



# *On Bridge Concepts in Translation Sociology*

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**Abstract:** The bridge concepts located by Andrew Chesterman have been labelled as one organic group of explicit elements in translation sociology. As a review on Bridge Concepts in Translation Sociology by Andrew Chesterman, included in the book *Constructing a Sociology of Translation* edited by Michaela Wolf and Alexandra Fukari, this article will seek to illustrate the structure of bridge concepts and correspondingly the mechanism of the causal model for translation sociology.

**Keywords:** bridge concepts, causal model, translation sociology

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## **1. Introduction**

Bridge Concepts in Translation Sociology by Andrew Chesterman aims to promote the idea of consilience which highlights the significance of interdisciplines by elaborating the “bridge concepts” in translation sociology through an explicit causal model[1].

The “sociological turn” led by Daniel Simeoni (1998) and Jean-Marc Gouanvic (1999) comes after polysystem theory of the 1970s and the following descriptive translation studies amid the cultural turn of the 1990s. Gouanvic’s methodology is grounded in a critique of polysystem theory, which, in his opinion, pays insufficient attention to the social functions of cultural products... According to Gouanvic, the sociology of culture developed by Bourdieu can remedy such shortcomings because it consistently combines the semiotic with the social (Hermans 1999: 132)[2].

This paper by Andrew Chesterman demonstrates the possibility of a concrete empirical paradigm for translation sociology, implying a move beyond descriptivism through the logic of causality in the following ways. First, the social perspective is placed at the centre while bridge concepts are crystallized to link the social perspective with textual, cognitive and cultural perspectives. Second, the notion of quality assessment which normally falls under the applied branch has been included in the descriptive branch in a bid to describe translation effects in social perspective, i.e., translation reception. Third, the focus of sociological research is mainly on the people (clients, translators and other agents) and their observable actions. Finally, the above research with the application of bridge concepts is about Chesterman’s attempt to promote the idea of consilience, the unity of all knowledge.

## **2. Bridge Concepts and Causal Model**

Bridge concepts can be introduced for two main reasons. On the one hand, gradually seen as an interdiscipline, the increasingly fragmented translation studies is calling for a greater degree of consilience. On the other hand, it should be well established that new research problems and hypotheses arise in border areas (Chesterman 2007: 172)[1].

To illustrate his own research paradigm and sociological anchor point, Chesterman also offers views of related scholars, including Bourdieu with his term *habitus*, Lefevre, Hermans, Wolf with their earlier consideration of sociological issues of translation, Pym and Hermans with their criticism against polysystem theory and even Aristotle with his categorization of causes and others. Chesterman foregrounds the translation process rather than the product and also stresses the synchronic relations of four perspectives in contemporary research. The other three perspectives of translation include linguistic perspective, cultural perspective and cognitive perspective, respectively with focus on texts, cultural elements and decision-making processes. Then, the sociological focus is mainly on the people and their observable actions. In this way, translation as a social practice can be defined as starting with the client’s request for a translation and ending with its reception by other agents on various levels, which echoes the logic of causality.

Causality, the first bridge concept, refers to the mechanism of Chesterman’s research for translation sociology. Chesterman mentions his previous suggestions of three kinds of models of translation: comparative models, process models and causal models. Comparative models are on the textual level. And process models operate on the cognitive level, with some of them being implicit causal models, obviously assuming a causal relationship between the process and the final product. The most relevant models for the topic of this paper by Chesterman are the explicit causal models aiming to link all four levels. Causal models relate textual features to features outside the translation, with these traits serving either as causal con-

ditions or subsequent effects. To avoid determinist formulations, Chesterman emphasizes that the general notion of a cause must be interpreted flexibly. He borrows the terms of von Wright, “quasi-causal” explanations, to explain the infinite set of potential contributory conditions, seeking to reduce our surprise when novel events occur. He also quotes the view of Pym and Hermans that abstract concepts of polysystem theory may fail to function as real causes. In such a way, the people-centred translation sociology and causal models will highlight genuine human agency and allow the translator’s subjectivity (Chesterman 2007: 176)[1].

