

# Introduction

The present book is in line of the research conducted in a series of books published by one of the leading sociologists of the twentieth century Niklas Luhmann (1927–98). Among his numerous publications (see bibliographies of Luhmann’s works in German in Baraldi, Corsi, and Esposito 1997 and of his works translated into English in Moeller 2006), there are two major general expositions of his social systems theory (SST) and a series of what may be called case studies, that is, studies of individual social subsystems. The former group is comprised of general SST works: *Soziale Systeme: Grundriss einer allgemeinen Theorie* (1984, in English translation: *Social Systems*, see Luhmann 1995) and *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft* (1997, *The Society of Society*<sup>1</sup>). The latter group includes monographs on the economy (*Die Wirtschaft der Gesellschaft*, 1988), science (*Die Wissenschaft der Gesellschaft*, 1990), law (*Das Recht der Gesellschaft*, 1995), art (*Die Kunst der Gesellschaft*, 1995), religion (*Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, published posthumously by André Kieserling, 2000), education (*Die Erziehungssystem der Gesellschaft*, published posthumously by Dieter Lenzen, 2001) and others (see also Runkel and Burkart 2005, 7, 11). The second type of Luhmann’s publications, where SST is applied to individual social function systems, serves as a model for the present monograph, and, consequently, the latter aspires to continue Luhmann’s original series by adding a systemic description of one more social function system—the translation system.

Although there have been attempts to describe translation in terms of SST (see an overview in Section 2.1), the subject has not been treated in any satisfactorily comprehensive fashion. This is the ambition of this research—to go beyond simplified and cursory outlines of the applicability of only the major SST concepts and to explore Luhmann’s theory in all its inspiring complexity.

In a nutshell, Luhmann considered society as a self-reproducing (autopoietic) system surrounded by an environment. The system is composed of subsystems. In modern society such subsystems include the economy, law, politics, art, religion, mass media, and education. The list is by no means exhaustive. Luhmann’s social system theory allows and indeed prompts its application to more than these subsystems (see Berg and Schmidt 2000;

2 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

Seidl and Becker 2005; Seidl 2005; Ihlen, Ruler, and Fredriksson 2009, 187–211). Any social formation may be studied from the standpoint of SST as long as it claims to be or can be described as a self-reproducing unity. Translation is no exception and this is what I intend to demonstrate in this study.

In the above said, there is already a great deal to define and explain: What exactly is a social system? What is the difference between system and subsystem? What is environment and what is its relationship with the system? I will discuss all these issues in due course and apply these notions to translation. By and large, in my application of SST to translation, I will follow the pattern set by Luhmann in the mentioned series of books on the economy law, politics, art, religion, and education as social systems. More specifically, I will describe translation qua system with its internal mechanisms and then its relationship with other social units.

Needless to say, the field of possibilities to apply Luhmann's SST as well as other sociological and systems theories to translation is vast, and one cannot hope to cover it in one monograph. Here I would like to quote Gregory Bateson who, having adumbrated in a book the line of his research, warned the reader: "Some of these questions are touched upon in the essays, but the main thrust of the book is to clear the way so that such questions can be meaningfully asked" (1972, xviii). In this study, mine is a similar task. While going deeper, than any existing relevant attempts in translation studies, into Luhmann's SST and its sources, I do not claim to have exhausted the subject, Luhmann's social theory being so rich and many-faceted that it is impossible to consider all what it has to offer in any single study.

### VIRGIL OR BEATRICE, BUT DEFINITELY AN "ASTONISHING" TRANSLATOR

Society and social laws lay hid in night.  
God said: "Let Luhmann be" and all was light.

—Dietrich Schwanitz

If there is no place like our present homelessness away from home,  
then it is Luhmann who can best guide us in this ever-expanding  
wilderness.

—William Rasch

Luhmann came into sociology when postmodern theorizing came to a kind of bifurcation point, a state of instability, after which a system's self-organization is unpredictable. After the disappearance of the transcending observer, metanarratives, that is, grand theories encompassing and unifying modern historical and social experience and attempting to explain it, were declared bankrupt, and the project of creating such theories was

abandoned. Since there is no such external observer, whatever observation is made, it is inevitably made from inside (the world) and cannot claim to suggest more than a representation among many other possible and existing representations. Admitting that no one binding representation of society is any longer possible, Luhmann did not assess the situation in exclusively negative or critical terms. He believed there was still something to be said about our highly differentiated and fragmented world. The end of metanarrative did not mean, for Luhmann, the end of theory, but rather—“a challenge to theory” (Knodt 1995, x–xi). And he took up the challenge.

Although describing himself as a sociologist, Luhmann virtually broke with contemporary sociology which, in his opinion, showed deficit in theory and resorted to piling up data and uncritical raking through classics (2009, 11). He saw a way out in turning for inspiration to other disciplines. He bravely exploded sociological boundaries when he combined social theory with the most recent scientific theoretical ideas, notably physics, information theory, biology, general systems theory, etc.

Non-sociological domains enabled Luhmann to come to grips with the growing rationalization and pluralization of our disenchanting world, picking up where Max Weber left off (Rasch 2000, 2). This is where Luhmann and another giant figure of modern sociological thought Jürgen Habermas are drastically different (Habermas and Luhmann 1975; Edgar 2006, 80, 86, 151–2; Donati 2011, 21). Luhmann does not hope to regain the unity of reason and, ultimately, the world. “Rather, in Weberian fashion, he participates in the operations and mitosis-like self-divisions of modern rationality by describing how those operations function” (Rasch 2000, 11). Habermas, on the contrary, sees his mission in finding a unifying basis for the world which has had a great fall but which might, as Habermas seems to believe, be put together again. This seems to be the ultimate goal of Habermas’s critical stance. That is why he insists on the importance to balance instrumental action with communicative action. That is how he hopes to regain the territory lost by the Lifeworld pushed on all sides by the colonizing systems (Habermas 1989a).

Luhmann paints a warts-and-all portrait of the de-centered and demystified world of modernity. He does not engage in either criticism or building a new Noah’s arc of a sort. In his SST, Luhmann presents the world as a multitude of equally unequal systems. Specifically, he is interested in self-(re)producing, or autopoietic, systems. Each system, being operationally closed, is surrounded by an environment. Steering clear off the rocks of solipsism and following von Foerster, Luhmann recognizes that autopoietic systems are not only closed—because, although they produce their elements themselves and out of themselves, they obtain necessary ‘ingredients’ from the environment. Being a sociologist, he is primarily concerned with social systems, communication-based self-reproducing systems.

