

The Language of the Social and Human Sciences: Translation Practices in Journals

Presentation by Gisèle Sapiro, 22 November 2021

Thank you for that presentation. I'm delighted to take part in this event, I think it's a very important initiative. Thanks for inviting me to speak here.

So within the academic field, the circulation of knowledge occurs in specific settings including conferences, journals and books. I have worked, until now, on translation of scholarly books and have published a paper on the factors that determine the circulation of this category of books in translation. These factors are: the centrality of the language; the symbolic capital of the discipline in national traditions (for instance, German philosophy); the symbolic capital of the author; classics; brand names such as Foucault; the symbolic capital of the publisher in the original language; the networks; the funding; and of course some properties of the book. Theory travels better than empirical work. Material properties of the book such as the length also count.

So this paper was published in *Palimpsestes* and is open access in French. There is also an English version in a book by Palgrave Macmillan; another one co-edited by Johan Heilbron, which is not open access. So I have not worked specifically on translation practices in journals, so my presentation here will rely on my experience of journals as a member of editorial or scientific boards – it's not all of them editorial boards – of journals from different disciplines in French and in English.

So how does the circulation occur across languages? The social sciences and the humanities were institutionalised at a national level through the creation of journals in the vernacular languages. How can the national fields communicate one with the other in this multilingual landscape? Is translation a solution for international exchange, or should all journals switch to the present lingua franca of science – English – like journals in the natural sciences? These are the questions that I will address in this presentation.

I will first adopt a sociohistorical perspective on the nationalisation of journals during the institutionalisation of the social sciences and the humanities, a process which had two phases in the twentieth century as I recall, and I will then turn to translation practices

which reveal the uneven power relation between the dominant Anglo-American journals and all the others.

So, the social science and the humanities occupy an intermediary position between literature, which is historically linked to vernacular languages, and the natural sciences, which often resort to using a universal language to limit ambiguity. Latin played this role in the past in Europe; English has since taken over in the 20th century, in conjunction with formal languages, like logic, mathematics of course.

The social sciences and humanities disciplines oscillate between these two options. For those that subscribe to the scientific model, like economics and psychology, the norm is to adopt English as a vehicular language, whereas in more nationally-rooted disciplines such as law, literature and history, scholars mostly write in national languages, with the exception of foreign languages and literature, or comparative literature or comparative law. Anthropology and sociology are located between the two. Linguistic choices are related – without entirely overlapping – to the degree of internationalisation, which varies across disciplines, as analysed by Yves Gingras. They are also related to publishing practices. Whereas the scientific model is associated with journals, the literary model which prevails in the humanities, literary studies and philosophy is attached to the book form. Anthropology and sociology again being in the middle of these two models and forms; there is a continuum that exists between history, where the book is more important, to sociology, where articles have come to be more valued in careers, and variations across specialities such as historical sociology where the book is still very important.

Taking a sociohistorical perspective on the establishment of journals in the SSH, we can observe a double process of transnational circulation of the model and then its nationalisation. I would illustrate this with the case of my discipline, sociology. So, at the end of the 19th century, sociological journals were launched in relation with the formation of a scientific field in sociology. This process was independent from any academic institutionalisation, which existed only in the United States. There were very, very, few journals of sociology across Europe until 1940. And even in other areas. And, actually, this academic institutionalisation occurred in the second half of the century, starting in 1950.

But these journals existed, as you can see, and they asserted first the identity of the new science rather than any national identity, so what was put forward – you can see from the names – it was the discipline, sociology, the science. Where the organisation of higher education and professional organisations of scholars were being nationalised as attested by the names of the learned societies like American... British Sociological Society, German Sociological Society, Dutch, Brazilian... it was not yet the case for the scientific fields before the second world war. The names of journals did not include, in most cases, a reference to the nationality: *Rivista di Sociologia*, *L'Année Sociologique*, *The Sociological Review*, *Journal of Sociology*, which is the journal of the Japan Sociological Society, and the first sociological journal, launched in 1893 by René Worms, was entitled *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*, attesting to its ambition to an international scope and perspective.

These journals published authors from different countries and also reviews of works in other languages, for instance in the *Année Sociologique* there were many reviews of

German books. The affirmation of national identity in the journal titles seems to start in the 1930s with the American Sociological Review in '36, the Revista Mexicana de Sociología in '39, also the Romanian journal, as if the peripheries had to assert their identity with regard to the centres of Great Britain and Spain. Some journals were associated with a city, a university, like the precursor Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Soziologie, which appeared from '21 to '34 and was relaunched in '48 under the name Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie.

