

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ELIASIAN PERSPECTIVE TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF TRANSLATION¹



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ABSTRACT

This essay aims to highlight the Eliasian constructs that can serve as theoretical-methodological foundation tools for investigations in the Sociology of Translation. From the understanding that translation is a social practice, we resort to national and international studies, which constitute the densification of the discussion that we propose with rich guiding questions developed in the field of sociology, especially those arising from Bourdieusian thought. In this journey, we weave peculiar approximations of this subfield of knowledge production of Translation Studies with the Figurational Sociology of Norbert Elias, especially with the notions of figuration, network of interdependence and habitus. Without losing sight of overcoming the dichotomy between individual and society, we conclude with indications of possible investigations around translations and translators.

Keywords: Sociology of Translation, Figurational Sociology, Translation Studies, Norbert Elias.

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INTRODUCTION

This study emerges from reflections carried out within the scope of the research group "Policies, Management and School Inclusion: contexts and social processes", linked to the research line "Educational Practices, Diversity and School Inclusion", of the Professional Graduate Program in Education (PPGPE), of the Federal University of Espírito Santo (Ufes). Also, from an international interinstitutional network that includes Mexican professors and researchers from the Universidad Veracruzana and the Universidad de Guadalajara.

In the flow of work of our international research network, we realized that the institutions visited, the individuals and groups with whom we talked whether in Brazil and/or Mexico were (and are) crossed by translations from different languages. In view of these perceptions, we share Michaela Wolf's (2009a) statement that translation is a social process loaded with tensions.

Throughout our investigation, we identified and understood the adoption of different perspectives for translation. In most cases, translation is understood as a practice that aims to ensure communication between individuals. However, based on Eliasian notions (which we will discuss below) and Michaela Wolf's (2009) notes, two questions were present for us: a) how does this guarantee of communication happen when translation is understood as something external to individuals and societies?; b) what are the chances of prestige that the translation and the Brazilian and Mexican Sign Language Interpreters (TILS) who perform them have.

It seems to us that these issues become more evident when we consider the fact that there is an imbrication of forces in translations. In different intensities, there is an interrelationship of forces that delineate who the translators are, that create strategies based on working conditions, that can translate what, and for whom, in the face of a very specific purpose (ELIAS, 2014; 1994; CHESTERMAN, 2014; WOLF, 2009b).

These guiding questions drive our studies and prompted us to write this essay. However, before moving forward in our objective of highlighting the Eliasian constructs that can serve as tools for theoretical-methodological foundations for investigations in the Sociology of Translation, we believe it is prudent to warn that, with this essay, we do not intend to confront the existing paradigms to point out the only possible and much-needed path for other studies and authors that deal with aspects of translations within the scope of the Sociology of Translation.

Thus, in the first part of this essay, we seek to walk in the recent subfield of Translation Studies: the Sociology of Translation. To this end, we resort to national and international studies that present themselves to us as references and as empirical productions that constitute the densification of the discussion of the subfield of Sociology of Translation. In this exercise, we present the so-called "cultural turn" and issues that emerged in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries that indicated the need for the contribution of interdisciplinary issues, especially in the field of sociology.

In the second part, we reflect on translation as a social practice that happens in an interdependent way with cultures, institutions, individuals, languages, policies and others. From the interrelation of these vectors, we bring contributions from sociology, especially those arising from the thought of Pierre Bourdieu, which go on to contribute to the studies of the Sociology of Translation.

In the third part, we present a synthesis and characteristics of Figural Sociology, as well as the notions of figuration, network of interdependence and habitus developed by Norbert Elias and, thus, gradually, we propose reflections on these Eliasian constructs in investigations focused on the Sociology of Translation.

Finally, without losing the perspective of "me and us", we indicate the possibilities of investigations around translations and translators in an interdependent, plural way and associated with industrial, economic, professional and urbanization contexts (ELIAS, 2014).

HISTORICAL ASPECTS CONSTITUTIVE OF THE SUBFIELD OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF TRANSLATION

Translation is a process that occurs in the interrelationship between individuals and societies. As we approach translation, we realize that it depends on a translator and social institutions that together cooperate to serve certain individuals and linguistic communities. Thus, translation, previously seen only from a technical and descriptive perspective, has also come to be understood as a social practice, since

[...] the translation act is, in all its stages, undeniably practiced by individuals who belong to a social system; [...] the translation phenomenon is inevitably linked to institutions that, to a large extent, determine the selection, production and distribution of the translation and, consequently, the strategies adopted in the translation itself (WOLF, 2009b, p.01).

