Translation and the Economies of Power

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1. The economies of translation in a globalised world

Power is everywhere: it mediates our relationships with the physical world and regulates our relationships amongst each other. One of the ironies of research on power in translation studies is that translators and academics remain caught within hierarchical and thus oppressive regimes of power that are increasingly determined by a relentless rationalization and technologization of modern life (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Feenberg, 2002). These forces bear a strong imprint on the subconscious, and they tend to only become evident as instances of normative behaviour on the textual level when we empirically investigate a large amount of translations. While such investigations have come to fruition in corpus-based translation studies (Olohan, 2004), most research has been devoted to conceptualising translation as a generator of knowledge across cultures. The cultural turn and its focus on intertextual relations, however, does not tend to regard texts as commodities that are produced and consumed according to the rules of a hierarchically structured market, and this is why we feel compelled to make a case for an integrated cultural-economic focus concerning the analysis of translation and power. A primarily cultural view is flawed to the extent that it ignores the underlying structural and institutional conditions which allow elites to reproduce their privileges and dominant positions in society. An overly cultural perspective also tends to overlook the fact that globalisation is increasingly determined by communication technologies and commercial interdependencies (Samir, 2014). It is time to balance this overreliance on cultural epistemology by an approach on translation that is more firmly grounded in the material and technologically-mediated dynamics of everyday life (Cronin, 2003). In other words, it is time that we look much closer at the ways in which the products, processes and functions of translation are embedded in the markets of commodity exchange. The new buzzword for us is the reality of the *economy* as the foundation of our existence. Let us therefore make an attempt to conceptualise the intricacies of power and translation across libidinal, digital and political dynamics within a globalised world. The importance of each domain will be exemplified with three case studies which highlight a) the impact of translation on the (social) body, b) the effects of automated translation on practitioners

and languages themselves, and c) the need for a more sustained analysis of the economics of translation.

The flows of power across time are delineated by a multitude of epochal labels. Currently the most widely used is postmodernism, symbolising an era where traditional certainties in stable sexual, national or political identities have become increasingly eroded (Lyotard, 1984). Postmodernist thought rejects grand ideological narratives, fixed categorizations and stable identities, concentrating its analytical energies on subjectivity and discursive practices at the expense of material factors. Transformations in the regimes and forces of power are of course underpinned by the transformation of dominant belief systems. Research in translation studies, however, has not yet sufficiently acknowledged that epistemological shifts tend to be driven by the vicissitudes of the economy and capital. Moreover, power evolves alongside scientific and technological change, a historical dynamic with its very own effects on the human condition. Future translation research indeed might position itself under the label of posthumanism, an intellectual paradigm that aims to transcend culturalism by problematizing taken for granted ideas about what it actually means to be human in a world dominated by capital, science and technology (Braidotti, 2013). The cultural turn that was inspired by postmodernism's power of subversion – for instance the critique of colonial translation methods or the propagation of feminist translation strategies – will most likely become enriched by an additional "posthuman" focus on our reliance on translation technologies and on how these are transforming the nature of cross-cultural communication. At the dawn of the posthuman condition, we begin to ask questions as to what extent the digital economy, the ever-increasing power of global technological flows, impacts on human subjectivity and social life.

Contemporary translation theory needs to critically acknowledge the genealogy of scientific and technological rationality and its impact on human subjectivity. Yet, a critical engagement based primarily on postmodern ethics and posthuman sensitivities would fail any litmus test in a world that revolves around the logic of economic exchange and consumption. In our discipline, the notion of the *political economy* has received very short shrift, presumably because of its roots in Marxist historical materialism, yet it is evident that the political and the economic are two sides of the same

coin. These two dimensions have virtually become symbiotic during the historical transitions of capitalism into a stage where its ideological force has become an unquestioned principle (Jameson, 1991). Hence, it would be interesting to see a future turn towards investigations of translation as embedded in local and global political economies. It is clear, after all, that the power of capital plays a significant role in the history of translation (Liu, 1999; Milton, 2008). A new focus on the political economy, therefore, would complement activist research and practices, it would create a stronger awareness of the ways in which the politics of cultural exchange is bolstered by economic principles.

