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How books travel: Translation flows and practices of Dutch acquiring editors and New York literary scouts, 1980-2009

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Conclusion

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I studied the development of translation flows of fiction and poetry books into the Netherlands between 1980 and 2009. This study was inspired by the rising prominence of translations from English in the Netherlands after the Second World War (Heilbron, 1995) and the overall increasing importance of Anglo-American culture in Western Europe (e.g. Janssen, Kuipers & Verboord, 2008). As such, I set out to study how translation flows in fiction and poetry developed in the last two decades of the 20th century and the first of the new millennium. My research question was twofold. First of all, I asked *quantitatively* from which foreign languages fiction and poetry books are translated into Dutch and how these translation flows developed between 1980 and 2009. Secondly, I asked *qualitatively* how translations come about in practice and how the transnational market for transnational rights is organized. In other words, I sought to understand *how* the process of cultural globalization, defined in the introduction of this thesis as ‘the growing international diffusion, exchange, and intermingling of cultural goods and media products’ (Janssen, Kuipers & Verboord, 2008: 720), is made possible in practice in the literary field.

In this conclusion, I will elaborate on my main findings regarding both research questions and outline my main contributions to the literature in cultural sociology and globalization studies that these research questions are embedded in. Moreover, I outline the major limitations of my dissertation and I will suggest avenues for further research that can be developed out of this dissertation.

Research question 1: how did translation flows into the Dutch literary field develop between 1980 and 2009?

In order to answer the first research question, I developed a novel dataset, based on the collection of the Dutch Royal Library (KB), that contained all editions of fiction and poetry books published in the Netherlands between 1980 and 2009. This includes books published by the widest range of publishers, from the biggest mainstream publishers to books published by self-publishing houses and the smallest private presses. In total, the database holds 80.231 editions of 64.032 unique titles and includes data on the author, publisher, original language of the book, genre, height, size, number of pages, type of binding, whether the book is a restricted print run and the retail price. This dataset is more advanced than earlier data used in the sociology of translation such as the *UNESCO Index Translationum* (Poupaud

et al., 2009). Its primary advantages are that it contains both translations and books written and published in Dutch, which enables me to study translations within the context of the entire fiction and poetry book production (Heilbron, 1995) and it includes much more detailed information on the books. The genre-classification is far more fine-grained than the one used in the UNESCO data, in which all fiction books are included in the category 'literature' (Ginsburgh et al., 2011).

On the basis of this dataset, I found that translations from English were indeed dominant in the Dutch fiction and poetry book production between 1980 and 2009. But, the position of English shifted during the three decades under study. While the dominance of English rose during the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s, when the share of English was greater than 50 percent of all fiction and poetry books published, the relative share of English decreased after 2003 (see also Achterberg et al., 2011). Chapter one shows that, throughout the 30 years analyzed in this dissertation, there was a rise of diversification of book translations in terms of the number of languages represented in translation from on average 28,5 in the 1980s to 33,2 in the 2000s (with a peak of 40 different languages in 2008). However, these 'other' languages were represented in such small numbers that they did little to weaken the dominant position of English. Besides, the decline of English was relatively small after 2003 and, on an aggregate level, the dominance of English over all other languages including books originally written in Dutch was abundantly clear.

As such, my dissertation seems to provide evidence for the cultural world-systems thesis, which has been used in previous studies of translation flows (Heilbron, 1995; 1999; Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007). This theory argues that translation flows are:

“EMBEDDED WITHIN THE POWER RELATIONS AMONG NATIONAL STATES AND THEIR LANGUAGES. THESE POWER RELATIONS ARE OF THREE TYPES – POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL – THE LATTER SPLIT INTO TWO ASPECTS: THE POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES AS ASSESSED BY THE NUMBER OF PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SPEAKERS (DE SWAAN 1993, 2001), AND THE SYMBOLIC CAPITAL ACCUMULATED BY DIFFERENT COUNTRIES WITHIN THE RELEVANT FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION (CASANOVA, 1999).”

