Arturo Parada & Oscar Diaz Fouces (eds) *Sociology of Translation*. Vigo: Servizio de Publicaciones do Universidade de Vigo, 2006.

I hate to quibble, but surely the title needs an article? It could be *The* Sociology of Translation, if only there were something definitive about the discipline. Or perhaps *A* Sociology of Translation, if there were a coherent approach clearly emerging from the ten articles brought together here. Or even *Some* Sociology of Translation, suggesting this is part of a larger whole, which is not really the case either. So we shall settle for the linguistic calque, which could be from any number of Germanic or Romance languages (*Sociologie de la traduction* is indeed the title of a recent book). But we would still have preferred "aspects of…", "approaches to...", "towards...", or even "for...", to make it very clear that we are not quite where we want to be.

Those are not mere quibbles. If we accept that sociology concerns large-scale relations between people and groups of people, then only a minority of the articles in this book are immediately sociological. And the one that is most clearly sociological—Joachim Renn on communication and governance in fragmented societies—does not actually concern translation in anything more than a metaphorical sense. Here lies the rub. In German, the term *Translationssoziologie* (more rarely *Übersetzungssoziologie*) can and is being used for a way of viewing as translation all meaning-transformation that occurs in communication between social groups (as indeed is the case in Renn's article). In French, the term *Sociologie de la traduction* similarly adopts translation as a conveniently vague metaphor for the way communication can be studied within the frame of actor-network theory. Within Translation Studies (which might be another language), a conference at Graz in 2006 explicitly undertook to build a bridge with those newish forms of sociology. By the way, that conference produced a collective book called *Constructing a Sociology of Translation*, which explicitly recognizes that our discipline is a process. So you can see why I am interested in the calqued title of the book in front of me now. And you can perhaps appreciate why the things I look for under this title are, one, what is meant by translation, and two, what is meant by sociology.

In the case of this book, the term "translation" is clear enough as a constrained mode of interlingual text production (i.e. what you always thought it was), with the one exception of Renn. The term "sociology", on the other hand, is strangely absent from the "Foreword" and is concretized in many different ways in the rest. No article would

fully disagree that sociology concerns large-scale relations between people. And yet no article seems to address what for us are two of the most engaging questions involved: How does translation affect relations between people?, and: What are the relations affecting the production of translations? Answer those two, and I think we will be starting the sociology of translation.

From here on, we will try to see what sense is made of sociology, article by article. We start from the least sociological, and move to greater things.

The last article in the book is a set of petty gripes between German-language translation theories of the 1980s. Alguien ha hecho la pelota, so I won't say anything more. There is also an article that just splices the literary theory of New Criticism with a few banal citations from translation theory. Idem. Eight to go.

This being a book from Galicia, much weight is given to the question of lesser-used languages, and thus to language policy. In a long and detailed article, Oscar Diaz Fouces gives an overview of the various policies affecting language use and the ethics of access to translation. He makes the very valid point that translation policies habitually confuse collective rights (e.g. Galicia's right to have books in Galician) with individual rights (e.g. an accused's right to be tried in their own language). His survey is very much based on those switching ethics and thus, implicitly, on the defence of minority cultures. The article does not go into the actual social relations involved (we get few numbers of speakers or quantities of translations), nor does it try to analyze language policies as discursive constructs produced in specific social contexts. This second absence is to be lamented, since it might have explained why policies rarely lead to the desired results in this field (they are mostly lip-service). It might also have aroused some useful caution about mixing up official documents from very different levels. For example, a UN Declaration of Rights is just whistling in the dark, with no legal force; it is quite different from the Treaty of Rome, which sets out the legal basis for EU language policy; which is not to be confused with a non-binding EU "convention" on minority cultures; which is quite different again from a would-be European Constitution, which is justifiably dead-in-the-water at the time our lines are being written; which is on an entirely different level from an Irish pamphlet about hospital patients (informing them about their "rights"); and none of that is to be confused with the "Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights", which is an ultimately provincial document designed to ensure that languages with territory (Galician, Catalan, etc.) have more rights than the languages of nomads (immigrants, tourists, etc.), as if