Advanced capitalism has spawned new forms of oppressive power that have become internalised by large swathes of the global population as unquestioned principles of conduct. The fetishization and uncritical acceptance of the imperatives of capital and technology has generated a multitude of cultural identities and practices, including a blind belief in global market forces and the prerogatives of private competition, wealth accumulation and bureaucratic efficiency. An important task for translation theory, therefore, remains a systematic critical assessment of the acceptance of neoliberal imperatives to the detriment of intercultural understanding, social justice and environmental sustainability. A translation theory that seriously attempts to think through the reciprocal effects across translation and power needs to reflect upon translational flows within the context of (global) commercial operations and their complicity with technology-driven biopolitics (Nakai and Solomon, 2006: 27). The emphasis by postmodern and postcolonial research on operations of culture, however, has resulted in a certain depoliticisation of academic theory and the relegation of *socio-economic* structures and processes to the analytical margins (Baumgarten, 2016: 121-124). It is important to take these aspects into account because, as Jacquemond (1992: 139) already stated 25 years ago, ‘the global translation flux is predominantly North-North, while South-South translation is almost non-existent and North-South translation is unequal: cultural hegemony confirms, to a greater extent, economic hegemony’. Translation studies needs to forge stronger links between critical (economic) theory and critical practice in order to empower our interdiscipline to facilitate change, engage in action, and become visible in public discourse.

In the early 21st century, the structural dynamics of capital are strongly interwoven with the onward march of science and technology, engendering ever more complex forms of interdependency. Notions like *hypermodernity* or *hyperreality* capture snapshots of emergent new regimes of power (Baudrillard, 1994; Lipovetsky, 2005), while the neoliberal political paradigm and its techno-scientifc offshoots engender new forms of rationality (Pellizoni and Ylönen, 2012). The emerging new realities in the global political arena call for more finely differentiated accounts of translation and power that can enlighten us about the possibility of new ways of living not dominated by market forces and authoritarian state control, new ways of living which will necessarily have to address current social inequalities and the looming ecological disaster (cf. Hardt and Negri's (2004) concept of the multitude).

The recent surge in sociological translation research has propelled the notion of agency into the scholarly debate (Milton and Bandia, 2009), but actor-centred methodologies tend to insufficiently account for the underlying inequalities generated by the dynamics of capitalist globalisation. Bourdieu's ideas, however, have facilitated a better understanding of the ways in which translation both shapes and is shaped by solidified yet also fluid and emergent regimes of power (Inghilleri, 2005; Vorderobermeier, 2014; Hanna, 2016). The three economies of translation that we wish to highlight in our discussion bear relations to Bourdieu's approach, because a) an agent's habitus is embedded within a given *libidinal economy*, b) it is dependent upon forms of capital that are increasingly dependent on the shifting technological provisions within the *digital economy*, and, c) it is ultimately tied to the capitalist logic within the globalised and globalising *political economy*. While it is obvious that translation agents can freely choose their allegiances and participation in wider social struggles, their decisions remain subject to the fluctuations of power within the libidinal, digital and political economies of translation. It is therefore instrumental to identify such newly defined intercultural spaces, and locate them at the junctions of translation studies, in order to better understand how translation shapes and is shaped by emerging new centres and relations of power and their underlying ideologies.

The *postmodern* perspective on human affairs is libidinal to the extent that it considers biopower as integral to all organic life and social reality (Foucault and Gordon, 1980; Hardt and Negri, 2004; Lyotard, 1984, 1993). Translation is, of course, subject to the whims of our feelings and emotions, it is a cognitive and affective-somatic practice (Robinson, 1991; Scott, 2012) that may be envisaged as taking place within the realms of a global *libidinal economy*. The *classical* perspective emphasises power as a centralised resource held by elite groups who impose their interests on subordinate groups (Mills, 1956). In this classical sense, translation may be seen as subject to techno-scientific progress, entrenched within a *digital economy* where influential (multi)national and technological players compete for stakes in power within a worldwide marketplace. Finally, the *structuralist* perspective on power underscores its diffused and relational, its conflictive and consensual nature, permitting refined insights into overlapping social and agentive networks of power (Bourdieu, 1990). Here, translation is seen as firmly integrated within the structural fabric of society, within the hustle and bustle of institutional and commercial relations of power that characterise the *political economy*. To what precise extent, however, do these three socio-economic realms relate to the question of translation and power?