Luhmann’s is the mission of describing what might be out there, in reality. He depicts reality or, some may insist, constructs it. Indeed, with the

4 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

premise of autopoiesis in the focus, it is difficult for a theory to claim to describe reality as it is or even be sure that it is; therefore, Luhmann says: “Reality may be an illusion, but the illusion itself is real” (qtd. in Knodt 1995, 493, endnote 33; see also Schulte 1993, 17 sq.). He does not criticize reality. In this respect, he differs not only from Habermas but also from such prominent modern sociologists as Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu, who actively engaged in criticizing modern society (Elliott 2009, 122–52). Rejecting functionalists’ aloofness, Giddens, for instance, defines the task of social science as elaborating conceptions of social activities and of the human agent which have to be of clear empirical value. He rejects purely epistemological disputes relevant to social theory. Therefore, he suggests that understanding human being and doing as well as social reproduction and transformation should be focused upon (1984, xvii, xix).

Luhmann, on the contrary, sees himself as a kind of meticulous map-maker. To be sure, he is fully aware that reality is/may be much more complex than any map can hope to show. Therefore, for him, the more complex a theory is, the closer it comes to reality: the more complex, the more realistic (Luhmann 1997, 137). Inevitably, a more complicated question generates a more complex answer and explanation (cf. *ibid.*, 100). The complexity of reality is of course inevitably reduced in theory, yet “reduced complexity is not excluded complexity, but rather “sublated” [*aufgehobene*] complexity” (Luhmann 1995, 1). As any system reduces the complexity of its environment, each explanation reduces the complexity of its subject (as any presentation of Luhmann’s SST reduces SST, for that matter). Yet the reduction does not simply curtail the original complexity; rather it opens countless new ways for entering, or re-entering, the original complexity (although, Luhmann warns, any such entering will have to produce its own reduction).

Luhmann’s role in modern sociology is often viewed as that of radicalizing existing theoretical premises or introducing controversial ruptures with the existing modes of theorizing the social. For example, institutional analysis, social theories foregrounding the role of institutions, such as states, in social life, is already rooted in early sociological thought (notably in Durkheim’s works). Recently, it has had a renaissance in modern reactions to rational actors models and their atomistic accounts of social processes. Oliver E. Williamson, for instance, attacked individualistic social theories (primarily in microeconomics) by saying that actors have only limited cognitive ability, are poorly informed, and act opportunistically. This is why institutions step in to reduce social uncertainty (Calhoun et al. 2002, 134). Institutional analysis begins with the premise of interdependent social activities. But Luhmann draws radical conclusions when he examines the institutional nature of human social activity. If one is to understand Luhmann’s argument, it would be helpful to start by examining the “other minds” problem. No one can know another consciousness, one can only know what is communicated by another person, and one can understand communication by selecting and filtering the communicated message by applying categories of one’s own mind.

Interaction is, therefore, postulated as nothing more than what communication systems (can) observe. Following up on Durkheim's suggestions Luhmann sees society as differentiating itself into subsystems (e.g., law, science, religion, economics). The notion *autopoiesis*, meaning the self-referentiality of self-differentiated subsystems, brings us back to the "other minds" problem: systems observe other systems' behavior, but what they can do is only to construct by interpreting the observed actions by using their own binary codes. The assumption concerning social subsystems' closed self-referentiality revolutionizes the way to conceptualize interactions of (sub)systems. It is in this sense that Luhmann's stance is constructionist. Yet importantly, Luhmann applies his radical views to institutions—not to individuals (Calhoun et al. 2002, 135–6).

One of the shocking ruptures created by Luhmann is his famous breaking with old European anthropocentrism. Putting social institutions and communication in the center of his sociological considerations, he rejected considering human beings as elements of social systems (Moeller 2006, 79–82). He reconceptualized social reproduction as self-reproduction of meaning, understood in its phenomenological sense (not in the hermeneutic one as opposing "meaninglessness"). Meaning is theorized by Luhmann as a repertoire, or—more precisely—a *horizon* of possibilities. Social communication, composed of temporalized communication events, selects (actualizes) one option of the horizon and puts aside the rest. It is meaning that is reproduced socially. Thus, "in a brilliant move" (Knodt 1995, xxiii), Luhmann made the concept of autopoiesis, with its key idea of self-reproduction, applicable to social theory (it would be absurd to theorize social reproduction as the reproduction of human beings!). Habermas sees Luhmann's work as an "astonishing job of translation" which demonstrates that the language of general systems theory "can be so flexibly adapted and expanded that it yields novel, not merely objectivating but objectivistic descriptions even of subtle phenomena of the lifeworld" (1987, 385).

With "this brilliant move," among other things, Luhmann beheaded old metaphysics-based social critique, advocated, among others, by Habermas himself (yet Habermas has the nerve to recognize and appreciate Luhmann's efforts!). Luhmann replaces subject-centered reason with systems rationality. He deprives the critique of reason in the sense of a critique of metaphysics and of power of its object. Since Luhmann's SST not only claims to contribute to its specific scientific discipline but also influences society at large, it exchanges metaphysically grounded convictions with those metabiologically anchored. As a result, the conflict of the objectivists with the subjectivists is rendered pointless. "Linguistically generated intersubjectivity" and "self-referentially closed system" become the catchwords for a polemic which will replace the mind-body controversy (Habermas 1987, 385).

This rupture has been a shock that causes misunderstandings even among sociologists, let alone scholars in various other adjacent areas of social research, including translation students. The shock seems to have

6 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

dealt such a heavy blow that, not infrequently, no explanations are accepted (even before they can be found acceptable or otherwise on the ground of reasonable weighing of pros and contras and not on the ground of pure bigotry). The density of Luhmann's prose—found by those, preferring easier reading, arid, forbidding, and irritating—only aggravates the situation: for example, not too many are willing to scrape through *Social Systems*, a six-hundred-odd-page volume, to the chapter where Luhmann addresses the issue (1995, 210–3, as well as the rest of chapter 6, “Interpenetration”).

