the transfer knowledge and dissemination of religion (Ma Zuyi, 1998), role of translators in the formation of national literatures (Wang Hongzhi, 1999), construction of meaning in intercultural exchanges, giving detailed information on their social and cultural contexts (Delisle & Woodsworth 1995, Wang Kefei, 1997), subjectivity and intersubjectivity of translators in the translating process (Chen Fukang, 2000), and critical post-modernist approach to open up translators in culture-studies-based research (Tymoczko & Gentzler, 2002).

We share the view that the inescapable role of translators playing in the construction of cultures in the history has been and is being recognized. Originating as a sub-discipline of linguistics, however, translation "theory" for many years chose to ignore the cognitive, social and cultural constraints under which translators operate historically, and force the translators into invisibility, reducing them to the status of transcoders and translation machines (Venuti, 1995). The functional, text - and discourse - oriented approach DTS has been heavily criticized for "gloriously overlook[ing] the human agent, the translator" (Hermans, 1999, p.222). In particular, by focusing on the study of various and variable norms of a target-oriented approach, Toury's model for DTS has privileged collective schemes and structures instead of individual actors. The reference values employed by DTS were the literary systems (Even-Zohar, 1990) and not the agents and agencies that generate conventions and norms as a product of social negotiation (Hermans, 1999, p.117) It was not until the 1990s and the cultural turn in translation studies (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990) that translation studies finally also included the translators in its purview, as well as the translators' research for a way to cut through the labyrinth of socio-cultural constraints and their active role in the construction of cultures. Anthony Pym (1998), in his innovative work *Method in Translation History,* calls for an emphasis from texts and contexts to the individual translators as central objects of research with an aim to reconstruct the domain of socially conditioned subjectivity as a basis for understanding the translators' history.

For an analysis which expects to draw the notions of *habitus* and field from Bourdieu's model, it is imperative that it places the activities it investigate in a social milieu. In other words, this type of analysis will focus, on one hand, on interventions by agents who are the producers of the texts under discussion, and on the other hand, on the structural and institutional conditions which are at the origin of the production in question. The social milieu is here anything but a mere framework in which to lodge a text that would somehow exist independently of it. And, any text, translated or not, results from a social production process. It is impossible to consider it divorced from the social, for that would take away what makes it into a text, with all it contains, from the creativity of its producer to the dissemination of the translator. In fact, both translation and translator cannot be thought out of the social space in which it emerges. Whether in scientific or technical texts, administrative, judicial, philosophical or literary texts, the act of translation always and simultaneously intervenes, on the other hand, in a product which is the result of thematics of languages for special purposes immersed in society and, on the other hand, in the state of society at a given historical period.

Let us take the example of the literary field and one of the renowned translators in China during 1900s to see how the translator acquires his bi-cultural 'habitus' and imports the foreign text into the target culture as a symbolic material, thus orienting this culture toward a new social future.

A.   Social Milieu in 1900s in China

After the First Sino-Japanese War, when the last of the Chinese Dynasties - the Qing - followed its downward trend toward disintegration by the end of the nineteen century, the eagerness to absorb things Western as a way of "saving" the country, an incentive to rapidly import ideas from the West, led to a flurry of translation activity unmatched by any since the great epoch of medieval Buddhist translations. A large number of social groups and private publishing companies flourished. The number of translated literature on social sciences was in increase. Since the language competence of the returned students, who finished their study abroad and came back to China, was higher than before, the traditional translation mode, under which missionaries and the Chinese cooperated to do the translation, was turning to be the independent translation of the Chinese students. (Ma Zuyi, 1998, p.366) However, as described by Liang Qichao, "People just wanted to translate more books, no matter whether it was significant or not, what school it belongs to, so the translation practice at that time actually lacked organization and standard, but the society just didn't care" (Wang Kefei, 1997, p.233, my translation). This indeed met the needs of the society, because the society only needed the ideas, thoughts, and life styles of the Western countries. This plays an important role in the process of Westernization and modernization of the society.(Wang Kefei, 1997)

B.   Yan Fu's Habitus and Positioning

Given the prevailing social and language hierarchies and barriers, the Western ideas had a hard time in this positional setting. How do individual translators find their way through the intricate web? How should we understand changes in their profiles and in their choices in relation to the overall dominate structural and normative model in China at that period? Yan Fu, as the most prominent translator, under the influence of social position, developed himself as a social identity: a certain representation of the world (agent between China and the West) and of the person's position (a translator).

Yan Fu, living in the Modern China, witnessed the deterioration of China from an independent feudal society to a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society. His political views were complex. As a patriotic scholar,Yan Fu was much concerned about the fate of Chinese nation. Facing the pressing national crisis and the ignorance of the Qing government and the majority of Chinese people, he knew if China wanted to become independent and revive her old glory, the most effective way was to scale up the quality of its people and improved the Chinese government immediately. Therefore, Yan Fu advocated curing people's ignorance by learning from the West. In order to enlighten the Chinese people, Yan Fu wrote a large number of articles and editorials for some influential newspapers, comparing the different cultures and educational systems, political institutions,and customs between China and the West and he also embarked on his translation career in order to analyse the urgency and the necessity to reform and to modernize the feudal constitutions.

