

Different Perspectives of Scholars on Socio-Cultural Dimension in Translation

اسهامات مختلف المنظرين في الترجمة ذات البعد السوسيوثقافي

Ridha Sahraoui ¹

University of Oran 1, ridhatraduction@gmail.com

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Abstract:

This research paper aims at examining the different contributions of scholars such as Peter Newmark, Pierre Bourdieu, Justa Holz-Mänttari, Eugene Nida, Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury and regarding the socio-cultural dimension in translation. It seeks to explore their perspectives on how language, culture, and society intersect within the translation process and influence the transfer of meaning across languages. By delving into their theories and insights, this paper intends to shed light on the importance of considering socio-cultural factors in translation practice and the implications for achieving accurate and culturally relevant translations. Through a comprehensive analysis of their works, this research endeavors to provide a deeper understanding of the complexities involved in navigating socio-cultural differences during translation and its significance in facilitating cross-cultural communication.

Keywords: culture; society; translation; socio-cultural; cross-cultural.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تسليط الضوء على مختلف مساهمات المنظرين مثل بيتر نيومارك، بيار بورديو، جوستا هولز-مانتاري، يوجين نيدا، إيتامار إيفين-زوهار، وجيديون توري فيما يتعلق بالبعد السوسيوثقافي في الترجمة. كما تسعى هذه الورقة البحثية لاستكشاف وجهات نظرهم حول كيفية تلاقي اللغة والثقافة والمجتمع داخل عملية الترجمة وتأثيرها على نقل المعنى عبر اللغات من خلال التعمق في نظرياتهم ورؤاهم، كما تهدف إلى إلقاء الضوء على أهمية اعتبار العوامل الاجتماعية والثقافية في ممارسة الترجمة والآثار على تحقيق ترجمات دقيقة ومتماشية مع الثقافة. من خلال تحليل شامل لأعمالهم، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى توفير فهم أعمق للتعقيدات المشتركة في التعامل مع الفروق الاجتماعية والثقافية أثناء الترجمة وأهميتها في تيسير التواصل بين الثقافات.

¹ Corresponding author: **Ridha SAHRAOUI**

كلمات مفتاحية: الثقافة؛ المجتمع؛ الترجمة؛ السوسيوثقافي؛ التواصل بين الثقافات.

1. Introduction:

Translation undoubtedly involves transferring ideas and expressions from one language to another. However, this process is not confined to merely linguistic vocabulary transfer, but extends to other factors that play a role in the translation process. This indicates the importance of these factors in the success of the translation process. Any language cannot truly convey meaning to another if the focus is solely on translating linguistic vocabulary. Translation, as much as it is a linguistic process, is also, fundamentally, an operation of intercultural transfer. Social and cultural aspects have played a significant role in translation, and socio-cultural-oriented approaches have emerged more prominently than linguistic ones. Translation is now viewed as a communicative act rather than mere conveyance. It requires studying the text as an integrated unit within its cultural context and considering the intended purpose based on this. Therefore, translation has been described as a dialogue between different cultures and societies. Considering the socio-cultural aspect in translation is an integral part of all translation processes, given its importance in conveying the idea to the recipient and making it closer to their culture and environment. It seeks to approximate meaning to the greatest extent possible in light of the differences in social, cultural, economic, and political systems among societies.

2. Translation Sociocultural Approach

Proponents of the socio-cultural method argue that translation compensates for the source text by adapting it falsely in the target language and modifying its linguistic forms, thereby depriving readers of understanding the source culture. Consequently, they view translation as impacting the status of the original text and shifting responsibility to the translator regarding the target text. These advocates oppose the idea of equality in translation, considering translations as successive facts with varying degrees of understanding. They emphasize that the loss of differences leads to betrayal of translation. Therefore, this approach considers translations as alternative texts rather than originals and insists on always reading them as translations, while retaining some cultural and linguistic points as characteristics of the target text to create an alternative environment for the source text. This method results in texts in the target language that are unnatural in relation to the source and target texts, encompassing socio-cultural elements in the target language such as familiar words and phrases alongside untranslatable vocabulary from the source text, making it difficult to determine the impact of translation on the reader in the target culture. (Nasser El Sayed, 2019, p. 467)

Consequently, this approach considers translation as a communication process between different cultures, and views the text as a unique product reflecting the history of a specific culture. This method employs specific strategies to avoid losing important

cultural and social aspects during translation. In this approach, the text represents an artificial mental image created by the translator as a means of conveying cultural values.