Luhmann's original contribution to modern sociological thought is, first and foremost, that he suggested a new way of describing modern society and modernity itself. In social theory, he was the first to move beyond the functionalist paradigm in a fresh and innovative way and adapt the theory of autopoiesis and complex theories of self-steering in systems, borrowed from biology and cybernetics, respectively, to social units (Runkel and Burkart 2005, 7–11; Schützeichel 2003, 235–61). The step was so bold that it may be interpreted as a break with functionalism. As Eva Knodt suggests, Luhmann's sociological paradigm shift may also be seen as a shift in his own research career, characterized by breaking with Talcott Parsons's structural functionalism and by adapting theoretical models borrowed from cognitive biology and second-order cybernetics (1995, xiv). Whatever our interpretation of Luhmann's relationship with functionalism, it is obvious that he shook the very foundations of functionalism, which led to reconsidering some of key concepts. Acknowledging Parsons and his inspiring influence, Luhmann, however, revises his social theory.

The autopoietic turn in social theory is associated primarily with Luhmann's work. He enriched the application of system theory to sociology by discussing the sociological potential of ideas of the biologists von Bertalanffy, Maturana and Varela, cybernetician Wiener, information theorist Shannon, computer design theorists Turing and von Neumann, mathematician Spencer Brown, systems theorist von Foerster, to name only the most important names for SST.

Throughout history, there have been different types of social systems' self-organization. According to Luhmann, at least four such types may be singled out: segmentary differentiation (the system is composed of nearly identical self-sufficient subsystems); center/periphery (the capital vs. provinces); stratified (rank-based) differentiation; and functional differentiation of modern society. The last type of social-systemic organization is exactly the Weberian rationalized and pluralized world of modernity. Although the leading social philosophers, in general, tend to agree with such a vision of modern society (Donati 2011, 20–58), the difference between them, best exemplified by the controversy between Habermas and Luhmann (1975), is in how they answer the questions: Is the social reality out of joint, so to speak, and shall we accept it as it is or try to change it to make it somehow better? It should be noted, however, that to change the world of rationalization and pluralization is to do away with rationalization and pluralization,

and this is “in no way desirable” (Odo Marquard, qtd. in Rasch 2000, 2). It is also quite possible that the program of changing modernity into a post-modernity is no more than an antimodernist and *au fond* pluralist slogan which “affirms an old and respectable modernist motif, for the modern world was always and still is rationalization and pluralization” (Marquard, qtd. in *ibid.*). In the midst of this controversy and at least, optimistically speaking, until a consensus is reached, Luhmann, contemplating the reality with an unblinking eye, seems to be the best Virgil or Beatrice for us, depending on how we see the world—as *Inferno* or *Paradiso*. Let us follow him and see what he has to say or, rather, what he inspires us to say about the subject close to our hearts—translation.

What are the advantages of Luhmannian social-systemic approach to the study of translation? Here, we can only adumbrate some of them drawing on literature discussing pros and contras of systemic paradigms in sociology (Byrne 1998; Burns 2007). A detailed discussion of all these features will follow (see Conclusion).

Translation can be viewed systemically, and such systemic (holistic) approach presupposes that “complex issues cannot be adequately comprehended in isolation from the wider system of which they are a part” (Burns 2007, 1). This allows a homogenized description of translation as a social phenomenon—or as a social function system in its own right. At the same time, translation can be placed within a larger system of similar types of activity or phenomena, being viewed as subsystem within larger semiotic and social systems. Translation can be systemically juxtaposed with other social (sub)systems (the economy, law, art, religion, medicine, etc.). Such systemic thinking prepares us better for what is unknown, uncertain at present, in the state of constant flux, or not (adequately) studied. Systemic studies of translation open up possibilities of strategic development of research, overcoming simplistic models of linear causation, according to which “intervention outcomes are relatively straightforward to predict, if only we could get enough of the right sort of evidence” (Burns 2007, 1). To account for all contingencies and their affects, we need to understand the complex dynamics of social systems. Or to put it even more radically: “If we can see what makes the difference, we can make the difference” (Byrne 1998, 42). When Dmitrii Mendeleev introduced his periodical table of chemical elements, the research in chemistry became more consciously directable, if not plannable, aimed at identifying unknown elements, at that point missing from the discovered system of elements—the table, yet predicted by the table as elements which were likely to exist (Strathern 2000, 286–94). Systemic descriptions of translation create a comparable ‘table’ which can identify missing features of translation as a social-functional phenomenon. Such a table may also help to correlate what seemed to be not correlatable (Even-Zohar 1979, 288). Once again to give an example of Mendeleev’s table: it helps bring forth and better explain common properties of chemical elements such as types of alkali or inert gases. Systemic approaches to translation also help see and

## 8 Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies

explain its relatedness to other similar social activities. Systemics helps us make sense of fragmented reality by finding connecting patterns. Systemic approaches enable us to identify unintended features of translation activity. Systemic macroparadigms are often criticized for disregarding human conscious volition (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002, 32–3); yet they have their advantage of better describing unintended affects of human activity. Finally, systemic approaches help us shed some more light on crises in the domain of translation practice and theory.

### Thinking Bigger

True scientific revolutions amount to more than new discoveries; they alter the concepts on which science is based.

—Paul Davies. *The Cosmic Blueprint*

There are different levels of theory. There may be distinguished, if arbitrarily and only heuristically, macro-, meso-, and microtheories (Stein and Varela 1993, 3–7). Macrotheory provides a large-scale and imaginative canvas, which may serve as conceptual scaffolding applicable to a large portion of a discipline or even to several disciplines. Among classical examples of such theories are Lovelock’s hypothesis that the Earth is “the [self-regulating] superorganism composed of all life tightly coupled with the air, the oceans, and the surface rocks” (the Gaia hypothesis; Lovelock 1995, x) in biology, chemistry, physics, meteorology; or Einstein’s theory of relativity in physics and astronomy. Macrotheories are of paradigmatic significance and practical research is underpinned by them as a sort of scientific worldview. It is usually so deeply ingrained in scientists’ minds that they take it for granted, sometimes confusing it with reality. Macrotheories are *rarae aves* in scientific history and they have to fight their way into the mindset of practicing scientists. Macrotheories boldly challenge the existing macrotheories absorbed by the scientific community from the formative schooling years. Such view of macrotheories echoes Kuhn’s idea of scientific revolutions (1996). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that “the mortality rate of macrotheories is high, and their proponents are often relegated to that limbo that practicing [scientists] call ‘just philosophy’” (Stein and Varela 1993, 3).