The nationalisation of scientific research accelerated in the post-war period as attested by the journals' names: *British Journal of Sociology* which, interestingly, was initially supposed to be called *London Journal of Sociology* and changed its name at the moment before its publication at the instigation of the publisher, who imagined that it would be more relevant to call it *British Journal of Sociology*. The *Philippine Sociological Review* appeared in those years, *Revue Française de Sociologie* in 1960, *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia* 1960 also.

Some of them were related to the professional association, to the national association which was created, and these national associations, most of them were created following the establishment of the International Sociological Association in 1949 which spread the model of professional association across the world and even the American Sociological Society renamed itself as American Sociological Association afterwards. And, for instance, the *Japanese Sociological Review* is the review of the journal of the Japan Sociological Society so there is a link between the two.

Having a national journal in the national language was a way to promote the discipline in the country and it happened parallel to the academic institutionalisation of the discipline. It was perhaps also a way to assert the identity of the generalist journal when the rise of more specialised ones occurred like *Sociologie du Travail*. So the journalists multiplied and specialised and then we have those national journals. However, this process contributed to the nationalisation of research and of the SSH journals. Communication became more difficult across national fields which split into a more international pole and a more national one, as Bourdieu describes in *Homo Academicus*. So, this difficulty is even more pregnant considering that whereas books can be translated, journals in principle release only unpublished work in any language. Which leads me to the question of translation practices in journals.

I will distinguish three kinds of translation practices in journals. First, translating classical articles or contemporary articles that are proposed as a model for research, which is an exception to the rule of unpublished materials in journals. Such papers are usually published in a special issue or a specific dossier, often with a commentary explaining their presence, relevance and sometimes their initial conditions of publication. For contemporary authors it is more frequent to ask them [for] a synthetic version of a larger work, like I think of Eliot Freidson's paper on artistic professions and research in the *Revue Française de Sociologie* in 1986; Bourdieu used to invite foreign colleagues to contribute to his journal *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*; he also published their translations of book chapters such as Raymond Williams' book on Landscapes or Norbert Elias' book *Established and Outsiders* with a presentation by Francine Muel-Dreyfus.

However, many anglophone authors publishing in French, or in any other language than English, for them publishing in other languages than English does not count. So, to bring them to publish in other languages, they have to make sure that they will have the paper also published in English, which is contrary to the rule of the unpublished materials in journals. But most of them still do it: they publish their paper both in French and in another language, or in English and another language than English, and they do not respect this rule of unpublished work. Usually the journals do not check.

This is the second case. In this case, the non-anglophone journals or colleagues often do the translation themselves whereas when the non-anglophone scholars submit papers to anglophone journals they need to be in proper English so nobody will translate them, revise the English for you. This is only one aspect of the asymmetries that I will underscore here.

The third translation practice is when journals decide to translate part of, or all of, their papers in another language, usually English. The cost is here again the burden of the journal or of the institutions that support it. Again, I'd focus on French examples. The demography journal *Population* of which Yves Gingras showed that it became a truly international journal by doing so, with international reputation, attracting also non-francophone authors, so it's published in French and in English and has become really, truly international.

We can mention – I think it will be further discussed – the programme of the French Ministry of Culture who allocated 2.5 million euros to the platform CAIRN to help journals to translate part or all of their publications into English: the journals were selected by an unclear process, and it allowed for instance the *Revue Française de Sociologie* to move from an annual selection of papers in English to an entire translation of the journal. But Gingras showed, comparing it to *Population*, that it had no impact on the citation of authors in English of the papers from the journal in English, which was initially the aim of this investment – to raise the journal's impact factor and visibility of French research in the United States. So it's the opposite experience from *Population*.

So, beyond the cost of the editing, which is not only about the cost but also about skills – of course when you edit in another language you need the editing skills – this experience reveals another difficulty, pointed [out] by Gingras. In order to be visible and to be read for a non-anglophone journal, it does not suffice to publish in English. A journal has to build its reputation in a linguistic area, and this is even more difficult in the dominant English-speaking area. The *Revue Française de Sociologie* does not exist in the English-speaking world even though it has an English version. Gingras was sceptical about the gain of such an investment; however, in this group we could think of European platforms where journals could be connected, so this could be one of the objectives of such a gathering: connecting journals.