2. The libidinal economies of translation

We speak of a *libidinal economy of translation* to suggest that the theory and practice of translation are human activities bound to affective and embodied dispositions. To date, research on translation has tended to locate the sources and effects of power in libidinal conceptualisations such as identity, agency, memory, or somatic theory (e.g. Cronin, 2006; Milton and Bandia, 2009; Brodzki, 2007; Robinson, 1991). The spotlight that translation research has placed on the libidinal manifestations of the human condition certainly helps to advance our understanding of translation. Sociological research in particular has taken critical note of Foucault's theory of power (Nakai and Solomon, 2006) and of Bourdieu's conception of the subject as a confluence of socially and perceptually constituted dispositions known as habitus (Vorderobermeier, 2014). The postmodern "libidinal" perspective has given us much to think about issues of identity and agency. The intricacies of translation and biopower, however, need to be unravelled with recourse to a theory of the subject that accounts for questions of hegemony and domination against the backdrop of commodified

relations of power. Overall, this requires a reorientation of translation studies towards the *materiality* of knowledge and cultural practices, towards a concept which is all too often frowned upon due to its appropriation by hegemonic discourses on consumption and commodification.

The South Korean movie *Okja* (dir. by Bong Joon-ho, 2017) offers a particularly nuanced exploration of the ways in which libidinal energies, biopower, late capitalism, technology, globalisation and translation intertwine at the beginning of the 21st century. The main issues explored include the power of transnational companies, the morality and immorality of bioengineering, the ecological crisis and the radical structural changes suffered by human societies in the last few decades. In the movie, a local farmer who lives in harmony with nature in a remote Korean village grows a recently created species of giant pig on behalf of an agricultural corporation that intends to mass produce the animal to help alleviate world hunger. In reality, the whole operation is a greenwashing exercise devised to boost the company's profitability. Mija, the farmer's daughter, develops strong emotional ties with the pig, named Okja, and when the animal is reclaimed by the company she embarks on a journey from rural Korea to Seoul and as far as New York to reunite with her friend. Mija is helped by the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), determined to unmask the company's real intentions and to liberate the pig.

Mija communicates with the ALF through the help of an interpreter and, on being asked whether she would like the animal to be freed or implant a camera in her body to record the animal abuse taking place in the company's main facilities, she simply answers that she wants to go back to the countryside. The interpreter, sensing the disappointment that her answer will cause and given ALF's high moral ground, purposely mistranslates her words. Once his dubious translation choice is revealed, the ALF's leader, in order to make him realise that treating a person with respect involves respecting his or her language, beats him up while stressing that 'translations are sacred'. The ALF obtains the desired images, but only through Okja's brutal torture, which reminds us that translation has been used for the subjugation of bodies and human communities, that this practice ultimately intervenes in organic systems. To redeem himself, the interpreter in fact has the sentence "translations are sacred" voluntarily tattooed on his arm, an act of self-mutilation that stresses the

need to recognise and respect the embodied dispositions present in the enunciations of translation, whilst also expressing his future commitment to the voice of those he represents. The interpreter's translation decision, taken in a split second, shows how translation is subordinated to libidinal intensities, moved by feelings and desires that exist on the body, and it also shows how libidinal energies impact upon translation decisions. The power of the translator, exerted at the level of life and in the name of life, obviously has an impact on organic life.

In *Okja*, interpreting is also used within the agricultural company, because the managing board and the employees do not speak the same language. The former use English to engage in greenwashing strategies and develop new technologies to impose their industrial food products on a global scale; the latter only speak Spanish and have no other option but to contribute to their own subordination by first producing and then consuming the company's products. Translation, *Okja* suggests, should be used to sustain rather than predate social and ecological life-support systems. And the fact that in the film Korean and Spanish mainly exist in translation shows that languages, like natural ecosystems, have also been threatened by the socio-economic order, which favours a reduction of linguistic diversity in the name of market profitability. Given that the international market is being dominated by English and translations out of English, research on translation, power and globalisation cannot evade the question of linguistic imperialism. Here, the global hegemony of English panders to an illusion of immediate and transparent communication which is nourished by Western rationality. The result is that virtually 'every kind of thought must presuppose that it will be translated into English' (Takaaki, 2006: 42), while such translations may indeed be complicit in 'the systematic destruction of rival forms of knowledge' (Bennett, 2007: 154). Translation may potentially threaten the cohesion of existing social structures, reinforce inequalities and obliterate knowledge and linguistic systems. Human beings integrate translation into their lives, it is a practice which allows us to plan, perform and control intervention in our environment. We should therefore investigate in which ways the libidinal economies of translation can positively blossom within and across human communities, not to put our communities at risk or subordinate them, but to guarantee the preservation of cultural diversity, to enhance their self-image and to make sure that they are able to control their own knowledge and ways of life. *Okja*, with its focus on a quasi-sentient bioengineered