3. Different Perspectives and contributions of scholars on Socio-Cultural Dimension:

3.1. Contributions of Peter Newmark

Newmark developed the socio-cultural theory which focuses on meaning by resorting to cultural reference. Language carries cultural aspects, and translation expresses them, relying on the hypothesis of the linguistic relativity of Sapir-Whorf, which suggests that "every language not only provides its speakers with means of communication but also imposes upon them a particular view of the world." He also states that "there are no two languages sufficiently similar to be considered as representing one social reality, for the factors in which different communities live are distinct worlds, not identical ones" (Shaheen, 1998, p. 28)

Thus, it can be said that the cultural context is crucial for understanding the meaning of any message. Words do not carry meanings if not used within a specific cultural framework, and cultural content represents a barrier that must be overcome by understanding the true meaning and context in which it was used.

Accordingly, translation as a cross-cultural process poses many challenging problems for translators, most of which arise from the numerous cultural differences between the designated languages. These problems stem from differences in environmental, social, political, ideological, and religious aspects of the two cultures' lives. Chao distinguishes between two types of principles of cultural theory (Shaheen, 1998, p. 25).

3.2. Contributions of Eugene Nida

Eugene Nida believes that translators who undertake the task of translating text from one language to another must have a continuous awareness of the comprehensive cultural differences inherent in both languages. He interprets this as the fact that language constitutes an essential part of culture and social identity. An example that can be used to illustrate this idea is the belief held by the indigenous Maya Indians living in tropical regions that there is no place without plant life unless it has been cleared for corn cultivation. Therefore, a field cleared for cultivation cannot be synonymous with a desert. Thus, the term "desert" represents a concept that distinguishes the context of the source language and cannot be found in the context of the target language. (Nida, 1964, p. 90)

Nida also introduced the theory of dynamic equivalence, which primarily focuses on the culture of the receptor and seeks to achieve the same effect. He emphasized the importance of cultural factors in the translation process, asserting that most translation problems stem mainly from a misunderstanding of the source culture, not from the absence of verbal equivalence.

He also stressed the importance of the translator's cultural duality, stating: “For truly successful translating, biculturalism is even more important than bilingualism since words only have meanings in terms of the cultures in which they function” (Nida, 2001, p. 82)

3.3. Contributions of Pierre Bourdieu

Pierre Bourdieu made some contributions and had an impact on the field of translation, despite his primary focus being on sociology and culture. However, his understanding of social relations and power dynamics can influence the understanding of the translation process and how social context affects linguistic interactions. Bourdieu did not overlook this aspect, emphasizing the “universality” of his work and pointing out those global exchanges of ideas are subject to “structural factors that generate misunderstandings”, with the primary factor being that “texts circulate without their contexts”. He stated in this regard

“Les échanges internationaux sont soumis à un certain nombre de facteurs structureaux qui sont générateurs de malentendus. Premier facteur : le fait que les textes circulent sans leur contexte”. (Bourdieu, 2002, p. 4).

“International exchanges are subject to a number of structural factors that generate misunderstandings. The primary factor is that texts circulate without their context”. (our translation)

In addition to that, Jean-Marc Gouanvic delves into the application of Bourdieuan sociology in the field of translation, considering it among the sociologies that best enable the analysis of the translation phenomenon in all its aspects. He indicates that the analysis can be conducted at various stages of the translation process, both upstream and downstream of the translated text, as well as in the practical practice of translation itself. He says in this regard: “La sociologie bourdieusienne appliquée à la traduction est de celles qui permettent le mieux d’analyser le phénomène de la traduction dans tous ses états, en amont et en aval du texte traduit aussi bien que dans la pratique de la traduction”.