(HEILBRON & SAPIRO, 2007: 95)

My data shows that the cultural world-system, which structures translations flows, does not only reflect the political and economic power relations among nation-states but is influenced by the cultural dimension as well (see also Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007; Sapiro, 2010). More precisely, translation flows are shaped by the fact that translations are produced within a field of cultural production and are exchanged within an international market for 'symbolic goods' (Bourdieu, 1993).

It is striking that the dominance of English that I found was already established before the 1980 cut-off point that I used in my dataset. In contrast to other cultural industries in which the most recent wave of globalization occurred in the 1980s or even later (Hesmondhalgh, 2007), in the Dutch literary field, the main rise of translations has occurred before that time. Moreover, the hierarchy of foreign languages in translation remains remarkably stable between 1980 and 2009. This stability of the hierarchy offers a new puzzle for future research. The rise of, for instance, China in economic and political terms has not influenced translation flows into Dutch of Chinese books. On the other hand, Scandinavian books have been increasingly translated. This puzzle consists of two new angles for future research.

First, I have not been able to collect data to operationalize the cultural world-systems theory. The example of China, however, does ask for such an analysis to answer the question to what extent changes in economic and political power (still) influence translation flows. And, why, in the case of China, this has not happened. Has the cultural world-system become increasingly autonomous from economic and political power relations?

Second, the case of the Scandinavian languages offers a reverse example. While the global economic and political position of Sweden, Norway and Denmark does not seem to have changed, the rise of translations from these languages from, on average, 10,6 books (0,42%) between 1990 and 1994 to, on average, 83 books (2,56%) between 2005 and 2009 is very large. This example again suggests that the cultural world-system has become increasingly autonomous from political and economic power relations. If this is the case, this raises the question how to understand this new development in the cultural world-system.

Apart from demonstrating the dominance of English in overall translation flows, and the stability of this situation, my main contribution to this literature is the development of a more fine-grained approach to translation flows. This approach is enabled by my dataset, which contains a genre classification for the books that are translated. While this genre classification is much more fine-grained than the UNESCO dataset, it does have a number of shortcomings. Three different genre classifications are included in the dataset and these classification systems change over time. Moreover, books are often coded in one classification system but not in the others. A substantial amount of books (8117) could not be given a genre-code at all. Combining these different genre classifications led to relatively broad genre-categories. Especially the 'literary fiction' category is very wide and includes both commercial fiction and 'Literature'. These would, ideally, have to be separated into different categories. However, it does enable a more fine-grained analysis and taking genre into account showed to be very important for two reasons.

First of all, because taking all genres together to understand translation flows on an aggregate level, as is frequently done in previous studies of the subject (e.g. Ginsburgh et al., 2011), hides the differences between genres. The large quantitative dataset I have collected enabled a more detailed analysis of translation flows in different genres.

My data shows that there are big differences in the importance of translations within each genre. While, in poetry, translations constitute on average 13,9% of all books published, translations account on average for 94,4% of books published in romance. Moreover, the position of different languages in different genres varies. While, on the aggregate level, English is dominant and the share of English declines after 2003, this is not the case in every genre. In poetry, for instance, the position of English is much more modest: on average 3,1% of all published poetry books are translated from English. Among romance novels, on the contrary, translations from English on average account for 92,3% of all published books in this genre. Moreover, the development of English is different in different genres. For instance, in literary fiction, the share of English rose during the 1990s and 2000s, while, in crime fiction, its share declined from the middle of the 1990s onwards.