But it was not always seen that way. Until the 1970s, aspects of interest in Translation Studies were focused on structuralist and formal issues that aimed at a detailed

description of translation processes. In other words, when comparing with translations, the studies focused on the fidelity of the source text and observed grammatical issues involving languages and the strategies adopted by translators in their practices (ARAÚJO; MARTINS, 2018).

It was only after Holmes' essay (1988), which was presented in 1972 at the III International Congress of Applied Linguistics in Copenhagen, that the observation of the tensions that are beyond translations and are interrelated to it was cited in the field of Translation Studies. The author suggests, for example, that there are emphases, influences, and interferences in the choices and valuation of texts based on the contexts in which translation and translators are inserted (ARAÚJO; MARTINS, 2018; ZHENG, 2017; CHESTERMAN, 2014; 2006).

This perception is possible when we observe translation in areas of cultural borders. In this situation, it is not very difficult not to see that in communication, the act of translation and translation are interrelated in a large cultural network that remains in constant tension. Thus, the production of knowledge in Translation Studies, which aimed at the product of translation and the processes inherent to the act of translation, also began to observe, through interdisciplinarity or cultural studies, translations as a cultural mediation. At the time, this movement made it possible to see that the choices for terms, expressions, words and signs took place in the negotiation of cultural differences inserted in translations (WOLF, 2009b).

This "cultural turn" in Translation Studies is fraught with tensions, fundamentally, because it places us with the need to discuss the notion of translation. Instead of mediating linguistic agreements in an isolated conception of traditional and identity issues, translations would start to observe the dynamics of cultural formations and exchanges. Therefore, this turn made it possible to look at the cultural perceptions of translators and institutions linked to translation processes (WOLF, 2009b).

It turns out that the overcoming of the dichotomy between individual and society was not "resolved" in this "cultural turn". The question of the individual may have even been tied to translation, but social issues were divided into two levels: the cultural and the social itself. In a dichotomous perspective, the first level was characterized by forces as if they were beyond the individual and society, for example, power, capital, coercion, religions and others, and as the second level, the social was interpreted as if there was a collective internalization of the forces of the first level (WOLF, 2009b). Therefore, social institutions

and cultural aspects were analyzed as static, immutable spheres in opposition to individuals and translation.

In other words, we cannot consider culture as a process alien to social events and the production and understanding of linguistic signs of languages and translations, because in order to learn a certain language, even in childhood, individuals (translators) dynamize their linguistic potential. From Elias (2014), it is not by chance that the concepts of society and culture, in different ways, are interpreted as being opposed to the individual. It turns out that the temptation to think about society and culture in a way that is opposed to individuals forces us to imagine that at some point in life we are in suspension or oblivious to social and cultural events.

In this way, translation becomes a fundamental element for understanding social developments from a place between cultures and the specific issues of different societies. With this understanding, we agree with Wolf (2009b) that the "cultural turn" no longer seems to be enough to understand translation and the different social processes that are interrelated with it.

TRANSLATION AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

The social practice of translation has already been discussed by different approaches, including sociological ones, in the context of Translation Studies. The questions related to the interrelations of translation, social contexts and the translator remained open. And, until the 2000s, dichotomized theorizations did not provide an understanding of translation as interrelated practices with different societies (WOLF, 2009b).

Translation as an individual's work does not refer to an isolated production of human interrelations. If we look closely at the translation process and translation, we will realize that both take place in a complex and interdependent network. It is necessary to consider that translation occurs from the translator's individualities, which, together with social specificities, are crossed by cultural, linguistic, political, and terminological aspects (ESTILL, 2017; ELIJAH; 1994).

From this perspective, translation issues are not an exclusive production of the translator or the product of the translation itself. In the translation process we have institutions, purposes and choices about what to "say", but also the contents and

regulations themselves, which are interrelated in an open and plural dynamic (HEILBRON, SAPIRO, 2009).

Thus, roughly speaking, it is necessary to consider the textual, cognitive, cultural and sociological aspects as threads that interrelate and form a complex network. The entanglement of these threads relies on tensions charged with the translators' actions, their political preferences, the translator's prestige and their personal productions, which are never isolated (CHESTERMAN, 2014; 2006).