And the causal model with demonstration of the other three groups of bridge concepts operating in the four levels may be roughly shown as Figure 1. Figure 1 attempts to present overlaps between the social aspect and the other three aspects, with the location of corresponding bridge concepts. And the gray lines and arrows work to render the logic of causality. The oblique arrow in the top right corner shows that translation as social practice can be defined as starting with the client’s request and ending with its reception by other agents.

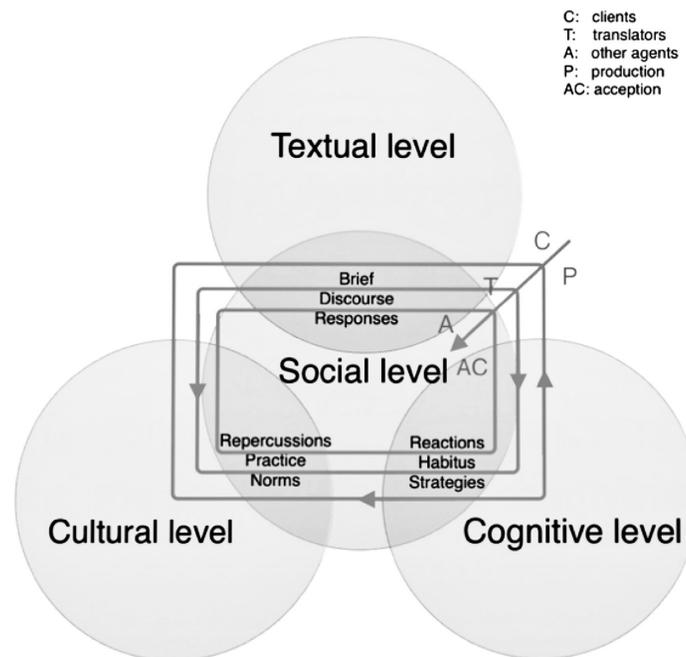


Figure 1. Causal Model for Translation Sociology

The bridge concepts of practice, discourse and habitus might enable us to conceptualize connections between the social perspective and the other three, while the social perspective is placed at the centre and the focus is on the people and what they do. In this category, first, the overlap between social and cultural aspects is explained by translation practice, focusing on what translators do. Critical practice analysis will be related to the value of quality by pinpointing weaknesses and identifying instances of “best practices”. Second, between the social and the textual we have discourse, involving all aspects of situational and institutional setting and issues of power and institutional status. And critical discourse analysis will probe the hidden values and power structures underlying discourse. Third, mainly between the social and the cognitive, we have the habitus, Bourdieu’s term, showing typical personalities of translators and interpreters. Critical habitus analysis is about a professional habitus, socialization into the profession, the adoption of appropriate attitudes and values, and so on.

The bridge concepts of norms, brief, and strategies will illustrate how practice, discourse and habitus are manifested. First, translation practice is crystallized in translation norms. As ideas, they exist in the cultural sphere, but their prescriptive force, their causal influence, is seen in social practices and their products, well showing the overlap between social and cultural aspects. Second, the discourse conditions of a translation are manifested in the translation brief, the client’s specification and instructions, giving the features of the resulting translation. Third, in the context of the constraints and demands of a particular translation task, the attitudes and dispositions constituting the habitus are thus made visible in a translator’s strategies for the translation.