Secondly, my analysis suggests that these differences in the importance of languages in different genres also have a symbolic dimension. I find that, within genres, different publishers publish different languages and these publishers are differently positioned in the Dutch literary field. The case of Scandinavian literary thrillers is informative in this respect. The publishers of Scandinavian literary thrillers have a much better position in the Dutch literary field than publishers of crime fiction books from other languages. This suggests that, within each genre, the relations between languages are relatively independent from other genres and from the literary field as a whole. This is an important finding for the cultural world-system perspective as it points to a level of analysis, the genre subfield, that has received very little attention in prior research. However, as my analysis suggests, it does play a role in the shaping of translation flows.

There are a number of questions for future research regarding translation flows that emerge out of the analysis presented in this dissertation.

An important future research project entails the collection and analysis of data on economic, political and cultural power relations between nation-states in relation to the development of translation flows over time to test the cultural world-systems theory. This would also entail detailed data on book production in other countries to test this theory for multiple cases. Drawing on the collection of the national library, as I have done in this dissertation, might be the best way to proceed for other cases as well.

A different future research project would be to analyze the development of translation flows historically, in particular since my research suggests that the big rise in translations occurred before 1980. Heilbron (1995) has made important contributions in this respect regarding translation flows after the Second World War. Moreover, Streng has recently published her findings on fiction book production in the 19th century (see Streng 2011; 2012; 2014). Combining the different sources available could make it possible to analyze the development of translation flows in fiction book production between 1800 and 2009. Such a long timeframe would, in the case of the Netherlands, give an opportunity to analyze the dynamic between flows out of English, German and French, which started out roughly equal in terms of the percentage of translations in the beginning of the 19th century (Streng, 2011) but whose positions have shifted to a great extent as my analysis shows.

Lastly, as suggested above, the relative stability of translation flows, with the exception of Scandinavian languages, questions to what extent shifts in economic and political power relations between nations influence existing translation flows and what other factors are at play. In the case of China, it might be the lack of relations in the transnational infrastructure in publishing that prevented an increase in translation flows from Chinese into the Netherlands. An alternative explanation could be in terms of taste patterns, which makes translation flows out of some world regions more likely to emerge than out of others. The rise of Scandinavian languages also points in the direction of an explanation within the literary domain. Anecdotal evidence (e.g. Appel, 2014) suggests that, after Swedish literary thrillers became popular, other publishers copied this strategy and also started to publish Scandinavian authors. However, this raises the question of why this happened here and not, for instance, in Japan, which has had considerable international success with Haruki Murakami, but which did not see such a bandwagon effect. A comparative qualitative study of, for instance, these three cases, could develop the cultural world-systems theory to advance its understanding of the dynamics that take place within the 'world republic of letters' (Casanova, 2004) and in the transnational market for translations.

Research question 2: how do translation flows come about?

My second research question regards the ways in which translation flows come about. I analyzed how the market for translation rights is organized, and how scouts and editors shape this process, from the desk of the writer to, at the very end, the Dutch book market, in chapters three, four and five. It was in 1912, when the

Netherlands signed the Berne convention, that international copyrights laws in which the rights of foreign authors were established became formalized (Dongelmans, 2004; see also Van der Weel, 2000). Although transnational communication already existed before, as a result of this convention this communication became a necessary element of translation processes. It is this exchange of translation rights, and the process beforehand of picking which translation rights to buy, that is the core of the transnational dynamic that I observed in my research.

The question of how translation flows come about cannot be answered within a macro-sociological framework and cultural world-systems theory. Instead, I switched from the macro-level of flows between nations to the institutional level of the transnational cultural field (Kuipers, 2011; Dowd & Janssen, 2011; see also Heilbron, 1999). I built on recent literature on these fields that studies how ‘the growing international diffusion, exchange, and intermingling of cultural goods and media products’ (Janssen, Kuipers & Verboord, 2008: 720) is made possible in practice. This literature is critical of the idea of global flows as fluid, which, according to Bielby and Harrington, implies an ‘uncontested journey from contexts of local production to new cultural contexts of consumption’ (Biebyly & Harrington, 2008: 172). Analyzing how the transnational diffusion of cultural objects happens in practice indeed shows all the effort that cultural intermediaries have to put in this process to make it happen.