“Bourdieuian sociology applied to translation is one of those that best allows for the analysis of the translation phenomenon in all its states, both upstream and downstream of the translated text as well as in the practice of translation itself”. (our translation)

Pierre Bourdieu was a prominent French sociologist who developed his theory of cultural capital as part of his comprehensive theoretical framework. Cultural capital is an important concept in Bourdieu's theory of power and social interactions.

Bourdieu used the term cultural capital and considered it part of his broader concept, as capital is not limited to financial and economic assets alone but also extends to cultural, educational, and social differences. This means that there are different types of capital, including cultural capital. Simply put, Bourdieu focuses on how cultural capital and social interactions can contribute to reproducing cultural and social differences within society. Thus, the social context and phenomena may directly or indirectly impact the work of translators in transferring cultural and social values and concepts from one language to another, necessitating an understanding of the social context of the text to ensure deeper comprehension, as the social context plays a significant role in shaping translation. He states in this context:

“Le capital culturel est une notion centrale de la sociologie des pratiques culturelles, peut-être même une des dimensions constitutives du savoir professionnel des sociologues. Il est une notion ordinaire de la sociologie, mobilisée pour rendre compte aussi bien de pratiques culturelles, de pratiques de consommation,...etc »”. (Glevarec, 2018, p. 1)

“Cultural capital is a central concept in the sociology of cultural practices, perhaps even one of the constitutive dimensions of sociologists' professional knowledge. It is a common notion in sociology, used to account for cultural practices, consumption practices,...etc.”. (our translation)

In essence, Bourdieu focuses on how cultural capital and social interactions influence and contribute to the reproduction of cultural and social differences within society.

Consequently, it can be said that social context and phenomena directly or indirectly impact the work of translators and the transfer of cultural and social values and concepts from one language to another. Understanding the social context of the text is necessary to ensure a deeper comprehension, given that the social context plays a significant role in shaping translation.

3.4. Contributions of Justa Holz-Mänttari

Justa Holz-Mänttari's theory of translatorial action in the field of functional linguistics deals with practical issues and strongly focuses on the target reader. Thus, it is possible to change things like the type of source text if deemed inappropriate for the target culture. Holz-Mänttari views translation as an act involving a series of actors, each playing a specific role in this process. This theory uses language similar to that used in Western economic terms, such as the initiator, the commissioner, the source

text producer, the target text producer, the target text user, and the target text recipient, adding a new dimension to translation theory that has not been extensively addressed before. (Munday, 2001, pp. 77-78)

Additionally, Holz-Mänttari advocated for the provision of professional non-literary translation within a social and cultural context and designed a model for the translation process based on terms from the field of business transactions. This model includes a “communicational deal” in which the translator, the initiating organization, and other parties participate. This theory focuses on the “professional side” of the translator and the importance of his role in achieving the desired function of translation. Below is a general outline of the translatorial action model, consisting of elements of the communicational deal, with each party having its own goals, intentions, and desires to be achieved as part of this deal (Munday, 2001, p. 77):

- Initiator: The company or individual requesting the translation or in need of it.
- Commissioner: The person tasked with contacting the translator.
- Source Text Producer: The person within the company who writes the source text, and may not necessarily have an influence on the translation production.
- Target Text Producer: The translator.
- Target Text User: The person who uses the translation.
- Target Text Recipient: The final vessel for the translation, such as students in the department or readers.

Thus, the main purpose of the translatorial action theory is to facilitate communication between individuals and different cultures by producing functional translation that overcomes cultural difficulties. Consequently, the translation process relies on the translator's choices of personality and prevailing standards in the social environment in which he operates, with the aim of facilitating equitable and interactive communication across cultural barriers.