animal, hints at the need to develop an ecological method of translation which is less anthropocentric and more life-centred, which is sensitive to the way the natural world is described, presenting it as an indissociable part of the human experience rather than just an external reality that mainly exists to be exploited.

3. The digital economies of translation

The rise of networked and digital technologies since the second half of the last century has significantly changed the processes and products of translation (Folaron and Buzelin, 2007). It makes sense, therefore, to scrutinise newly emerging yet constantly shifting hierarchies of power within the context of a *digital economy of translation*. While new technologies to some extent foster the erosion of classical "top-down" relations of power, they nevertheless remain subject to the pressures of increasingly interconnected global markets. In this sense, translation research needs to analyse the ongoing reconfiguration of social identities through the forces of techno-scientific rationality and capitalist globalisation (O'Thomas, 2017). Translation technologies are not just tools subordinated to human interests; rather, we increasingly live in symbiosis with them, to the point that frequently we do not notice their presence. As Alonso and Calvo point out, 'we find examples of the use of digital tools in even the most traditional forms of translation' (2015: 141). There appears, on the whole, to be no room outside of (capitalist) techno-scientific domination on a global level, because scientific research and technological development are firmly entrenched within public and private sectors, promising endless material riches and prospects for human advancement, often at the expense of social justice and the degradation of the environment.

Dealing with information is becoming ever faster and cheaper, and mobility-enhancing technologies have resulted in the appearance of a true global marketplace. This has transformed the practice of translation, which now can be carried out in real time by teams located in any part of the world with software that provides a significant input towards the final product (Daelemans and Hoste, 2009). Translation processes are increasingly mediated by interconnected actors who have specific, self-contained tasks to perform and often have no access to information on the purposes and results of the job at hand. As a consequence, authorship or ethical responsibility can rarely be claimed by

translators working, for instance, in large international institutions such as the European Union (Koskinen, 2008: 24).

In the wake of the global expansion of the techno-scientific marketplace, the translation process itself is increasingly explained in the managerial terms of productivity and professional efficiency. This discourse, which contributes to the grand narrative of techno-scientific progress, risks approaching translation from an exclusively rationalist and practical point of view that fosters purely empirical models of analysis. In order to avoid simply absorbing and reproducing these discourses, the discipline needs to pay more critical attention to power relations within the translation industry, composed of a vast number of organisations of very different sizes and with very different objectives and practices. Technology has, to be sure, lowered entry barriers into the translation profession, but we cannot ignore the fact that translation output is increasingly mediated by a very limited range of tools which determine product quality.

Digital networks of information have streamlined the translation process, but at the risk of promoting the rise of market-driven technocratic managerialism, homogenising knowledge and creating further inequalities. In May 2017, for instance, a subscriber to the Spanish digital TV channel Movistar+ tweeted a still image with Catalan subtitles from the series Fargo in which the caption – misspelling included – read “És molts diners. Cent mil galls dindis.” [It’s a lot of money. One hundred thousand turkeys.]. Catalan speakers immediately realised that the expression **gall d’indis** was a literal translation of the Spanish word **pavos**, which only in Spanish can mean both **turkey** and, in slang, **bucks**.

This mistake, obviously a result of automatic translation, irritated Catalan speakers and sparked a heated media debate which had political consequences: Santi Vila, the Catalan Minister of Culture, alarmed by the controversy, contacted Movistar+ and informed his Twitter followers that the company would amend the error (La Vanguardia, 2017; Ara, 2017). It soon transpired that Movistar+ and the Ministry of Culture had signed an agreement by which, between 2014 and 2016, the former would subtitle into Catalan 600 films and 60 seasons of different TV shows. It was also revealed that,

in 2016 alone, Movistar+ had received 300,000 euros for their subtitling efforts. Movistar+ distanced themselves from any responsibility by pointing out that the distributor (Metro Goldwyn Mayer) provided the subtitles, which had been outsourced to an external company. Internet users, shocked by the lack of respect towards their language, started circulating similar mistranslations from other shows and films and, also, from newspapers, making it obvious that in Catalonia computer-generated translation is a pervasive phenomenon that extends well beyond subtitling.