In this sense, in translation research, it has become more common to focus on the actions of translators inserted in a large network of interdependence that includes other translators and social institutions. A network with many crossings, whether cultural, economic, linguistic, political, technological or other (CHESTERMAN, 2014; 2006).

For researchers in Translation Studies, there was a need for a perspective that also related the ethics and responsibilities of translators and the institutions involved in the dynamics of translation. Thus, if historically the different aspects of translation were treated in a dichotomous manner and with different levels of appreciation, now, from a sociological perspective of translation, we see a markedly interrelational movement of analysis being driven (CHESTERMAN, 2014; 2006; WOLF, 2009a; WOLF, 2009b).

In the context of the Sociology of Translation, we can find different conceptions for translation. In the twenty-first century, since the "sociological turn", discussions and investigations have focused on at least three fronts⁵ that dynamize the concept of translation, namely: sociology of agents, sociology of the translation process and sociology of the cultural product (CHESTERMAN, 2006; WOLF, 2009a; WOLF, 2009b).

The combination of these three fronts provides us with a concept of translation as a social practice, which does not lose sight of the analysis of social interrelations. Similarly, like threads, cultural goods, objective and subjective conditions, and social coercions are entangled and, together, form a network that also includes translation, translation processes, and translators (CHESTERMAN, 2006; WOLF, 2009b; HEILBRON, SAPIRO, 2009). In other words, from a sociological perspective, the concept of translation is used for the production of knowledge that aims to investigate issues that are interrelated to translation, for example, training institutions, translators, ethics, translation policies, and others (ZHENG, 2017).

⁵ WOLF (2009b) details the theoretical-methodological aspects and indicates the main contributions of studies on these three research fronts.

Based on this understanding, in the 2000s, at least three different sociologists contributed to the densification of discussions and investigations in the Sociology of Translation, they are: the German Niklas Luhmann with his theory of social systems, the French Michel Callon and Bruno Latour with the actor-network theory, and the French Pierre Bourdieu with the theory of social fields.

Without diminishing the importance of the other two tendencies, we approach Bourdieu's field theory applied to Translation Studies because his thinking offers a perspective for translation focused on the social process from a network of interdependence, which considers translators, products, translation processes and consumption (WOLF, 2009b). Each of these elements will be in a very specific social position that interacts based on the different norms of the fields, the constitution and modeling of social habitus and the capital of translators (ZHENG, 2017). When we consider the neoliberal context in which we are inserted, translation is also permeated by capital factors (exchange rate, profit and loss) that are tensioned from the interrelations of translators, languages, cultures, contexts and purposes. Therefore, translation is also a tool of power shaped by socially negotiated behaviors (SERPA; CAMARGO, 2017).

Jean-Marc Gouanvic was one of the first researchers who sought this approximation of translation with Bourdieusian issues. Her theses focus on the interferences and responsibilities that occur for the production of translation in networks and in different institutions. The author suggests that there are legitimacies and powers that are operated in/by translation that are constantly stressed and undergo negotiations (WOLF, 2009b).

In this sense, translation relies on the act of translation, which is not exempt from the interference of the translators' habitus. Although there is a social habitus in translations, they are not exempt from the individual habitus of translators. The application of individual habitus is not merely movements of resistance, but is understood as the translator's habitus, in constant movement, which interrelates with other individuals and institutions and, together, constitutes the field (WOLF, 2009b).

In the flow of the production of more empirical studies based on the practices and discourses of translators, a second issue, of a theoretical-methodological order, caught our attention when we focused on Wolf's text (2009b), we agree with the author that Pierre Bourdieu, based on his conceptual tools, contributed with important sociological constructs to Translation Studies and that at the moment it is important that the next empirical studies

bring a careful look at the thought of the French sociologist in the search for multiple sociological understandings for translation.

In this sense, from the readings of the works of Pierre Bourdieu, the studies of the Sociology of Translation, studies developed by Brazilian and foreign sociologists and researchers of Bourdieusian works, I rescue one of the influences of Bourdieusian thought, the German sociologist, Norbert Elias.

As a result of a multiplicity of factors, Eliasian works were (translated and) disseminated in Europe and, especially, in France only from 1970 onwards⁶. The works "The Civilizing Process" and "Court Society" circulated among the thinkers of France in this decade. For example, Pierre Bourdieu translated an article by Norbert Elias on the genesis of sport with an analysis of how one should understand the notion of civilizing process elaborated by the German sociologist. Later, the Frenchman published one of his most important works, which rescued questions about the French elite, entitled "La Distinción: criterios y bases sociales del gusto" (ZABLUDOVSKY, 2007).