historical ownership of land gave cultural priority. Who says? Diaz Fouces somehow churns through all of these with the same analytical blend of careful surface-level description and controlled indignation, as if he actually wanted to believe what the slogans say. His general finding appears to be that all the official prose is a "poorly concealed dissimulation of the privatization of institutional multilingual communication" (61, my translation, here and throughout), apparently in resentment at the number of freelancers employed by the European Commission Translation Service. I don't really see how this connects with the official prose. But it can and should be connected with a few of the statistics that Diaz Fouces cites. For example, in the aforementioned Translation Service "in 2003, 1109 full-time translators produced 1416817 pages" (54), and the total cost of the translation and interpreting service was 325 million euros (53n.). These are the kinds of numbers that the EU bureaucrats flash in your face to convince you that multilingual Europe only costs the price of a coffee or a newspaper per citizen. But just divide the number of pages by the total cost: each page of output was costing something like 155 euros (which roughly compares with 175.5 euros in 2001, reported in Stecconi 2002). Diaz Fouces does not do that calculation. But if he had, he might have understood why there has been a move to the use of freelancers. The translation and interpreting services are shockingly expensive, for quite political reasons. Without those strong numbers, with no more than moral indignation, can the analyst claim to be doing sociology, or even sociolinguistics? Perhaps, since societies are ultimately concerned. Then again, a little more critical sociology, some attention to which bureaucratic groups make these pronouncements and why, might have sharpened the commentator's eye.

Also on language policy is a report by Robert Neal Baxter on the situation of Breton in France, with an analysis of the policies, the speakers, the geographical distribution, and the quaint writing used on the public signs that indicate the linguistic specificity of Brittany. The author gives us tons of sociolinguistic data (the text reads like a PhD chapter), although no firm measure (that I can see) of the actual success of any language policy, and little reference to translation processes beyond the assumption. no doubt justified, that a bilingual sign must have involved a translator somewhere. This is straight sociolinguistics, but is it therefore a sociology of translation?

Few of those doubts concern Covadonga G. Fouces González, who looks at the dominance of English-language best-sellers in the literature published in Italy in the 1990s. The researcher enlists conceptual aid from the entourage of the French

sociologist Pierre Bourdieu: Casanova and Heilbron in particular. The sociological models are thus based on struggle and conflict (Bourdieu never adequately recognized cooperation as providing mutual benefits for unequals). This makes the categories singularly unsuited for the study of intercultural phenomena like translations, to the extent that the conclusions are written into the models themselves. Here the analysis operates on numbers of titles translated between languages, as if languages were whole and homogeneous societies (books are usually translated for specific and mobile readerships), and as if the numbers replaced people (sociology is ultimately about people, not just commodities). The conclusion is necessarily that the translation of best-sellers has as its function "to internationalize the national values of American or Americanized production, which seriously threaten plurality in the world literary space" (86). This general conclusion is politically correct, but the article presents no empirical evidence for it. In fact, the grand denunciation seems partly contradicted by the more interesting conclusion stated a few pages previously: "The enormous growth in translations from English has not reduced translations from other languages, but has essentially diminished the role of books written in the national language" (80). This does not sound like an all-out threat to plurality. The research problem, at the end of the day, is that a modernist sociology, designed for the conflicting systems of complex nation states, is being use for a postmodern object, charcterizable as mobile, fragmented, and intercultural. The Bourdéistes will not provide all the solutions here (and Covadonga Fouces is not to be blamed for that).

Similarly based on book-production statistics is Felipe A. Machado's work on literature in Portugal since 1990. The numbers seem convincing; the analysis has a lot to say about source languages and genres, and the author is remarkably calm when he observes that only 50.2 percent of the books have Portuguese as a source language - this passes for an "absolute majority" (150), so not to worry. Missing, of course, are the people, and thus the sociology.

Marta García González faces non-unrelated problems when she describes policies for literary translation in Galicia. Instead of Bourdieu and states here we have straight marketing theory, plus some key concepts for the study of public policies. Lots of good interdisciplinary background, then some very solid numbers on book production in Galicia, and then… some sociology? The problem is that none of the official institutions (the ones we depend on for the numbers) "has followed up what happens to literary works translated into Galician, or of how they fare in the market" (103). We thus know

nothing about actual sales or actual readerships. Even stranger, this study gives us details on the prices of books in Galician relative to those in Spanish but it does not tell us (as far as I can see) exactly how many of those books received public subsidies of one kind or another. It is thus impossible to ascertain what effect subsidies might have on the market, even though quite a few guesses are presented in the article. One is left wondering, as is often the case in Spain, exactly where the public funds went. In all, this is an intriguing empirical study that needs to be complemented by a series of interviews, to substantiate the human strategies behind the numbers, and to ask about the money.