Mesotheories are more common phenomena. Usually, they apply to only particular domains. They catch on faster and easier because they connect directly to scientific practice where it is crucial what mesotheory governs interpretation of a particular set of experimentally obtained data. One of the characteristic features of mesotheories is that they “can be included in a seminar without the lecturer being considered impolite or vain” in contrast to macrotheories the presentation of which should be backed up with impressive credentials of the speaker in order “to enable him to get away with it (a Nobel prize, for instance)” (*ibid.*, 4).



Microtheories deal with specific phenomena. They are a kind of scientific cabotage, navigation in coastal waters, not daring to go too far; they are tailored to account “in some conceptually clean or analytically astute manner” for concrete empirical observations (*ibid.*, 4). Microtheories are tolerated and even respected among practicing scholars; they are generally seen as useful, concrete, and down-to-earth. They provide the subject matter for the majority of talks among scientists and scholars in conference presentations or in coffee breaks between them. The major drawback of microtheories is that “they may be so low-flying as to be boring, except for a limited circle of initiates” (*ibid.*, 4). Meso- and especially microtheories remind us of Kuhn’s description of normal science with its focus on problem solving (1996).

In this classification, Luhmann’s SST may well be qualified as a macrotheory. Indeed, the theory not only created a paradigm shift in sociology, but also sparked off new research well beyond (Knodt 1995, xiv–v; Berg and Schmidt 2000; Gripp-Hagelstange 2000; Moeller 2006, 292; Seidl and Becker 2005; Seidl 2005; Ihlen, Ruler, and Fredriksson 2009, 187–211). One of such domains that took on SST is of special interest for us in the present study: it is Translation Studies (TS).

Taking into consideration the ‘natural’ course of the development of ideas proposed by scholars within the descriptive and sociocritical branch of TS, it was only to be expected that one of the next logical steps would be not only a ‘sociological turn’ but also a social-systemic approach to the study of translational phenomena. Curiously enough, DTS (descriptive TS) started with systems (or to be more precise, with polysystems). Yet despite the fact that for more than a decade now, a specter of Luhmann’s SST has been haunting TS, the scholarly community seems to share sociologists’ doubts and have developed similar phobias (*cf.* Seidl and Becker 2005, 10; Lukas Sosoe’s introduction in Luhmann 2001, xiv–v). To begin with, one is dismayed by Luhmann’s dense, if not downright (allegedly) obfuscating, style of writing, to the extent that one doubts if it is really worth reading a couple of hundred arid pages before one can only hope to begin to understand anything. And then, who knows, even if that finally happens, what one could get out of this abstruse theory for one’s own research! As a result, apart from Theo Hermans’s attempts to apply Luhmann’s SST to studying translation (1997; 1999; 2007a; 2007b), not much has been done (*see* Section 2.1).

TS turns out to be no exception to the rule, formulated by Jean Paul and quoted by Luhmann: “In the realm of knowledge—different from the physical realm—sound always arrives earlier than light” (Seidl and Becker 2005, 54). The words ‘social systems theory’ and ‘autopoiesis’ are familiar, but discussions of them hardly draw on Luhmann’s own writings. Richard Jenkins writes about a similar situation with the study of Pierre Bourdieu’s works, resulting in their limited appreciation (“tunnel vision”), superficiality, and simply wrong interpretations of some key concepts (2002, 12).

10 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

The possibility of the application of Luhmann's ideas to the study of translation is still explored only superficially. In fact, TS experts are not at all convinced if these allegedly 'antihumanist' ideas (Moeller 2006, ix; Horster 1992, 10) are of any relevance at all when the crusade for *translator*, not *text* (of translation) is declared (Pym, Shlesinger, and Jettmarová 2003, 2).

The present study purports to probe into theoretical implications of SST for the study of translation as a social phenomenon. In this sense, this study is located on the borderline between sociology, branching out into TS, and TS in its sociological or, maybe, social-systemic turn. Today, social theory goes beyond the boundaries of sociology; this fact is borne out by numerous applications of sociological theories in other social sciences (Turner 2009, 559). Martin Fuchs, however, dethrones sociology as "the master of all discourse on the social," who dictates other disciplines how to theorize the social, and promises that for those sociologists, who would take heed, "there is much to gain from including sociological considerations of translation" (2009, 26). The rapprochement, however, should be mutual: Luhmann's macrotheory of social systems helps translation students think bigger about translation and move to a higher plane—from micro—to mesotheories.

### FASTEN YOUR SEATBELTS, OR BEWARE OF VERTIGINOUS WOOZINESS

The wind [ . . . ] whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

—*Ecclesiastes*

In the Introduction to their groundbreaking treatise *Autopoiesis: The Organization of the Living* (in Maturana and Varela 1980), Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela wrote that, on the one hand, "notions arising in the domain of description do not pertain to the constitutive organization of the unity (phenomenon) to be explained" and, on the other, "an explanation may take different forms according to the nature of the phenomenon explained" (p. 75). Thus, they clearly kept apart what Luhmann would theorize as the first- and second-order observations, that is, the phenomena described/observed and the description/observation, or observations of operations and observations of observations. Yet they also noted that there is a connection between the nature of the two: the form of an explanation depends (at least to an extent) on the nature of the phenomenon explained. Luhmann introduces the circularity not only as an object of his theory. His SST becomes a circularly designed theory as well: "A universal theory observes its objects, and itself as one of its objects" (Luhmann 1995, xlvi; cf. Knodt 1995, xiii; Drepper 2003, 24). This circularity of theory is reminiscent of George Spencer Brown's images of the snake eating itself and the dog chasing its own tail (1973, 106) as metaphors of "the relentless project of

human knowing” (Cooper 2005, xi). Thus, circularity begets circularity—the circularity of the object of description and the circularity of description itself, resulting in a sort of double circularity.

There is another source for circularity or loop-like trajectories of discourse. One may consider circularity a necessary evil of presentation or description of a complex theory (if circularity is any worse than linearity). In the Preface to the English edition of his *Social Systems*, Luhmann explained that in order to create a conceptually precise comprehensive social theory, one has to make it abstract and complex. He likened such a project to Lernaean Hydra with her nine heads, each one of which, when cut off, produced two more. In a comprehensive theory, each explanation calls for supporting explanations (1995, xxxvii).