3.5. Contributions of Itamar Even-Zohar and Gideon Toury

Itamar Even-Zohar is not considered a translation theorist in the strict sense, but rather a cultural theorist. He has not published anything in translation for over a decade, but his pioneering work continues to have a significant impact, especially in the study of translation in emerging or troubled cultures (Genzler, 2009, p. 277)

Even-Zohar's efforts date back to the early 1970s when he first introduced the concept of the polysystem to refer to the sum of systems and everything from highbrow

(canonized) works such as poetry to lowbrow or non-canonical forms like children's literature and popular fiction in a given tradition. (Even-Zohar, 1978, pp. 7-8)

The polysystem theory represents a significant development in translation studies for several reasons:

- Understanding translation as a process of transferring between different linguistic and cultural systems, where the broad and multifaceted socio-cultural context (hyper-context) must be taken into account during this process, and translation should not be viewed simply as a transfer between languages.

- Treating the translated text as an independent and fully organic text, not analyzed based on the equivalence concept, but rather in line with the general framework of the target system.

- Analyzing translation strategies based on socio-cultural contextual criteria, rather than according to each linguistic system separately. (Nasser El Sayed, 2019, p. 658)

Gideon Toury, a younger colleague of Even-Zohar, adopted the concept of the polysystem and collaborated with other researchers to test Even-Zohar's hypotheses during the 1970s, gaining abundant material on which his theoretical results were based. He sorted and defined a number of "translation norms" that influence decision-making during translation practice, then integrated these factors into a larger framework, forming a comprehensive theory of translation which he published under the title "In search of a theory of translation". (Genzler, 2009, p. 262)

Indeed, Gideon Toury considers translation as a cultural craft that encompasses it. He supports all forms of communicative or cultural transfer and says about translation:

"Translation is a kind of activity which inevitably involves at least two languages and two cultural traditions." (Toury, 1995, p. 207)

He suggests three methodological stages that describe the translation process and the central role played by the socio-cultural system:

- Determining the status of the text within the receiving cultural system and its acceptability.

- Comparing the source and target texts to identify shifts occurring in the text, the relationship between similar sections in the two texts, and attempting to derive generalizations about the fundamental concept of translation.

- Drawing conclusions to facilitate decision-making in translation. (Munday, 2001, p. 112)

Toury believes that norms are related to social and cultural constraints, defining the norm from a social psychology and sociology perspective as “the total of the general values or ideas that individuals share with society, such as right and wrong, appropriate and inappropriate, which translate into practical instructions that can be applied in specific situations, determining preferred or dispreferred behavior, and acceptable or permissible behaviors in a certain culture”. Individuals acquire norms through socialization, and norms serve as a measure for evaluating behavior in society, according to Toury. (Toury, 2000, p. 1999)

For Toury, translation involves at least two languages and cultures, with the cultural element being the focus of attention to achieve a socially responsive translation that meets the requirements and norms of the community. Additionally, Toury introduced the concept of an “acceptable translation” and explains that translation is not limited to just two languages and cultures but involves a confrontation between two sets of norms derived from the source text/language and the target language. The translated text serves as a mediator between these two directions, and an “acceptable” translation is one that makes the relationship between the receiver and the message largely match the relationship that existed between the original receiver and the message. To achieve this, the message must be adapted to meet the linguistic needs and cultural expectations of the receiver, making the expression natural. (Nasser El Sayed, 2019, p. 5)

3.6. Contributions of Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss

Hans Vermeer introduced the Skopos theory, which considers the purpose of translation as the ultimate goal, defining translation methodologies and strategies that lead to a suitable result. Thus, cultural elements are translated based on the purpose of the translation. Snell-Hornby also emphasized that translation occurs between two cultures, not just two languages. (Snell-Hornby, 1998)

The Skopos theory contributed to the spread of various common elements in the translation process, along with the cultural aspects governing the production and reception of texts in the field of translation studies. Translation is no longer just a simple conversion process but aims to achieve a specific goal, seeking to produce a text capable of performing a defined function in a different culture. Therefore, translators must develop an understanding of different cultures and deal with the complex process of translation. (Nasser El Sayed, 2019, p. 111)

Vermeer describes “action” as behavior that can be explained by the reasons behind a particular action, even though it could have been performed differently. This theory relies on six rules: (El Aidi, 2020, pp. 17-18)

- Determine the target text form or (translatum) according to the intended purpose (skopos);
- Include information in the target text from its culture and language derived from the culture and language of the original text;
- Avoid reproducing information in the target text in a clear and identical manner;
- Ensure internal coherence in the target text;
- Establish coherence between the target text and the original text;
- Arrange the previous five rules in a manner that is consistent with the skopos principle.