Translation or subtitling into Catalan is not just done in the interest of linguistic plurality and out of respect for Catalan speakers, but because the Catalan government subsidises such initiatives. Everyone involved benefits from this: the government can claim that audio-visual content in Catalan is growing exponentially and that continuous interest of media corporations provides evidence of the vitality of the language. Media companies receive a small government subsidy which, while not allowing them to provide a good service, grants them some publicity in the Catalan media and helps them balance their accounts. We could criticise corporate greed and question whether translation into stateless languages should be the sole responsibility of local governments, but the fact remains that 300,000 euros is a tiny subsidy: how many hours of content could be properly subtitled by a translator earning a decent salary? Not many.

What outsourcing companies do is to employ an editor (and we can imagine that contractual conditions are not particularly good) who quickly scans the automated translation in order to rectify the most glaring errors. The mistake spread through social media and thus uncovered the deplorable political, corporate and economic realities of automated translation, but this example also illustrates some of the less obvious consequences of the new digital economy of translation. No matter the original language of the media product, Catalan is systematically translated from the Spanish translations of these media products. Such relay translations consequently distort the lexicon, phraseology, syntax and grammar of Catalan, in a process which renders the language other to itself, gradually transforming it into a mere appendage of Spanish. Ironically, an initiative that in principle should help to promote the use of Catalan among its speakers may end up defacing the

language to a point where, if the process persists and intensifies, it becomes indistinguishable from the "source code", thus eliminating the need for translation.

Most automated translation tools rely on so-called pivot languages: instead of translating directly from a source to a target language, they first translate to an intermediary language and then to the target. To be effective, software needs massive amounts of data, which explains why results are poor when it comes to translating less spoken languages. As Boleslav (2015) pointed out regarding the disastrous results of automated translation into Irish Gaelic, 'languages are [should be] judged by the quality of what is said and written in them – not by the quantity of what can be cheaply translated into and out of them'. In the face of the catastrophic results that machine translation could have for the ecology of languages, Cronin (2017) has rightly called for a sustainable development of translation which protects languages from massification strategies which corrupt and distort them.

As the above example shows, new research needs to investigate the social and cultural implications of the increasing technological mediation of translation activities (Pym, 2011). Large sectors of the translation profession have quickly evolved from the rhythms of solitary intellectual production to the rhythms of the technological age, with its alienated labour, bureaucratic routines, and compulsion for productivity (Moorkens 2017). The societal drive towards technological rationalism strongly relies on the forces of advanced capitalism, and new research on translation and power would need to steer away from an overreliance on cultural, social and symbolic forms of capital to the benefit of a robust focus on *economic capital* (Bourdieu, 1990).

4. The new spaces of power in the political economy

The global spread of capitalism has been facilitated through newly evolving communication technologies and through the artificial creation of consumer needs. It is indeed reasonable to argue that the most significant 'paradigm shift in the global economic and political orders' constitutes the 'unification of the world market, which paradoxically operates through diversity and diversification' (Neilson, 2006: 158). The world's multilingual reality makes up for one significant aspect of this paradox, and it cannot be overemphasised that (linguistic) diversity is mediated through translation

and capital. When we speak of a *political economy of translation*, we focus on local and global manifestations of power in relation to institutional dynamics, political organization and economic imperatives. This structural perspective on the topic of power and translation offers insights into the local histories, hierarchical compositions and market objectives of differentiated socio-economic spaces such as publishing houses, translation agencies, software companies, educational departments, government institutions, and so on. By drawing on discourse analysis, terminology research and corpus linguistics, scholars have provided valuable insights into the linguistic challenges of translating business discourse and economic texts, but the focus on 'the translation of economics' should give way to an increased attention on 'the economics of translation' (Biel and Sosoni, 2017).