What these scholars offer is a predominantly meso-level analysis of cultural globalization as the emergence of a transnational cultural field (Kuipers, 2011: 541). Kuipers argues that:

‘CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION IMPLIES THE OPENING UP OF NATIONAL FIELDS TO INTERNATIONAL MARKETS AND STANDARDS. IN THESE EMERGING TRANSNATIONAL FIELDS, CULTURAL VALORIZATION AND ESTHETIC STANDARDS ARE THE RESULT OF POWER STRUGGLES NOT ONLY WITHIN NATIONAL CULTURAL FIELDS BUT INCREASINGLY BETWEEN ACTORS AND INSTITUTIONS IN DIFFERENT COUNTRIES.’

(KUIPERS, 2011: 542-543)

This depiction of a transnational cultural field draws heavily on Bourdieu’s field theory (1993, see also Sapiro, 2010) but also on neo-institutional theories of organizational fields (see Powell & DiMaggio, 1991). It is especially the later understanding of fields that has been important to the development of the concept of transnational cultural fields (e.g. Biebyly & Harrington, 2008; Franssen & Kuipers, 2013; Velthuis, 2013).

Building on this literature, I followed the translation flow from the moment that a book or even a book proposal is considered for translation by a literary scout working for a Dutch publisher, to the moment a translated book is priced in order to be sold to consumers. I have conducted interviews with 24 Dutch Acquiring editors and one head of production of a major literary publishing group. In addition, I interviewed 13 literary scouts at 10 of the 16 literary scouting agencies in New York and one ex-scout who now works at a major American publishing house. While this approach offered very detailed and rich data on the practices of these two crucial actors in the exchange of translation rights, I was not able to include literary (sub)agents (see Childress, 2012) or translators (see Heilbron & Sapiro, 2007) as well. These agents and translators also play an important role in translation flows. Moreover, while interviews with editors and scouts were broad in scope, I have especially focused on the fast-paced, commercial part of the transnational market for translations. A broader focus that includes transnational networks that extend into more peripheral literary fields or among less commercially interesting genres would have been an enrichment, and a comparison with the fast-paced part of the market I observed is certainly an interesting and relevant angle for future research.

Uncertainty, abundance and competition in transnational cultural fields

My analysis shows that the transnational market for translations and the practices of cultural intermediaries within it are structured by the way they manage, or cope with, three problems: first of all, overabundance of available manuscripts and books that will be or have been published worldwide and that are, in theory, candidates for translation. Secondly, uncertainty regarding the quality of these manuscripts and their potential artistic and commercial success. Thirdly, an intense competition among Dutch publishers for the translation rights to the best, most interesting manuscripts.

It is uncertainty that is at the core of the dynamics of the transnational market for translations. This uncertainty comes up in a variety of ways. First, editors, but also scouts, do not have connections that span the entire globe. As such, much of what is happening goes unnoticed to all. Even within the Anglo-American literary field where editors and scouts operate, there is always the possibility that one just does not notice a certain writer or manuscript. Moreover, there is uncertainty in the nature, quality and potential success of all the manuscripts that are within reach. There is no easy and swift way to judge a manuscript. Even if one judges a manuscript positively, the chance that it will fail in the consumer market in terms of sales is very big (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Uncertainty is heightened by

overabundance and competition. Increasing globalization augmented the amount of manuscripts as well as their diversity. Increasing competition, especially within the Anglo-American market, created a need for faster decision-making, putting pressure on this already difficult process.

In my dissertation, I have unpacked the ways in which editors and scouts evaluate manuscripts and make decisions in the transnational market for translations. I showed that they use a range of different strategies to cope with the problems highlighted above. I studied the decision making processes regarding what to look at and advise on, which translation rights to buy and how to put acquired manuscripts onto the Dutch book market.