Eventually, the theory reaches such a degree of complexity that it cannot be presented in a linear fashion. That is why Luhmann opts for “a polycentric (and accordingly polycontextural) theory in an acentrically conceived world and society” (1995, li). Naturally, the theory is presented as a printed book with a particular sequence of chapters. Yet the sequence may be different, because “the theory’s design resembles a labyrinth more than a freeway off into the sunset” (ibid., lii). Thus we end up with what I have referred to above as double circularity—of the object of description and of the description itself. Indeed, one has to be prepared even for a possible dizziness. Although in what follows I have tried to make as few causes for dizziness as possible, it was, however, impossible to avoid some of the loops. I cannot promise easy reading, but I do hope the reader will find the book inspiring. I, therefore, hope, as did Luhmann, “for readers who will bring with them enough patience, imagination, intelligence, and curiosity” (ibid., lii).

Some help may be found by the reader in the following publications where Luhmann’s theory is presented with helpful explanations and examples:

- Ferrarese, Estelle. 2007. *Niklas Luhmann, une introduction*. Paris: Pocket. (In French)
- Hayoz, Nicolas. 1991. *Société, politique et état dans la perspective de la sociologie systemique de Niklas Luhmann*. Genève: Université de Genève.
- Knodt, Eva M. 1995. “Foreword,” in Luhmann 1995, ix–xxxvi.
- Moeller, Hans-Georg. 2006. *Luhmann Explained: From Souls to Systems*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Rasch, William. 2000. *Niklas Luhmann’s Modernity: The Paradoxes of Differentiation*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Seidl, David, and Kai Helge Becker (eds.). 2005. *Niklas Luhmann and Organization Studies*. Liber: Liber & Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Seidl, David. 2005. *Organisational Identity and Self-Transformation: An Autopoietic Perspective*. Aldershot, UK, Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate.

## 12 Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies

It is highly recommendable for those reading in German and willing to come to know Luhmann's theory firsthand to turn to a series of lectures Luhmann gave at the University of Bielefeld, in the winter semester of 1991–2, published posthumously by Dirk Baecker (see Luhmann 2009). The text is easier to read than the majority of Luhmann's works thanks to the original oral delivery of lectures and their introductory nature. I also refer the reader to the Glossary of key SST terms which I have provided at the end of this book.

My purport is very different from what the above listed and a number of other similar publications (many of them in German, see a bibliography in Krause 1996, 211–27) were aimed at—not to explain or popularize Luhmann's SST but to apply it to translation. Therefore, I will consider only those notions and concepts which I find applicable to translation. At that, I will try to tease out whatever potential, relevant to TS, I will be able to detect (not exhaust!). It is hardly necessary to add, that in order to get a better and fuller understanding of Luhmannian notions, one has to turn to Luhmann's own publications for, indeed, no explanation can exhaust the explained phenomenon. This is especially the case when it comes to a theory as complex as SST. In fact, this can be explained in SST's terms: no complexity reduced (and any explanation is a reduced original complexity) is equal to the original complexity.

Finally, I would like to echo Francisco J. Varela (1979, 107) and ask the reader to remember that this study is an attempt to look at translation from a new angle, that it comes to grips with problems which verge on philosophy, and that it attempts to theorize such facets of translation that so far have been acknowledged, at most, only intuitively. These aspects are challengingly difficult to tackle. This is an endeavor to map out a new terrain. Some ideas may be found deserving more attention than they are allocated; the reader may even come across some gaping lacunae. It should be stressed, therefore, that my application of SST to translation does not claim to exhaust the theme but, rather, welcomes further considerations, fine-tuning, and full-blown follow-up research projects.

### TRANSLATION: WHAT'S IN THE NAME?

O Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou Romeo?

—William Shakespeare. *Romeo and Juliet*

The last, but far from the least important subject to be discussed in the introductory part is translation, the key notion of TS. What is translation? Defining translation is indeed a damnable task, especially within a theory which defies flat, one-dimensional and linear definitions, yet *volens nolens* we have to start somewhere. It would suffice, for now, to define translation as a semiotically broadly conceived text oriented towards another text, the

orientation being as that of the secondary to the primary.<sup>2</sup> Translation will also mean the process of creating the text. Since mostly, conventionally, translation is thought of as existing in the verbal medium, it should be added the following: my aim is to consider translation in a “much wider and more formal [way] than is conventional” (Bateson 1972, xvii). Unless specified, I understand translation as both (written) translation and (oral) interpreting, both in the above mentioned sense (a text with specific characteristics, which are to be discussed at length in due course, as well as the process of creating such text). Importantly, however, I do not limit the term ‘translation’ to verbal (intra- or interlingual) mediation. On the contrary, my understanding of translation is prompted by a broader social context of its existence.

I dismiss the foreseeable rejection of such a broad vision of translation on the grounds that there is the risk of blurring the line between translation and other forms of intertextual activity, as a colleague warned me once. I dismiss such rejection, firstly, because the line has been blurred already as back as in 1959 by Roman Jakobson, when he famously presented his triad of translation types—intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic, and then this blurring was theorized by Itamar Even-Zohar when he argued for translation to be considered as a special case of transfer (1990, 73–4). Secondly, I dismiss such rejection because, I am afraid, it is prompted not by the concern for the object studied but for the subject objecting, if the pun were permitted: scholars, who are afraid of blurring the line between translation and transfer just because it is *blurring*, are likely to be more concerned for their turf and not for the object they study. In other words, if at some point one finds that translation may be seen not just as a unique phenomenon, but also as a special case of a larger class of phenomena, one should not artificially hold on to one’s discipline’s out-dated boundaries. Even if one does, somebody will break through and tear another Berlin wall down. If the line between translation and other intertextual activities is in danger, that is the last thing that should concern us: if the line is blurrable, it should be blurred and will inevitably be blurred sooner or later. Indeed, the line is blurred already: “today’s situation is much more complex and blurs the boundaries between disciplines to a far greater extent” (Bachmann-Medick 2009, 3; cf. Spivak 2003). Norman Fairclough agrees: “Boundaries between social sciences are weakening”—and writes about a ‘linguistic turn’ in social theory (1992, 2).

The editors of the collection *Translation Studies at the Interface of Disciplines* (Duarte, Rosa, and Seruya 2006) bravely propose to drop the notion of TS as either a discipline or an interdiscipline. Rather, they suggest considering TS as “a principle of flux,” as an interfacing domain with a multiplicity of coexistent language-games, unceasingly intersecting, intermingling, realigning, even clashing, but also cross-fertilizing one another. Moreover, TS should be “a ghost-like presence to haunt us out of enclosures and rigidities” (p. 4).

## 14 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

If translation is seen as an integral part of social life, one may go as far as to conclude that there must be a connection between immediate concerns and needs of a society and translation activities, taking place in that society. Although we should be careful ascribing a direct relationship between social processes and translation activities, it seems likely that whenever we observe activated translation, we may be sure to witness some sort of activation of social processes as well. This suggests how intimately translation is connected with the social.