Logemann and Piekkari (2014), for instance, examine how multinational corporations implement translation and language policies to regulate internal communication, create a common corporate language and reduce internal linguistic diversity. Their study brings to light the importance of invisible practices such as self-translation, the particularly active role of junior employees regarding this practice and the way it is used to solidify or contest power relations within organisations. This structural approach, ultimately, complements scholarly insights on empire, colonialism, gender and subject formation that have been generated since the cultural turn. Another practice that has been analysed from this perspective is that of crowdsourcing, which has shaken the foundations of the translation industry (McDonough Dolmaya, 2012). Advances in technology have blurred the boundaries between professional and amateur translators, which has resulted in fears being raised regarding the potential de-professionalisation of elements of translation practice. Translation services have in any case become widely diversified, now they include not just paid professional translation, but also unpaid raw machine translation, paid post-edited machine translation and paid or unpaid crowdsourcing (Garcia, 2015). While volunteer translation initiatives can provide training opportunities for graduates or invaluable support in situations such as a humanitarian crisis, for-profit corporations have already explored the use of gamification strategies and canvassed online communities to recruit unpaid volunteers. In 2009, for instance, LinkedIn sent an online survey to thousands of translator members asking whether they would be willing to help translating the

company's site for no remuneration (Newman, 2009). The options included translating in exchange of an upgraded account or simply for fun. While a number of translators expressed serious concerns, many others welcomed this initiative as a way of enhancing their CV and potentially securing more paid jobs. It appears that, first and foremost, the problem was one of communication: LinkedIn employs professional translators on a regular basis, and a company whose revenue mainly comes from providing information to HR professionals surely would not risk jeopardising their reputation with an underdeveloped translation programme. While some feared that the survey was an attempt at cutting costs by using non-paid translators, others argued that the goal was to potentially develop an ambitious crowdsourcing translation project which was not well explained (Kelly, 2009).

The key role of translation in fostering intercultural communication is obvious to translators and scholars, but examples abound which show that the added benefits of a well-thought-out translation strategy are by no means obvious to the corporate world. In 2015, for instance, Taco Bell's communication strategies floundered in Japan: information content from the company occurred mainly in English, tweets in Japanese were ignored and the company used unmediated machine translation to translate their Japanese website, this causing the impression that Taco Bell was entirely ignoring the local context (Sholl, 2015). The cases of LinkedIn and Taco Bell demonstrate that communication and translation strategies are interlinked but not always developed to the same standard. In order to understand the political economies of translation, it is paramount to explore the ways in which translation is embedded in a company's culture and business practices, to examine their internal communication systems and policies and their translation needs, the way they present themselves externally, and how they interact with clients from different countries.

What needs to be investigated regarding the political economies of translation, however, is not only how translation is embedded in the daily functioning of corporations, but how translation companies themselves operate. Scholars logically side with translators, raising concerns about practices that appear to threaten the profession and highlighting those that seem to empower it. Nevertheless, when a translation company promotes its services by stating that '[e]very economic institution, organization and business understands that money is the greatest communicator in the world and

that accurate financial translations are indispensable toward making certain that communication is not infringed upon in any way' (York's Translation, 2017), it is obvious that we should be more critical with the rampant industrialisation and commodification of this practice. Similarly, another company states that they 'can help ensure that through a maze of new terminology and regulations [such as hedge funds, credit default swaps, swaptions, subprime debt, etc.], shades of meaning do not get lost' (Ulatus, 2017). The blind adherence by many specialised translation companies to market principles by emphasising that their apparent high quality services increase profits and ensure growth and security poses the inconvenient question of whether the role of translation lies not just in promoting intercultural understanding but in the (surely also inadvertent) creation of global economic bubbles, the depredation of the environment and the reproduction of social injustice.

Undeniably, the opportunities available for translation researchers and practitioners have grown exponentially in just a few years, but at the cost of a creeping internalisation of hegemonic market values. The rift between humanist and market-driven discourses on translation is echoed in the ways in which scholars address the study of newly emerging technological and economic processes. By leaning on the skepticism of the Frankfurt School towards technological development and consumerism, there are concerns about the potential capacity of these processes to limit and control the subjectivity of the translator (Nakai and Solomon, 2006; Dizdar, 2014). But it has also been argued that these transformative changes may in fact liberate them from repetitive and mundane tasks, allowing translators to precisely focus on those aspects of their job which demand more creativity (Cronin, 2003; also Pym, 2011). Pessimist views on the unviability of capitalist relations of production and consumption exist side by side with the idea that advanced capitalism does indeed offer opportunities that empower and free the human subject (Featherstone, 1991: 86). This may be the case, but we should not forget that at the precise moment when translation becomes integrated into the global exchange system of commodities – i.e. when a translation is distributed on the consumer market – it becomes part and parcel of the realm of capitalist ideology.