First, both editors and scouts rely on others to cope with overabundance and uncertainty. In the case of editors, these others are, for instance, the scouts who are hired to act as a filter for the Anglo-American literary field. Moreover, editors rely on (foreign) friends, such as editors, translators or critics, who give them tips and other valuable information. In this way, editors decentralize their gatekeeping power to a range of other actors. As a result, gatekeeping becomes a process rather than a single decision-making moment. Scouts, in the same way, rely on others to receive information about new manuscripts that might be interesting for their clients. They rely on friends in the business, whom they speak to very often, sometimes on a daily basis. They follow the 'buzz' of the town: that is, they follow the manuscripts that most people in the New York literary scene are talking about. Using this information, they assess what their clients should focus on.

Second, editors follow publishing decisions of foreign publishers that have a similar publishers' list and position in their literary field. Knowing that a certain editor of such a publishing house is interested in a manuscript or already bought the rights can be vital information to the Dutch editor of a similar publishing house. This suggests a process of what we have called 'horizontal isomorphism'; publishing houses in similar positions in different literary fields grow more similar by copying each other's publishers' list.

Third, both scouts and editors use their own experience and tacit knowledge to evaluate manuscripts. Editors try to gauge whether a manuscript fits with their publishers' list. Scouts, on the other hand, try to read from the perspective of their clients and try to understand, based on detailed knowledge of their clients' taste, whether something might be 'right' for them. Both scouts and editors rely on a long trajectory of experience in reading of books and manuscripts, often starting in their childhood, throughout their education as well as their professional lives, that has sensitized them to this task (see also Franssen, 2012).

Fourth, manuscripts are assessed by editors and scouts within the aesthetic dimensions of their genre by comparing it to classics, bestsellers and current trends in that particular genre. Genre-classifications such as 'up-market women's fiction' are used and understood by all actors involved and again help to gauge whether a manuscript might be worth reading. Both editors and scouts constantly refer to certain classics and bestsellers to compare a new manuscript to and make sense of its possible future position in the field.

Fifth, there is a plethora of other judgment devices (Karpik, 2010) that editors and scouts rely on. Knowing who the American agent and publisher are, reviews and sales figures out of other literary fields and from earlier books all help to position a manuscript and its author in the field and, as such, to gauge whether the manuscript 'belongs' with the publishing house in question.

Sixth, when translation rights are bought and a book is put onto the market, deciding what the retail price should be involves a particular evaluation process that builds on pricing conventions in which certain book characteristics can be transformed into a higher price while others cannot. Chapter five shows that genre here acts as a judgment device through which cultural hierarchies translate into economic hierarchies. Moreover, editors have to create a material object with a price that is seen as fair and just by consumers. As such, they enter into a moral evaluation process as well.

This dissertation does not only add an analysis of these strategies but, in addition, shows that the use of these different strategies, and whether they are even available, depends on the particular part of the transnational market for translations that an editor or scout is active in and the timing of the evaluative moment in question.

When translation rights are sold before a book is published, one cannot rely on sales figures or reviews, which is often the case with commercial genres in the Anglo-American field but less so in more peripheral literary fields or less commercial genres such as poetry. Moreover, as scouts have a different and prior role in the translation process compared to editors, they have to rely on other strategies. As such, the transnational configurations in which evaluation practices take place can differ substantially.

The quantitative differences in translation flows in different genres as outlined in chapter one and two are related to these differences in transnational configurations. A large generalist publisher might have a literary scout in New York and meets regularly with (sub)agents to discuss the newest manuscripts on offer from the Anglo-American literary field. This publisher will focus on the Anglo-American literary field for his or her translations, if only because the costs involved in hiring a scout are quite substantial. A small poetry publisher interested in translating,

on the other hand, will have an entirely different set of connections, practices and judgment devices. Such a publisher might focus more on literary awards and have a network of translators and critics who can point to interesting poetry, which is usually already long published in its original language. As such, the publishers' list of a poetry publisher often contains a more diverse set of languages than a mainstream publisher.