The above stated connection leads us to overstep the narrow understanding of translation. In his article “Problems and Challenges of Translation in an Age of New Media and Competing Models” (2006, originally published in 1996), José Lambert advocated a broader understanding of the term ‘translation’ which should include not only autonomous texts, but also text fragments. Otherwise “we implicitly ignore an enormous quantity of texts that are not called translations but that in fact play a key role in our contemporary societies” (p. 142). He writes about the necessity to consider verbal translation as only one of many possible types of communication with a wider understanding of terms ‘text’, ‘equivalence’, ‘language’ (ibid., 142–4).

What follows is founded on principles like those suggested by Lambert. Indeed, limiting translation to its verbal aspects, we ignore an enormous quantity of texts not only in our modern societies, but also in societies of other historical periods. Lambert advocates a semiotically broad definition of translation where “explaining transfer phenomena between non-verbal signs [together with verbal ones] appears simply a question of generality” (Lambert 2006, 143). Susan Göpferich advocates a broader understanding of translation (2004; 2007). Over the last decade, several edited collections, such as Rose (1997), Fenton (2004), Hung and Wakabayashi (2005), and Hermans (2006), as well as an important publication by Maria Tymoczko (2007) problematized narrow conceptions of translation.

However, the question is bound to arise: How can one “conceptualize translation despite its heteronomy?” (Hermans 1999, 137). As one of the possibilities to resolve this problem Theo Hermans suggests to apply Luhmann’s SST. Hermans considers translation as a system. Indeed, SST allows us to go beyond declarations about translation as a distinct social activity (whatever the limits of this distinctness may be), but to describe what properties and characteristics of translation make it a distinct social activity among other distinct social activities. Luhmann’s keen interest in the systemics of social phenomena and his highly sophisticated conceptual apparatus and methodology are exactly what is needed in order to meet the challenge of conceptualizing translation despite its heteronomy.

However, to understand not only characteristics of translation as a system in itself but also to conceptualize it as a social activity despite the heteronomy of its manifestations, one should see it from the right distance, as it were, that would provide the adequate level of generalization. For translation to be seen as a social phenomenon, it should be considered within a

broader—social—context. Once again, Luhmann's SST comes handy with its well-developed conceptual vocabulary. Luhmann's SST is also universal in its approach, in the sense that it deals with and is applicable to the entire domain of the social; SST is capable of including the whole world in its relationship with the social system (Luhmann 1987, 163–4). In SST terms, translation may be viewed as part of this universalized portrayal of things social or as a 'subsystem' of an overall social system—society.

Systemic study of translation may be traced back to the Tel-Aviv–Leuven school which developed ideas of the Russian formalists who viewed national literature as a polysystem with its evolutionary dynamics and center/periphery relations (Tynianov 1977, 255–81; Even-Zohar 1990). Translation was, however, primarily studied within a national literary system (or, in the exact terminology, "polysystem" since the literary system was seen as composed of several systems). Yet the literary system is but one social system among many others where translation is also actively practiced. No wonder, a broader social perspective of translational practice started to come into view of translation scholars and the role played by translation was considered not only within the national literary system, but also in the overall social system.

Analysis of translation's "guiding difference" (*Leitdifferenz*) as a social subsystem among other subsystems (the economy, education, science, law, politics, religion, etc.) shows that translation's principal function consists in representing anterior discourses "across semiotic boundaries" and at the same time not operating in and for itself, but catering for other systems' interests, hence being heteronomous (Hermans 1999, 142–3). Thus, to account for translation as a heteronomous yet autonomous phenomenon, one has to consider it in a broader context—the entire social system.

Translation as a subsystem has a particular function in the social system. No other function subsystem can fulfill this function, that is to say, no other subsystemic formation can do what translation can. A crucial concept to borrow from Luhmann and to apply to translation as a social activity is *boundary phenomenon*. Hermans's statement that translation going "across semiotic boundaries" does not seem specific enough because his emphasis in the application of Luhmann's system theory is on translation as a system. No doubt, translation can and should be described as a system if we want to conceptualize it despite its heteronomy. (In fact, following Hermans's ideas, Part I of the present work will consider translation as a system.) However, in the defining the *Leitdifferenz* of translation as a system, Hermans inevitably broadens the scope of his consideration. The object of his speculation changes from translation as a system to translation among other systems. He gives examples of interlingual translations and touches upon translation's catering for other systems.

From time to time, in his application of Luhmann's social system theory to translation, Hermans seems to lose sight of the fact that translation is fundamentally social phenomenon, that is, inscribed in a larger system.

16 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

Translation's *Leitdifferenz* cannot be formulated unless translation is seen as part and parcel of the overall social system. Even when we discuss translation as a distinct systemic formation—a system in itself, we should always keep in consideration the social system, of which translation is only a subsystem. Translation is a system but only against the backdrop of the system of systems. I argue, therefore, that it is more productive to conceptualize translation as a subsystem whose primary function and *Leitdifferenz* are better understood within the system which is the entire society. Translation is a subsystem within this system. Translation's principal responsibility is to separate the overall system from and at the same time connect the overall system with the environment (Luhmann 1995, 29). Translation opens the system when it facilitates the passage of texts (in the broad semiotic sense) from the environment into the system and makes them available for the system's processing. Yet in that translation filtrates and transforms the texts (e.g., by choosing not to render some of their parts or changing some of their genre characteristics, if we speak about verbal texts or modifying, adapting newly introduced technologies, values and customs, if we assume a broader understanding of translation), translation fully or partially closes the system. One may argue that, strictly speaking, translation's opening and closing the system should be separated as functions from translation's transferring phenomena into/from the system, that they are the functions akin to reconnaissance and censorship of what is to be allowed to cross the system's boundary. However, these functions show that translation always acts on behalf of the commissioning system. Selecting what is worth translating and what is not (reconnaissance and censorship) is, therefore, inseparable from translation, which is always 'socialized' (as any other social phenomenon), that is, it is fully 'pickled' in social communication of the commissioning system, translation expresses the values of the system, immersed in the overall system, inhaling and exhaling only its system's communication. Another argument in favor of considering the functions of opening and closing as indispensable properties of translation will be clear when we will consider translation as communication event (in Section 1.6). Translation always exercises selectivity in deciding what part of the original message to transfer. Hence, opening and closing the system is its intrinsic characteristic.