More humanized is the work of Arturo Parada, co-editor of the volume, who weighs in with some quite philosophical considerations of interculturality. He asks what the intercultural could effectively mean for the differences between the German and Spanish legal prose and principles, for example. After consideration of possible historical reasons for the very fundamental differences between the two sets of principles, Parada recognizes that this will be changed by a "modernization" of legal language, ideally making it "open, transparent, responsive, fast and accountable to the citizen" (188, cited in English from Borja Albi, miswritten "Albir"). Parada then somehow concludes that this change will require a more participative role by clients of the legal system, and a more communicative and dialogic role for the mediator, with greater a focus on "intentionality" of legal acts (189). But why should these be the consequences? Just as Parada cites the ideal of transparency in Borja Albi's untranslated English, surely participants in transparent legal discourse will require less mediation, not more? Whatever the case, there is not much empirical sociology here to decide the toss.

Esther Monzó i Nebot, on the other hand, is citing sociology, tons of it, in her preparations for a study of the translation professions. Her summary of the history of professions, and of the various sociological approaches to professions, is genuinely useful spadework, which should serve for many other researchers as well. Unfortunately the study does not actually get to any empirical data. Yet that does not stop the author from pronouncing conclusions: "what we have is not conflict between professions, as happens in other sectors, but a lacking socialization of professionals and an under-defined common identity" (173). This allows for a rather moving form of researcher engagement: the research task is not just to understand the phenomenon, but "to promote the jurisdiction of translators and interpreters" (174). *Es kommt aber darauf an...* But wait a minute. What if the deprofessionalization (in Spain) partly ensues from

the over-production of translation graduates? Is that not a conflict between the university professions (jobs for teachers) and the labour market for translators (moreover highly segmented by technologies, to an extent not appreciated here)? And if that is the basic conflict, how much irony must tinge our declarations of solidarity?

And so we reach the most sociological of the papers: Joachim Renn on "Indirect access: Complex settings of communication and the translation of governance". The paper uses translation as a functional metaphor able to handle some of the problems in the sociology of fragmented multicultural societies. In such societies (our societies), social groups communicate with each other, but there is no guarantee that they understand each other. The governance of relations between those groups (since we must run our societies) nevertheless requires that the communication be handled. And it might be handled if we look at it as translation. Indeed, in terms of the extended metaphor, governance itself becomes the act of translation, mediating between different groups that have different meaning constructs, and basically doing so by constantly monitoring feedback (but is that what translators really do?). That, in sum, is a coherent and influential argument for using the term "translation" to talk about much more than translations. If I do not buy into it entirely, it is because Rein's notion of translation seems too simplistically either/or (194): either translation does repeat the same meaning (as in the naïve optimism of the old linguistic paradigms), or it does not (as in the pessimistic productivity of deconstruction, where all translation is transformation). That opposition belonged to debates in the American analytical tradition after Quine (and back to Wittgenstein and beyond, if you will); the other side of it still travels with deconstruction; but neither of those aging traditions exhausts the range of possible solutions. Cooperation theory, in particular, does not require identity of meaning or equality of participants. This is touched on in a passing reference to Luhmann (and Parsons), but unfortunately is not developed, perhaps because Luhmann himself, with his concept of "irritation" as the only communication between systems, is eminently unsuited to the analysis of translation. Renn avoids this line by falling back to the either/or (either "translation is impossible", or…) while at the same time flattering us with the assumption that translation itself is "a well established metaphor for meaning exchange between identity and difference" (199). *¡Ojalá!* Just as Bourdieu used the term "habitus" to cover over the problem of measuring agency, so the word "translation" is being used here to conceal the mechanisms by which social groups can actually reach consensual cooperative governance. Renn is correct and useful in arguing

that analysis must start from the possibility of “intercultural encounters where interaction occurs, but simultaneously understanding […] fails “ (201). We start from the assumption of difference, of disagreement, as debate as the cause of negotiation, and that is nothing new (cf. Pym 1998: 128-9). In the process, however, Renn reveals that our postmodern societies are perhaps not quite so different and diverse, since he produces the one narrative and the one abstract solution for them all, without recourse to the dirty world of data. And so we reach the extreme of sociology without translations (in whatever sense we want to give the latter term), and indeed without people.

So where is the sociology of translation? If we quantify the numbers of translations and non-translations in a language over a number of years, is that properly sociological? If we talk about the various sociologies of professions but do not actually apply any of them, is that sociology? If we mention inspiring terms like *Systemwelt* and *Lebenswelt*, and say that both conform the context in which texts differ and translations take place, is that sociology or just astute conceptual borrowing? And if we extend the term “translation” to cover all postmodern communication, will we have become sociological by becoming deceptively egregious?

Those questions will have to wait for the next book. When you do it, perhaps you should spend less money on the full-color cover, and invest some in copy-editing. For that matter, one might have invested effort to achieve international publication, with a proper distribution network. Awaiting that future, this collective volume must be regarded as a valiant pioneering work, destined to be cited by a discipline to come.

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