Contributions to sociological research on transnational cultural fields

By unpacking evaluation and decision-making practices of editors and scouts and transnational configurations in the transnational market for translations, my dissertation contributes to the growing literature on transnational cultural fields in four ways. First of all, current studies tend to see transnational fields as structured similar to national fields of cultural production, which can be analyzed from a Bourdieusian perspective. For instance, in an impressive study of the word republic of letters, Casanova uses Bourdieusian concepts, especially capital and field, to understand the position of languages and literatures according to their literary capital (Casanova, 2004: IX). Similarly, Sapiro (2008) argues that the international book market is structured "like the national markets, around the opposition between large-scale and small-scale circulation" (Sapiro, 2008: 160). Kuipers (2011) mixed Bourdieusian field theory with the neo-institutional perspective and argues that globalization can be understood as the emergence of a transnational television field (see also Bielby & Herrington, 2008). Buchholz (2008; see also Adams, 2007) uses the field perspective to study the transnational field of contemporary art and argues:

"THE GLOBAL FIELD OF ART CAN BE DEFINED AS A COMPETITIVE ARENA THAT REVOLVES PRIMARILY AROUND ACQUIRING INTERNATIONAL ARTISTIC LEGITIMACY OR OBTAINING THE MONOPOLY FOR DETERMINING THE CRITERIA OF INTERNATIONAL ARTISTIC LEGITIMACY ITSELF."

(BUCHHOLZ, 2008: 218)³¹

However, little attention is given to how field dynamics change when actors move from the national to the transnational level. The abovementioned scholars find similarities between transnational cultural fields and the structure and dynamics of national cultural fields. My dissertation suggests, by contrast, that transnational fields may function differently than national cultural fields.

31. Quoted from an English translation provided by the original author.

In the literary field, the main reason for this difference is that manuscripts can be turned into multiple books in other languages. A new American manuscript will become many different books. On a transnational level, a publisher from Germany and one from Italy are not in competition with each other when they buy translation rights to the same manuscripts. The vast majority of publishers are only active in one country or set of countries in which the same language is dominant. They aim to buy translation rights for Dutch, Swedish or German, but are not in conflict with publishers outside their national field. The competition for symbolic capital takes place, as I showed in chapter four, on the national level between Dutch publishing houses, but not on the transnational level. This sets the literary field at least to some extent apart from cultural fields such as the visual arts (Velthuis, 2013; Buchholz, 2008) or the movie and television industries (Crane, 2014; Kuipers, 2011), where both symbolic and economic competition between the key distributors takes place transnationally.

My second contribution is to reframe the perspective on transnational cultural fields by arguing that social interactions in transnational fields do not, or not exclusively, revolve around struggle for domination, but instead around dealing with the radical uncertainty regarding the economic and literary qualities of the manuscripts that can potentially be translated. This is especially the case since, compared to the national field in which actors are positioned, their knowledge of all other literary fields and their transnational network are much weaker. Combined with the overabundance of possible manuscripts to publish and the reliance on people that are geographically much further away (see also Velthuis, 2013), the uncertainty that intermediaries have to deal with comes to the forefront of their daily practices.

A third contribution to the growing literature on transnational fields is to show that the involvement of actors with this field may differ considerably. On the one hand, I find that scouts are permanently involved with this field since their primary activity is to search for books and manuscripts that can be translated. Other actors, however, such as Dutch publishing houses, are primarily involved in their own national field. Their activities in the transnational field may be restricted to the acquisition of the translation rights of a few books a year. While some have very close relations with particular publishing houses or literary agents for extended periods of time, many other, especially smaller publishers, venture onto the transnational market for translation rights just a few times a year. These ventures are, moreover, frequently mediated by a Dutch subagent. Even when a scout is involved, who will send manuscripts to their clients almost daily, the number of times an actual sale will happen is much smaller. So, rather than a field in the Bourdieusian sense of the word, in which all actors are constantly engaged in the

field much like a magnetic force field (Bourdieu, 1969:89), editors that work in a predominantly national context have 'transnational moments' in which they venture out into the transnational arena.