A fourth option exists – it was launched by Maison de Sciences de l'Homme – the journal *Trivium* made of articles translated from German and from French; so, selecting already published papers in the two languages and translating them in the other languages, and selecting them around certain themes, specific topics, to foster a better circulation of knowledge across the two countries. And this is a very interesting experience, but of course this journal has less an identity of itself because it's not a journal who published unpublished material, nor does it have a power of consecration as such – though being

translated is a kind of consecration, but it's not the same as the first publication – it is perhaps more a communication tool, but a very useful one, and it is of course costly in the process. I guess that we will hear about their experience during the meetings, I hope so.

Anyhow, I think this practice could be developed through cooperation agreements across journals, to co-publish, and sometimes it happens: one or two articles per year in both languages, for instance French-German, French-Italian, but of course any other language.

So these are the translation practices that I have observed in journals. They all reflect, and are related to, the inequalities between languages, and especially to the domination of English. The effect of these asymmetries is not only observable in translation practices but in other strategies. One of them is, of course, publishing directly in anglophone or other central languages, French or German, so this practice is developing: with the growing pressure to publish in English, a small proportion of scholars from peripheral countries are very internationally oriented and often collaborate with British and American scholars which enhances their chance to publish in English, all the while they allow these anglophone colleagues to access field work in other countries for comparative or transnational purposes.

They usually also participate in international associations, such as International Sociological Association, European Sociological Association, and often go to American Sociological Association meetings to present their work and they become familiar with the presentation patterns that prevail in the Anglo-American journals. But this means also importing a specific model which is already very pregnant especially in sociology, which for instance has taken over the tradition of historical sociology in Europe, which is now also developing in the United States but has a very dominated pool of the sociological discipline. So the colleagues who invest in this strategy either write directly in English or pay for translation which may be costly and is also risky of course because the acceptance of the paper is not guaranteed, and European journals are also published for the most in English, but there are some exceptions, which are the multilingual journals.

Multilingual journals are developing in countries other than the English-speaking ones. This format is not new; it goes back to the origins of these disciplines and an example, of course, is *European Archives of Sociology* founded by Raymond Aron in 1960 to counter the American domination, and which publishes in three languages, English, French and German. This is an exception of course – most multilingual journals are bilingual and some national journals have switched from monolingual to bilingual, like *Rassegna Italiana di Sociologia*. I will not expand on this topic since there will be a paper focussing on it. I just wanted to point [out] the fact that this bilingual practice does not entirely solve the communication problem, because the paper that will be in Italian won't be read by people who don't read Italian or who have more difficulty reading Italian. Even though of course I'm interested in these multilingual practices, just to legitimise the multilingualism in the social sciences and humanities, and saying that here the multilingualism is epistemologically productive, contrary to the natural sciences.

So just to conclude, there are significant differences between translation practices of books and articles due not only to the format but also to different rules of the game. The

circulation of academic books is embedded in logics that are specific to the publishing industry, and scholars do not make autonomous decisions because of the cost of translations and of the production and marketing of course.

However, the authors selected by these mechanisms may circulate more than through journals, where, as we saw, translation practices are quite rare. For instance, Bourdieu became famous in the Anglo-American academic field thanks to the translations of his books, rather than his articles, in English. He did publish, there are four or five – I think, I didn't count – papers, directly published in English and the French version of it did not exist as such, only in the draft, or was published later. But what is most cited of Bourdieu is the books, very clearly. One of the famous papers he published in English is his paper on the literary field in *Poetics*, it was ten years before *The Rules of Art*, and it was a very important, central paper.

So to be efficient, however, the translation, as we saw, does not suffice in and of itself and it's true also for books. There needs to be conditions of reception and thus efficient intermediaries. For books it may be the publisher but also some significant figure in the field who has a media platform like Krugman, the Nobel prize winner for economics, who praised Piketty's book *Capitalism in the 21st Century*, released by Harvard University Press which is already a very major intermediary in the field, and he praised it in the *New York Times* so there was a lot of echo, and often you can see that books are prefaced by scholars who introduce the author.

Regarding journals, translating whole journals in English is efficient if you build a real transnational community which can happen especially when you are in more specialised communities, building a new research area. I think something like *Symbolic Goods/ Bien Symboliques* is doing this kind of work, trying to build a transnational community around a new approach. But just translating a national journal that has been national for fifty years and putting it in English, I'm not sure of the benefit of that.

And, of course, what I think should be encouraged is this kind of cooperation practices that you're trying to launch through reflection on the practice, but which could also translate into effective cooperation practices like sharing papers, that would be translated in these two languages or maybe more.