The bridge concepts of reactions, responses and repercussions suggest that translations themselves also act as causes

and produce effects. This is where quality assessment lends itself to a more complete model. First, to refer to the effects of translations on the cognitive level, we could use the term reactions. On a collective level, people may share the mental image of works of translation and the translators through reaction. Being unaware that a given text is a translation, people may contribute more data on their reaction for relevant research. Second, communicative responses will fall under the general notion of discourse. The public image of translation and translator functions like Bourdieu's habitus, in the sense that it reactivates the effects of past practices via acquired dispositions. Third, repercussions can describe the effects of translation at the cultural level. Examples of translation repercussions might be that the canonization of a literary work changes in the evolution of the target language, in norms and practices, and in the perception of cultural stereotypes (180)[1]. This view of Chesterman will possibly ring a bell with people due to its resemblance to the corresponding concepts of polysystem.

Further, Chesterman figures that translation quality assessment will be realized by virtue of the combination of particular reactions and responses. Also, he tries to blur the gap between prescriptivism and descriptivism, arguing that prescriptive statements are predictive hypotheses of translation effects. In such a way, it echoes his earlier mention of Popper, one of whose notable ideas is bold hypothesis (172)[1].

Consilience, like the idea of bridge concepts, as a metaphor, seeks to enable people to better understand the significance of interdisciplines in that it's a new attempt to cut across boundaries in the search for a deeper understanding of the relations between texts, languages, societies and cultures. Hailing interdisciplinarity as a strength of the field, Chesterman also points out that we can try to challenge and overcome the existing categorical borders by exploiting notions that set up alternative categories.

As roughly shown in Figure 1, causality also operates within or between different groups of bridge concepts, such as: professional habitus and practice affect each other mostly via discourse (177); translator's strategies will realize the influence of norms and brief (179); habitus are made visible in a translator's global strategies for the translation (179)[1]. The central position of social sphere, the overlaps, the prescriptive hypothesis, the strict logic of global causality and also causality within or between different groups of bridge concepts are altogether conspiring to establish an extremely solid, stable and centripetal structure. Such a structure will reduce our surprise, allowing us to embrace new research data, and possibly enable a concrete empirical paradigm for translation sociology. The presence of these concrete concepts is part of the efforts to tap the social potential of "repertoire" firstly defined by Even-Zohar. Whereas, instability will still possibly find its way into this structure due to "bold" prescriptive hypotheses, assessment of quality, definition of profession, less emphasis on implicit causal models and potential negligence of possible conflicts among bridge concepts, which may call for massive data for such a research paradigm and constant weighing of each concept. And the above-mentioned challenging and overcoming of existing categorical borders will possibly constantly invite more new bridge concepts, which may also, in a way, cause instability.

### **3. A Sociology of Translation in the Making**

There exist criticisms or debates wondering how tenable these terms are. For example, the concept of habitus has been exposed to heated discussion for long. Sela-Sheffy (2005) argues that the major weakness associated with the concept of habitus is the deterministic view of human action it may convey[3]. This problem presents itself in Simeoni's (1998) discussion with emphasis on "submissiveness" as a universal component of translators' habitus, which allows almost no room for understanding choice and variability in their action. Another problem is that the interplay of the distinctive, conflictual and contradicting habitus of different agents will influence the explanatory power of this concept (Wolf 2011: 13)[4]. Besides, Wolf's attempt to enhance Bourdieusian concepts with the help of Homi Bhabha's theorem of the Third Space may also test the thickness of the concept of habitus to a certain extent (Wolf 2007: 113)[1].

To better analyze the mechanism of this empirical causal model for translation sociology and the components of it, we will have to study all of the related reviews, citations, debates and maybe other interdisciplinary writings and of course Chesterman's own works in terms of explanatory and causal theories, research methodology in translation studies, memes of translation and others, like his most recent volume *Reflections on Translation Theory: Selected Papers 1993-2014* (2017)[5].

### **4. Conclusion**

In short, this paper by Chesterman renders a sincere attempt to establish a concrete and applicable model for translation sociology and to promote the idea of consilience. The demonstration of such a research paradigm and subsequent and ongoing debates will involve students and scholars of translation studies in an explicit and inspiring way, enabling us to explore deeper into the structure and maybe consequently see beyond and even deconstruct the self of it.

## References

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