It’s evident from the above that Vermeer highlighted that the purpose of translation is a crucial element in the translation process. The Skopos concept is applied to find a text that differs from the original text based on the purpose of conveying it to the reader. The success of translation depends on creating a context that is suitable for the reader's context in the target language and culture.

Katharina Reiss started her work on the concept of equivalence, where she adopted the text instead of the word or sentence as a framework for achieving equivalence and balance. She based her classification of texts on defining the language functions established by the German psychologist and linguist Karl Bühler, who categorized language into representation, expression, and request functions. Based on this, Katharina Reiss classified texts according to their main characteristics and linguistic dimensions into three categories: (Annani, 2003, pp. 114-116)

A. Informative Texts: These texts are considered simple and logical, aiming to convey facts directly, with content being the main focus. Examples include scientific articles and news reports.

B. Expressive Texts: These texts are characterized by their creativity and aesthetic appeal, focusing on artistic form and style, such as poetry, novels, and plays, among other literary forms.

C. Operative Texts: These texts aim to elicit a specific response from the reader or recipient, relying on persuasion and highlighting their importance to the reader or recipient. Examples of this type of text include commercial advertisements.

There are also texts that combine two or more functions, such as autobiographies, which combine information and expression, religious sermons, which combine information and advocacy, and headlines, which combine the functions of

informing the reader about the subject and eliciting an emotional response. Katharina Reiss described this category as mixed or hybrid texts, and judged the dominant function based on the original text. (Annani, 2003, p. 117)

3.7. Contributions of Lawrence Venuti

Venuti describes the goal of translation as inevitably involving cultural considerations, citing:

“To bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and the aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of the foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, and political” (Venuti, 1995, p. 18)

As Lawrence Venuti sees it, the utility of translation is established through its cultural and social relationship with the conditions under which it is produced and read (Salehi, 2012, p. 81)

The concept of adaptation aligns with Venuti’s idea of domestication as opposed to its counterpart, foreignization. Domestication is a strategy that involves modifying the foreign text to fit the language and culture of the target audience. It contradicts the theory of foreignization, which aims to preserve the foreignness of the original text. Domestication relies on making the text smooth and transparent, hiding cultural features to avoid strangeness for the target readers. However, Venuti believes that this diminishes the value of the original text and transforms it into something that suits the language and culture of the target audience. Venuti associates this strategy with the narcissistic experience of the target culture, where they can see their own culture reflected in the other's culture. In contrast, Venuti considers the strategy of foreignization to be better for highlighting linguistic and cultural differences in the foreign text and educating target readers about the source language and culture. This works to enrich the language and culture of the target audience (Venuti, 1995, p. 20)

From this perspective, it can be said that, according to Venuti’s vision, the value of translation depends on the relationship between the cultural and social circumstances under which the translated text is produced and read.

3.8. Contributions of other theorists:

“Telya” and others argue that Russians, for example, understand the term “conscience” as expressing the presence of God in the human soul, while the English perceive “conscience” in terms of good and evil. In this regard, we can observe a general resemblance between the Russian understanding of the term “conscience” and that of Arabs and Muslims, as both concepts are closely related to religion. Good and evil should align with the will of God, who represents the sole truth. Therefore, doing

good implies obeying God's will, while committing evil signifies disobedience (Mark & Cowie, 1998, p. 58)

Consequently, Muslims' understanding of the concept of conscience lies in their complete belief in the presence of God at all times and places. They are governed by social concepts such as marriage, love, family, neighbors, and brotherhood, which are perceived differently in different religions. For instance, the concept of love in Islam differs from that in Christianity or Judaism.

Therefore, it is imperative for the translator to consider the distinctive characteristics of each culture, as deliberately ignoring them will lead to a failure to grasp the different sensory perceptions and concepts that distinguish peoples, languages, and cultures. The translator must realize that the variation in meanings between different languages and cultures makes it difficult for them to understand concepts such as conscience, leading to mistranslation if it is assumed that the same meaning applies to all languages and people living in different regions.