Whatever is appropriated by the system from its environment is bound to cross the system's 'boundary'. Importantly, boundary is not to be understood simplistically, for example, only as a geo-political frontier (cf. Anderson 1991, 172; Poltermann 1992, 7, footnote 8). There are different levels of boundaries' functioning. In the simplest of possible cases, a social system sees in its environment another system. For example, national geo-political frontiers are most commonly understood as boundaries of a nation qua system with another nation-system. Yet such view of boundaries becomes illusory if we conceptualize economic, political, scientific, or educational interaction which no longer correspond to national frontiers and the notion of systemic boundary should be reconsidered as moving



inside each particular function system and what was seen as interiorized by national boundaries is seen as bounded functionally (Luhmann 1995, 30–1). A nation-state qua system may interact with its environment by waging wars against other nation-states, by sending diplomatic and other types of missions, by concluding peace treaties or treaties of commerce. In all these cases, the most conspicuous boundary crossing is crossing geo-political frontiers. But crossing occurs within people, carriers of their respective national communications. An envoy sent abroad becomes the locus of the respective social system's meeting with its environment.

For the discussion at hand, it is important to stress that translation is always a factor in these across-boundary dealings of the system with its environment. Translation may manifest itself not only on the verbal level: the boundaries between socio-cultural worldviews use translation in trying to make sense of each other.

Luhmann speaks of a world society of modernity (1997, 145–71). This world society is function-based in the sense that different function systems act internationally. Geo-political boundaries cannot stop these function systems from establishing their own system-functional boundaries. The economy establishes its boundaries worldwide through the international, worldwide market or international business organizations representing fewer national interests and more interests of business. Boundary is to be understood here as business's operational independency (or in social-systemic terms, operational closure). Boundary, however, is constantly crossed because different interacting historical communities and their respective economic subsystems within the overall worldwide economic system need to be harmonized. There are still issues of intercultural communication in the globalized world. Luhmann argues that modernity is aware of multiculturalism (1997, 170). Such awareness inevitably leads to a higher appreciation of translation as a necessary means that makes function-based world society's functioning possible. Intercultural boundaries do not stop the economic worldwide system from forming and developing, but they make boundary crossing and translation as mediation indispensable.

Translation can be conceptualized as the meeting point of the system with its environment (and systems in the environment). Translation exercises its function of opening the system to and/or closing it from the environment. This social function of translation allows us to homogenize various types of transfer that a social system uses for its existence. Translation facilitates transfers between the system and the environment. Thus, translation as a subsystem plays the role of a boundary phenomenon within the system. Translation is responsible for the passage of texts (in a broad semiotic sense) or elements thereof from the 'outside', 'environment' into the system. If we do not take the social function of translation or limit its application only to verbal transfers and/or to complete verbal transfers ('full texts'), we run a risk of distorting the studied phenomena or losing the scale of social-systemic analysis.

18 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

One may doubt if we really need to homogenize translation as a phenomenon. But this is comparable to denying the project of discovering and formulating most general natural laws as opposed to describing every studied phenomenon individually. All things falling to the ground can be said to obey the law of gravity, but somebody may say that it is too simplistic because there is a difference in the speed and trajectory of how a feather falls down as compared to a cannon ball. All depends on what we want to demonstrate: the universality of certain phenomena or their specificity. One does not exclude the other; rather, they complement each other. Luhmann's SST attempts to show the universality of social phenomena's properties; there are other theories which show these phenomena's specificity. The former approach has been under way in TS all along. On the one hand, individual cases have been considered in their relation to universal pursuits of formulating or questioning more or less general principals of translation. On the other hand, there have been attempts to formulate general principles, laws, of translation (e.g., Toury 1982; 1995) or discussing the existence of translation universals (Mauranen and Kujamäki 2004). Yet there have been doubts about such generalized and homogenized conceptualizations of translation.

Doubts about the possibility of generalizing in the social domain are by no means a matter of concern only on the part of translation students. In his critical stance against functionalism in social sciences, despite admitting the sophistication and importance of the work of some authors such as Luhmann and Habermas within the trend, Anthony Giddens, a leading British sociologist, rejects "a fondness" for evolutionary style of sociological theories, drawing on natural scientific views of society (which is to be traced back to sociological theories considerably earlier than Parsonian (Hirst 2010)). He denies point blank that generalizations are at all possible in social science:

There are no universal laws in the social sciences, and there will not be any—not, first and foremost, because [ . . . ] the causal conditions involved in generalizations about human social conduct are inherently unstable in respect of the very knowledge (or beliefs) that actors have about the circumstances of their own action. (1984, xxxii)

It would not be productive or even constructive for the study at hand to undertake a discussion of Giddens's scepticism, all the more so that holding the generalizers' views as "beliefs" or expressing his objections in the Indicative mood, Giddens does not make his own beliefs, that there are no universal laws in the social sciences and there will be none, empirically established and proved facts. Pushed for a final answer, one has to admit that both positions, that of the generalizers' and that of the hardcore empiricists', like Giddens, are no more than 'beliefs' and the research, based on whichever position, is, first, conducted in hope of better understanding of the social and, second, is most probably neither pure generalizing (which

Giddens makes sound as groundless fideism) nor pure empiricism, as, by the way, Giddens's own research with a considerable amount of generalizing (for example, his generalization about non-existence of general social laws) proves very well. It is also a question, at what point a statement leaves the ground of empiricism and enters the realm of generalizations. It may be as difficult to answer this question as to draw a clear and indisputable line between translation and non-translation, as is obvious in Giddens's following statement: "private property, a cluster of rights of ownership, can be 'translated' into industrial authority, or modes of sustaining managerial control" (1984, xxxii). The empirically observed private property is, after all, 'translatable' into a more general concept of industrial authority, i.e., modes of managerial control. Is it not what a generalizer does when, based on observed empirical data, s/he draws conclusions of a more general nature and conceptualizes concrete facts as manifestations of authority, control, etc. (See also Norbert Wiener's answer to objections like those voiced by Giddens, discussed in Section 1.5.)

## GOALS AND STRUCTURE

I hoped that some new image might propel me past the jaded puzzle to the other side, to ideas strange and compelling.