5. Final considerations

The demands of the market, which probably represents the most significant locus of power in most spheres of society, have generated both optimism and insecurity in the field of translation studies. This interdiscipline, one of the few recent success stories in the humanities due to its large potential for the creation of practice-based knowledge, finds itself in a contradictory position. While it keeps drawing heavily from its humanist-hermeneutic foundations, it is simultaneously drawn towards the private sector, consistently creating links with actors in the corporate world. The tension between both poles has given rise to two divergent discourses coexisting side by side in postgraduate courses, conferences and journals. One body of research draws inspiration from cultural studies and the social sciences, whereas the other borrows heavily from the discourses of business administration, international marketing and translation technology (Pym, 2013, 2014). These are discourses that above all propagate market ideals such as employability, productivity, or skills development. Their influence is evidenced by a growing number of educational training courses whose main aim is to produce translation professionals for the brave new world of (largely corporate) intercultural communication. This techno-managerial approach to translation education tends to give prominence to linguistic structures and technological innovations at the expense of cultural context and often presupposes the neutrality of both language and translators, favouring an empiricism that 'tends to privilege analytical concepts derived from linguistics, regardless of how narrow or limited they may be in their explanatory power' (Venuti, 2013: 67).

During recent decades, the global spread and availability of information and knowledge have become crucial assets in maintaining stakes in economic and political power. Any knowledge-based modern society crucially rests on the foundations of a socio-economic order overseen by institutional networks of power (Castells, 2000; Rooney, Hearn and Ninan, 2005). However, keeping an appearance of *order* calls for considerable efforts and resources, because social values, norms and conventions are constantly being challenged and re-evaluated. Translation, as a key factor in the dissemination of knowledge, has the power to consolidate or disturb ideological positions and relations of dominance. The translation process itself can be seen as a moment of structuration (Giddens, 1984; van Rooyen, 2013) in which new discourses are being created and in which multi-faceted layers of meaning are being (re)negotiated, shaped and reinforced. During the translation

act knowledge is in transit, in the making so to speak, and this is often a moment of individual hesitation infused with power in which critical choices are being made. As a result, uncovering how translation agents make and reshape the text also requires us to direct our attention to the often microscopic and sometimes seemingly trivial choices through which they negotiate power relations. This may then enable us to speculate on the causes and effects of translational decisions in the wider social arena. Translation is instrumental in fostering the reconfiguration of values and wider structural relations as it participates in the social construction of knowledge and identities. But we should not forget that it is also firmly embedded in processes of (neoliberal) globalisation which promote social inequalities and the depredation of natural resources.

On a positive note, in today's political economy power is more diffused and fragmented than ever, because the barriers that once granted monopolies to large-scale organisations have been eroded or can be more easily circumvented (Naím, 2013). The last few years, for instance, have seen the emergence of a myriad of small, specialised and very flexible (mostly technology-driven) companies that can deliver services at often very low costs, but we also witness an explosion in phenomena like citizen journalism or fansubbing (Massidda, 2015; Wang and Zhang, 2017). It is obvious that technological developments in communication systems have resulted in the redistribution of global power relations and have greatly increased the opportunities for social activism, which pose challenges to corporate, media and state institutions. The growing number of translators organised in close-knit networks across the globe has led to an increasing emphasis on their social responsibility and on opportunities for intervening in public debate (Tymoczko, 2010). Further to this, from the perspective of the sociology of globalization, proposals have been put forward to engage in 'intercultural translation' in order to preserve cultural heterogeneity and to counteract hegemonic neoliberal globalisation (Santos, 2014; Cronin, 2017). The fact that information produced in any part of the world can today almost instantaneously be made available in any major language, therefore, propels the economies of translation into a position of new political significance, not least because activists and translators are gaining more options to question, outflank, or even sabotage, hegemonic and dominant forms of power.

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