Translating is not a mechanical process, and translators are not servants of the original. Translation activities are done under the influence of target social-cultural contexts and are manipulated by the translator's own purposes of translation. Yan Fu turned to translation with the purpose of enlightening the Chinese people and saving the country, which was the same as the dominant ideology then: to wake up the Chinese people and to make China independent and prosperous. As Yan knew clearly that the social sciences and liberal thinking were the root of the prosperity of the Western countries. Thus he chose the source texts seriously, and made plans about when and how to translate according to the times. Yan Fu foremost introduced the Western world in the fields of social science, economy, innovative thinking, liberal concept, political institutions, legal systems, social arrangements and the evolutionary outlook all contributed to the formation of a wealthy and powerful West. Powerful translations include *Evolution and Ethics and Other Essays*, *Study of sociology*, *An Inquiry into Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, *A System of Logic and Primer of Logic*, *History of Politics*

Moreover, in his translations, he conveyed such doctrines as "struggle for existence" and "survival of the fittest" to wake up the Chinese people (He Lin, 1982, p.29-30). Therefore, Yan Fu's insight into the critical moment of China was a shift in the importation into China of the Western learning from the material culture of apparatus and technology to the spiritual culture of thought and academics. However, on the other hand, Yan Fu believed in the ruling of the superior

men of virtue--Wang Dao. He cherished a complex and subtle sentiment to the Qing Dynasty. He expected China to reform, but he could not accept a sudden change. And he hoped that China would adopt the political and social system of the constitutional monarchy.

C.   Interaction of the Translator's Habitus and the Field

The central notions of field and *habitus* are intrinsically woven together, such that none can be defined without recourse to the others. *Habitus* is a deeply embodied phenomenon that structures a field and at the same time is structured by the field. In that case, translation as a practice has little to do with conforming to norms through the deliberate use of specific strategies. Norms failed to explain the more or less subjective and random choices made by Yan Fu, the translator who is free to translate or not to translate, to follow or not to follow the original closely. As what he did in the translation, the choice of source text, the classical Chinese used in the target structure, like any other translator, who might impose a rhythm upon the text, a lexicon or a syntax that does not originate from the source text and thus substitutes his or her voice for that of the author, this is essentially not a conscious strategic choice but an effect of his or her specific *habitus,* as acquired in the target literary field.

Translations, or cultural productions are in our societies organizes and regulated according to principles stemming from "fields" and agents who act in fields and mobilized by interests which proceed from their habitus whatever may be the society in which their action is exerted. It should be noticed that Yan Fu's achievements in translations and his contributions to Modern China are significant to that particular time and his translation activity is an unusual phenomenon in China's, or even the world's history of translation. There exists an interaction between Yan Fu's translation activities and that current structures in the field. On the one hand, the social, political and cultural milieus of Modern China determine Yan Fu's translation activities, developing his *habitus* as a translator, including his aim of translation, his selection of translation materials and his translation techniques. Conversely, Yan Fu's *habitus*, a translator as a social identity, through the field, enlightened Chinese people and saved China from extinction by translating Western works. Translations influence the target socio-culture society, the field, is partly decided by the constraint and acceptance of the target culture to the translated texts.

IV.   CONCLUSION

This article investigates one of central concepts of Bourdieu's sociology theory. We have discussed that *habitus* is closely linked to the dynamics of a field, existing only in the action of agents equipped with the *habitus*. It is always the *habitus* of a translator that influences the way translation is practised, and this *habitus* cannot be interpreted separately from its rapport with the foreign culture. Translation as production therefore rests on the mode of socialization embodied in the *habitus* that supposes the social practice of translation, and on the other hand, the historicized subjectivity resulting from the translated text's belonging to a given field. The translator places him - or herself at the service of the writer to make this capacity manifest in the target language and culture. In so doing, the translator becomes the agent of the writer, transferring the writer's discourse into the target culture. This discourse proceeds from the actualization of the writer's *habitus* in the literary field. The evolution of the source society expresses a universal image of the human being seen through the prism of the specifics of a history, and this small history produces an image of the greater History. It is true to Yan Fu.

There are some criticisms from researchers arguing that Bourdieu's theory is theoretical abstraction and methodological imprecision, and the analysis of translator's role is discontinued. *Habitus* is a plural and dynamics concept. We have to confess that translation scholars have explored the relevance of these theories to the field of translation in a number of ways. The work of these theorists has contributed to the endeavour to make translators more invisible, or in the case of Luhmann, invisible as social actor. Translation studies will not reach maternity until translators too have acquired their rightful place in the field of cultural production and feel free to give voice to their particular experience of translation, and are more "visible" than Venuti (1995) terms.

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