—Edward O. Wilson

What is it exactly that we want to see with the help of Luhmann's SST? What are the goals of the present study? It should be emphasized that my overall goal is neither to popularize SST (cf. Fuchs 1992) nor to scrutinize the technicalities of Luhmann's theory-constructing (cf. Barben 1996) nor to undertake the study of individual concepts of SST (cf. Stark 1994) or in comparison with other concepts in SST or beyond (cf. Künzler 1989; Roberts 1995, 84–9; Albert, Cederman, and Wendt 2010). Rather, I will attempt to approach Luhmann's theory with only one intention of gauging its potential for the study of translation as a social-systemic phenomenon. In this respect, my approach is very different from Hans J. Vermeer's who, as it seems to me, undertook disparate tasks of explaining what he understood in Luhmann's theory, applying it to translation, and, at the same time, trying to critically engage in assessing Luhmann's theorizing of the social (see Section 2.1 for a detailed analysis of Vermeer's publications on the applicability of SST to the study of translation).

As any research in translation theory, I aim at shedding more light on the nature of translation, its properties, especially those revealed in its social praxis. My study is, however, much less a sociological study of translation during a certain period in a certain place, although I do provide some time-locus specific examples, than it is testing a conceptual framework, Luhmann's SST.

20 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

I argue that SST allows us to pose questions which, without it, go not only unanswered, but also unasked. Together with Luhmann, I intend to adopt the “experimental attitude” and “look at the world from the denaturalized perspective of its improbability” (Knodt 1995, xvi). Chaos is more probable than order, yet in certain circumstances order becomes not only probable but also possible. This is the stance which informs Luhmannian vision of society, and I will look from this perspective at translation. The questions, which underlie my study, are the following:

- How is translation, being improbable, made probable? That is to say, how is connecting two (or more) different phenomena/parties made possible?
- How, of all sorts of social activities, does translation emerge as a specific activity?
- What are the internal mechanisms that made/make translation possible?
- Upon what basis are different social activities categorized as translational and said to belong to the same type of activity?
- What is translation’s contribution to making the improbability of social order probable?

All these questions form two groups. The first three refer to the internal structure of translation and its nature (understood as a set of properties producing certain results). The last two questions regard translation as a part, or subsystem, of a larger social domain, which I, following Luhmann, would term the overall social system. What is the function of translation in the overall system? If we answer this question, we will be able to define translation as a social activity.

Luhmann’s SST provides us with a sophisticated conceptual apparatus. It helps us, first, pose challenging questions and, second, guide us to answering them. Luhmann’s theory as well as the theories which served him as sources of inspiration ask most fundamental questions, so fundamental that, in most theories, they are taken for granted, ignored, or forgotten. Yet it is a matter of scientific honesty at least to make an attempt to raise and discuss them. It is not an easy path to choose, yet it is so much more exciting. That is why we follow Robert Frost’s logic who, famously, out of two diverging roads took “the one less travelled by, / And that has made all the difference.” (2010, 9)

Chapter by chapter, section by section, I will consider Luhmann’s concepts and sometimes I will look for more details in his sources. The two groups of the questions formulated above inform all my study. I will address the first group in Part I and the second in Part II. The groups are closely related, and the separation between the two is made only for clarity’s sake. This is, however, not always possible and a certain amount of overlap is unavoidable.

In Chapter 1, I start with a brief historical survey. I present the history of the concept of autopoiesis and the systemic roots of SST. I also discuss such key concepts as system vs. environment, allo- vs. autopoietic systems; I apply them to translation and present the criteria which allow us to view translation as an autopoietic system. In Chapter 2, I survey sociologically informed TS literature and primarily publications where Luhmann's SST is applied to the study of translation. Then, building on the notions introduced in Chapter 1, I explain different levels of observation of translation: translation vs. everything else (system vs. environment); translation among other social systems (system vs. system); and finally, translation as a subsystem in the overall social system (subsystem vs. system). I analyze what I term 'translational communication event' which is the key concept enabling us to understand how translation is possible, what mechanisms are at work in translation's mediation between interacting social parties. I proceed then to defining elements, relations and components of translation qua system. Finally, in Chapter 2, I problematize putting actors in the center of studies of translation and discuss a related question of structural couplings.

Chapter 3 starts with discussing the general problem of constructionism. The foundation is laid for further discussion of the concept *observation*. Translation is shown to observe itself at two levels—observation of operations and observation of observations. An important notion *re-entry* is introduced. The evolution of translation qua system is theorized as translation's acquiring the second-order observation on top of the first-order observation.

Chapter 4 shows translation as a system operating in the medium of meaning, producing a limitless variety of forms which, in turn, undergo metamorphoses and cluster together. That is why in order to define translation, one has to define a distinction. I also analyze three non-TS applications of the vocabulary of translation studies: by Joachim Renn, by Michel Callon and Bruno Latour, and by Luhmann. I discuss why their application of translation vocabulary in sociological contexts is possible.

Part I on translation as a system is concluded with a chapter on translation's systemic binary code and programs that provide its flexibility over time and space (Chapter 5).

Part II proposes answers to the questions about the relationship of translation with the overall society and about its function and place in this complex social formation. In other words, translation is viewed as one of social subsystems. Translation's function in society is to facilitate social interaction. In Chapter 6, Luhmann's metaphor of social catalysis is elaborated and translation is theorized as a social catalyst.

In Chapter 7, another Luhmannian concept, *boundary phenomenon*, is applied to translation. Here, I also turn to Spencer Brown's and Varela's laws of form. This chapter is an attempt to show the intrinsically dynamic nature of translation.

Chapter 8 considers translation as a factor of social evolution. Luhmann views social evolutionary cycle as comprised of three stages, or

22 *Applying Luhmann to Translation Studies*

aspects—variation, selection, and stabilization. Translation is shown to play different roles at different stages.

In Chapter 9, translation is analyzed in its structural coupling with the subsystem of politics. A fine difference is to be made between translation being equal to any other system in that no other system can fulfill its function—mediation and translation being subordinate to internal systemic communication, notably to the subsystem of politics. At some periods of history, translation may be summoned to change or even subvert internal systemic communication in its dominant discourse.

Finally, in Chapter 10, drawing on Spencer Brown's laws of form, translation's behavior within the form and within what can be termed 'super-form' is scrutinized. Translation facilitates interaction of the two sides of the form. Drawing a boundary necessitates crossing it. Yet translation also creates an illusion of not crossing the boundary between the sides of the form. I conclude the chapter with demonstrating the unique position of translation in the form: bestriding the boundary and observing both sides.

In the Conclusion, I summarize the results of my research and suggest possible lines of further sociological study of translation.