In granting an interview to sociologist Loïc Wacquant, Bourdieu recognizes the Eliasian influence for the elaboration of the notions of field – based on Eliasian contributions related to games – and of habitus – that the French, as well as the German, also works to overcome the dichotomy between individual and society. In addition to these contributions to Bourdieu's thought, the Figural Sociology elaborated by Norbert Elias offered conditions for Pierre Bourdieu to deal with the issues of physical and symbolic violence and for the criticism regarding the dichotomies between theory and practice, as well as sociology and history (ZABLUDOVSKY, 2007; BOURDIEU; WACQUANT, 1995).

Thus, in order to highlight the Eliasian constructs that can serve as theoretical-methodological foundation tools for investigations in the subfield of the Sociology of Translation, I then resort to the Eliasian constructs so that, gradually, from the notions of figuration, network of interdependence and habitus, the assumptions of Figural Sociology can be contemplated and served, for the densification of discussions about translation as a social practice, enhancing other modes of analysis for the subfield of Translation Studies.

⁶ From this translation, the work was one of the best-selling books in Europe and had a great influence on different fields of knowledge, fundamentally, in history. And it was from Roger Chartier that this work was widely disseminated in France (ZABLUDOVSKY, 2007).

FIGURATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: APPROXIMATIONS TO ELIASIAN THOUGHT

If we think of a synthesis for Figural Sociology, we propose that it is a processual historical approach used by Norbert Elias to analyze modern societies from the overcoming of the dichotomy between individual and society (COSTA JUNIOR, 2015; GASPAR, 2016), taking emotions, power and knowledge in long-term processes as the axis of analysis (ELIAS, 1994; 2014). Specifically, Figural Sociology is a set of theoretical-methodological assumptions that aims to understand the processuality of human interdependencies (SOBRINHO, 2009), fundamentally guided by the following questions:

"What makes people connect with each other and be dependent on each other? How do interdependencies change as societies become increasingly differentiated and stratified?" (ELIAS, 2014, p.147 – emphasis added).

For us⁷, these guiding questions help us to answer – and ask more questions from – one of the fundamental problems of Figural Sociology, which is "[...] to explain and discover how social transformations arise from previous states" (ZABLUDOVSKY, 2007, p. 31).

After all, Figural Sociology is characterized by escaping from static understandings of individual or society through a long-term processual analysis, as well as individualizing perspectives for social actions, because for the German sociologist, individuals make up a network of interrelations (COSTA, 2017).

This Eliasian proposition of overcoming the notions of the individual elaborated by classical sociologists is clearer when we observe the particularities and emotional valences of individuals, in this sense, we see that the notion of individual expands to:

[...] isolated beings who are born, have to be fed and protected for a long time by their parents or other adults, grow slowly, start to take care of themselves in this or that social position, can marry and have children and, finally, die (ELIAS, 2014, p.128-129).

In other words, from the Eliasian perspective, we refer to a being that transforms itself, lives in the midst of events and flows in the midst of different social figurations. Parents and children in a family, priests, pastors and church members, teachers, students and managers of a university are some examples of groups of individuals who, with each

⁷ Here we take the liberty of placing ourselves together with the understandings, perceptions and productions that take place with colleagues from the Research Group Policies, Management and School Inclusion: contexts and social processes (CNPq).

other, in the form of allies or adversaries and in an interrelational way, form a specific figuration. The population of tribes, municipalities, states or a country also form types of figurations. From these examples, and although at first glance it may seem strange, the same individual can relate from one or more figurations and different individuals can form a single social figuration (ELIAS, 2014; 2006).

It is common to be faced with the question of how the interrelationship of individuals through social figurations occurs. The answers to questions that influence this theme cannot be elaborated from the perspective of homo clausus. The actions of individuals distanced from each other end up being entangled from multiple links in the networks of interdependencies. A closed perspective of societies does not favor the analysis and understanding of human relationships and the crises of congresses and economies, because these issues cannot be understood from the analysis of the actions of individuals in isolation.