A fourth contribution is to show that to understand the complex process of evaluation and decision making, different, albeit related, theoretical perspectives are necessary. At different moments in the translation processes, different problems arise, which also depend on the type of literary field and the timing of the exchange. To cover these differences, I have drawn on field-theoretical and neo-institutional theory as well as on insights from economic sociology and pragmatic sociology to understand the entire process of translation, from the desk of the writer to the Dutch book market. While the field-perspective proved useful to understand moments of struggle and competition, neo-institutional theory provided answers on how cultural intermediaries manage uncertainty. Economic sociology was necessary to understand the way retail prices are set while pragmatism offered insights into the situational and material aspects of evaluation practices.

Avenues for further research

This dissertation showed that the characteristics of books and their need for linguistic translation mediates the way books travel across the globe. Publishers are most often bound to a particular language and national market and do not, very easily, cross into other markets. This draws attention to the role the cultural object itself plays in the ways in which global diffusion takes place. While my dissertation covers a large part of the translation trajectory, in future research, it is important to follow the cultural object in a more systematic way.

It would be illuminating to follow one manuscript in a more detailed manner, from an American writer to his or her agent, literary scout, Dutch editor, translator and bookseller, to analyze in more detail the different stages of transformation in which a manuscript becomes a book. In addition, anecdotal evidence in my fieldwork among scouts suggests that manuscripts can be turned into very different books in different literary fields. One manuscript can simultaneously be translated and put into the market as a work of 'Literature' while it is marketed as a commercial yet intelligent 'beach read' in another market. To understand these types of differences created in the process of global diffusion (Kuipers, Forthcoming), it would be informative to comparatively follow the processes of transformation that one manuscript goes through in different countries at the same time.

A second angle for future research is the development of a taxonomy of transnational cultural fields. My research suggests that the transnational literary field

does not function in the same way as national literary fields, as outlined above, and that there are differences between the transnational literary field and other transnational cultural fields. In the emerging literature on transnational cultural fields, these differences have not been systematically analyzed. Based on my dissertation, such a taxonomy would have to consider, among others, the extent to which a transnational cultural field is structured similar to or different from national cultural fields; the continuity and depth of involvement of cultural intermediaries in these transnational cultural fields; the extent to which interactions in these fields are structured by a struggle for symbolic capital, or, alternatively, to dealing with problems related to uncertainty and abundance; the strategies and types of judgment devices used to cope with uncertainty.

Making macro-processes comprehensible

The aim of this dissertation was to unpack the transnational configurations through which manuscripts travel across the world. These configurations consist of all kinds of human actors, law, regulations and aesthetic conventions, small and large events from a visit of an editor to New York up to the Frankfurter Buchmesse. Moreover, countless lunch meetings, telephone conversations and emails are necessary to coordinate and make translations happen, and this all has to be repeated over and over again, day in day out, to reproduce the relations between writers, agents, scouts, editors and publishers that ended up producing remarkable stable translation flows from all over the world into the Netherlands over a period of 30 years.

In short, this dissertation suggests that, in order to understand abstract complex processes such as globalization, we have to unpack the daily transnational practices that constitute them. It is precisely this task that sociological research can offer to society in general: making abstract macro-processes comprehensible, especially regarding issues of a global scale, such as global flows of cultural goods, people and problems, so that their origin and workings can be understood. This is possible by focusing on the transnational configurations and daily practices that underlie these abstract and elusive processes that seem to be beyond our reach. Doing so offers both an analysis of the interconnectedness of everyday practices on the micro-level with macro-global processes, as well as insights into the ways we can influence them.