Furthermore, Julian House confirms all of the above, considering that translation and culture move on parallel paths with each other. House's statement about translation validates these findings, as he indicates that translation is not just linguistic but extends beyond to being cultural and communicative between cultures. In this regard, he says:

"Translation is not only a linguistic act, it is also a cultural one, an act of communication across cultures. Translation always involves both language and culture simply because the two cannot really be separated. Language is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality, and the meanings of linguistic items, be they words or larger segments of text, can only be understood when considered together with the cultural context in which these linguistic items are used" (House, 2009, p. 11)

Then he concluded the following:

"In the process of translation, therefore, not only the two languages but also the two cultures come into contact. In this sense, translating is a form of intercultural communication". (House, 2009, p. 12)

Furthermore, Jean Baptiste Casagrande elaborates on this context by stating that "humans do not translate languages, but cultures", highlighting how the process can result in cultural differences due to the social, political, and ideological structures of the two cultures. This theory emphasizes translation from one culture to another and focuses on direct meaning. Similarly, Peter Newmark suggests that translation is based on three binaries: (Siddig, 2013, p. 93)

- the original and foreign cultures;
- the source and target languages;
- the author, translator and shades of readership.

Additionally, Hardwick, a researcher in ancient Greek language and author of a book on cultural interaction in translation, argues that the process of translating words also involves translating or transferring the cultural structure of a text from ancient texts to the receiving culture. (Hardwick, 2000)

Henry Meschonnic further emphasizes that despite claiming to translate language, we are actually translating culture. (Meschonnic, 1999, pp. 32-33)

So, when a translator translates any given text, they undoubtedly translate culture, not just language.

Although De Saussure, Jakobson, and others stripped language of its cultural garments and treated it as mere material systems, they did not deny that language is a social phenomenon characterized by patterns like other general behavioral patterns that distinguish members of a society. De Saussure affirmed in his book on language study that speech has an individual aspect and a social aspect, and language cannot be separated from the social context in which it arises. Therefore, neglecting such social characteristics of language may lead to mistranslation because they influence the understanding of language and its uses in different societies. (De Saussure, 1986, p. 124)

In conclusion, the process of adaptation in translation produces translations influenced by the culture of the target language, reflecting translators' understanding of the world and their way of expressing translation. Cultural elements are significantly affected during this process. Furthermore, adaptation can be used to impose a specific ideology, whether through the recipients' understanding of the purposes of translation or otherwise.

4. Conclusion:

In delving into the different contributions of scholars, it becomes evident that translation is not merely a linguistic endeavor but a deeply socio-cultural one. Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework, for instance, provides valuable insights into how power dynamics, social structures, and cultural capital intersect within the translation process. By applying these concepts, translators can better grasp the underlying social forces that shape their work, from the selection of texts to the reception by target audiences. Moreover, scholars like Jean-Marc Gouanvic extend Bourdieu's sociological theories to the field of translation, emphasizing the role of cultural capital in shaping translation practices. Gouanvic's exploration of how translators negotiate socio-cultural differences highlights the dynamic interplay between language, culture,

and society in the translation process. His work underscores the need for translators to be cognizant of the socio-cultural contexts of both the source and target languages to ensure faithful and culturally resonant translations. Furthermore, the perspectives offered by these scholars challenge conventional notions of translation as a straightforward linguistic transfer. They advocate for a more nuanced understanding that considers the socio-cultural dimensions inherent in both the source and target texts. This approach acknowledges that translations are not mere replicas of the original but dynamic cultural artifacts shaped by the socio-cultural contexts in which they are produced and consumed.

In essence, the contributions of these scholars enrich our understanding of translation as a complex socio-cultural practice. They highlight the importance of transcending linguistic barriers to bridge cultural divides and facilitate meaningful communication across diverse linguistic and cultural landscapes. By incorporating socio-cultural insights into translation theory and practice, translators can strive for more authentic, culturally sensitive, and impactful renditions that resonate with audiences worldwide.

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