Thus, this shift of gaze from the perspective of homo clausus to the perspective of hominis aperti is one of the preponderant factors for Eliasian investigations and for those that focus on social interrelations that include the "[...] personal interdependencies and especially the emotional connections between people, considering them as unifying agents of the whole society (ELIAS, 2014, p.150).

In this sense, emotional connections will also depend on the size of the interdependence networks, which are understood as:

[...] a large weave of wires between individuals that connects each other. For example: "[...] Cities and villages, universities and factories, states and classes, families and operating groups, all constitute a network of individuals. Each one of us belongs to these individuals – this is what the expressions "my village", "my university", "my class", "my country" mean (ELIAS, 2014, p.16).

Although we have different possibilities of linking their valences, the individuals of a small tribe, a district, a city or a community, participate in the configuration as a whole. However, as social expansions and stratifications occur, different ways of individuals interrelating emotionally emerge. Concomitantly with these connections, individuals begin to have relationships with each other through emotions, symbols, beliefs, agreements, guidelines and processes that constitute social habitus (ELIAS, 2014).

Similarly, as much as translators are unique, in a mild, tense and interdependent way, they share experiences with each other. These processes dynamize common knowledge that, when shared, make up the social habitus.

The Eliasian conceptualization of habitus also means "second nature" or "embodied social knowledge". It is a mutable notion because it depends on the multiple and accumulated meanings that individuals give to social experiences that have overcome the notion of a given, fixed and permanent national character (culture) (DUNNING; MENNELL, 1997).

Through this understanding, at the current stage of the development of societies⁸, we understand that translators have *habitus* that are individualized in different proportions and "layers"⁹ depending on the complexity and tensions of the networks of interdependencies in which they are depicted. If one translator is intertwined with more social factors relative to another, the *habitus* of the former is intertwined in more "layers"/social issues than the latter. However, one of these "layers" differs from the others, the one that characterizes the bond of this individual to the group to which he belongs and feels safe – here we have a good example of the feeling of belonging in community, identity, national and other issues.

In the social sciences, the notion of social habitus follows in fluxes. Research that is guided by this Eliasian construct must observe the paths that are related in the formation and self-regulation of the images of the "I-and-we". From this investigative redimensioning, we are able to observe the power relations that dynamize the formation of social habitus and the control of individual emotions.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By considering the Eliasian constructs, especially the notions of figuration, network of interdependence and habitus as theoretical-methodological tools for the investigations of the Sociology of Translation, we propose to enhance the investigations that deal with translation as a social process, because as we have seen so far, from the sociological turn in Translation Studies, we have the understanding that translators are connected to others in different ways from the networks of interdependencies.

From Elias (1994), we understand that through these networks, translators model their habitus in different ways and move their chances of social prestige based on a socially

⁸ Individuals figured in pre-state stages or in tribes, such as the Yoruba of Nigeria – who live on the margins of the state and developed contexts of our time – have *habitus* with "fewer layers" than individuals who live in state societies as a result of the (im)possibility of sharing experiences, impulses and emotions and knowledge in different social figurations.

⁹ By second nature we understand it as the formation of a consciousness from a self-regulation of behaviors and emotions that has been self-regulated by the impulses and tensions of the networks of interdependencies in which individuals are figured (WOUTERS, 2006).

established habitus. In this way, these chances of prestige of translators are related to the social positions occupied by these individuals who, gradually, begin to dynamize self-regulation and the future of the figurations in which they are inserted.

Whether with little or a lot of chance of power, the translators' decisions impact the relationships with the other individuals who make up the figurations. For example, regardless of the appreciation and importance of some issue that demands some solution for the profession, for the translation processes and/or for the cultural products produced, translators experience multiple tensions and are intertwined with the distributions of power, which are operated by the social habitus established in the networks of interdependencies in which they are inserted.

These symbolic connections, through networks of interdependencies, are no less important than those that occur through industrial, economic, professional and urbanization processes (ELIAS, 2014). The sum of all these valences constitutes an exclusive stage of connections that allows us to analyze the translations from the perspective of "I and we".

Without intending to exhaust our reflections here, we believe that through Figurationnal Sociology, we also have the possibility of observing translators' affective bonds with translation, translation processes, institutions, linguistic and translation policies, the development of the profession, etc., which are figured in the networks of interdependencies as if they were affective bonds with another individual. It is possible, then, to perceive the translators' productions of meanings in these relations of interdependence permeated by some conquest/defeat, exaltation/humiliation or in the entry/exit of some process or other professionals.

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