

## A Comparative Study of the Concept of Ideology in Marxism and in Translation Studies<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Both Marxism and Translation Studies have a great body of writings on ideology. The close relationship between ideology and translation was first acknowledged by those scholars who used Cultural Studies' theories and conceptions in Translation Studies (e.g., Susan Bassnett, Andre Lefevere, Theo Hermans, etc.), but There exists little consensus on the definition of the concept in the field. The present research is an attempt to review the origins and the history of the concept of ideology, and the engagement of Marx and Marxist tradition with the concept, in order to shed some light on the ambiguous state of the concept in Translation Studies. The available literature on ideology was reviewed in both Marxism and Translation Studies. Marxist theories of ideology were classified into three categories: critical, positive, and descriptive. The critical sense—ideology as false consciousness—is prominent in the writings of Marx. The positive notion of ideology is associated with class distinction and class consciousness. Finally the descriptive theories of ideology involve an anthropological study of the beliefs and rituals of certain groups. A survey of studies conducted on ideology in Translation Studies showed that except a few (e.g. Lefevere 1987 and Jacquemond 1992), majority of the studies used the concept of ideology in its descriptive sense.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Ideology, Hegemony, Translation Studies, False consciousness

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1. This paper was received on 03.04.2021 and approved on 27.06.2021.

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## 1. Introduction

Both Marxism and Translation Studies have a great body of writings on ideology. It was Marx who made the concept of ideology prominent in social sciences. The concept is rich enough and has a significant literature in social theory. But, despite the significant role of the concept in contemporary Translation Studies (see Venuti 2008, and Hermans 1985), no systematic study of the origins and history of the concept has been conducted. There exists little consensus on the definition of the concept in the field. This study is an attempt to review different conceptions of ideology in Marxist Tradition and to compare and contrast them with the conceptions used by TS scholars.

## 2. Ideology and Marxism

To talk about Marx's conception of ideology, we have to go back to post-revolutionary France, in the late 18th century. The word ideology was first used by an aristocrat by the name of Antoine Destutt De Tracy. He "coined the word idéologie (English: "ideology") in 1796 as a name for his own 'science of ideas'" (Destutt de Tracy, Antoine-Louis-Claude, Comte," 2015). He first uses the word ideology in his work titled *Memoir on the Faculty of Thinking* (1798–1802) as "the science resulting from the analysis of sensations, [...] the goal and the method" (cited in Head, 1985, p. 33). What de Tracy is getting at here in general is what we now refer to as psychology.

Marx had read de Tracy and mentions him in different occasions in *The Holy Family* (1956), *Capital Vol. 1* (1887), and some other writings and correspondences. But the concept of ideology he developed is totally different from that of de Tracy. On the one hand de Tracy's conception of ideology is "idealist" (1979). "He stressed the importance of the study of ideas as the only things that exist for us, the only means we have to know things" (Kennedy, 1979, p. 364). However, Marx abandoned idealism in favor of materialism. "For Marx, [...] idealist abstractions have been the

counterfeit currency of far too much of early nineteenth century history, philosophy, and political and economic theory" (Cox, 1987). On the other hand "the word [ideology] that was to supplant metaphysics and denote something more scientific and positive had undergone a metamorphosis due to its political connotations and to its metaphysical character" (Kennedy, 1979, p. 368). The rationale behind Marx's acquisition of the concept despite its "pejorative" sense at that time was "Marx's reading of Tracy's economics in the *Eléments d'idéologie* which led him to associate the word with bourgeois class interest" (Kennedy, 1979, p. 368).

Fundamental to Marx's (1998) analysis of ideology is his theory about the relation of human's consciousness to his social reality. He believed that the connection between the theoretical products of consciousness—i.e. man's conceptions—and their social world is determined by the general form of the relation of consciousness to the world. For Marx, social reality is constituted by the mode of production and the relations of production. He (p. 50) also said that consciousness was a social product dependent on the "need, the necessity of intercourse with other men".

He remarked in *The Communist Manifesto* (2008, p. 68) that "man's ideas, views, and conceptions change with every change in the conditions of his material existence, in his social relation". By social relations he meant property relations of society. They comprised of the ownership of the society's means of production—natural resources and machinery—by the dominant, ruling class, and the relations of this class to the rest of the society—the producing class. For Marx, these relations are primarily exploitative due to the fact that the dominant class systematically appropriated a portion of producers' product without compensation.

So the social relations are governed by the economic interests of the ruling class—its interests of ownership of the means of production and exploitation of the producers. As a result, it can be claimed that Marx's theory is that a society's conception of its social affairs corresponds to the economic interests of the dominant

class of that society. Marx (1998) put it this way: "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (p. 67).

Marx also claims that the dominance of the ruling ideas is the result of the ruling class's control over "means of mental production" (1846)—the apparatuses of education and dissemination like the university and the mass media. This control leads to the subordinate class's subjection to the ideas of the ruling class.

Marx (1998) argues that the ruling class in society—*bourgeoisies*—maintains control over the institutions of society that establish the way that people think. One of the main functions of the bourgeoisie is having their ideas be disseminated throughout society and be accepted as the general ideas of society. They are so successful at doing this that they convince the *proletariat* that the ideas of the bourgeoisie actually serve the proletariat themselves. He calls this false class consciousness (see Lukács 1971). So if we could sum up the Marxist conception of ideology, ideology for Marx equals false class consciousness.

What Marx (1887) means by false class consciousness is that the proletariat have an ideology that does not actually serve them. That is the antithesis of their material existence. In fact the proletariat think that they sort of know what the world is about, but they do not. So that the ideology of the bourgeoisie that they have adopted is actually different from reality. There is sort of an illusion if that helps to think of it in that context.

As Leopold (2013, pp. 31–32) remarks, a survey of historical accounts of Marxism and the theory of ideologies shows that all the subsequent Marxist theorizations and conceptions of ideology can be classified into two overarching groups. For the first group of subsequent Marxists ideology became a more important element within the social theory. For instance, in Western Marxism, ideology is one of the characteristic preoccupations of the intellectuals like Gramsci and Althusser.

The second group replaces Marx's critical account of ideology with non-critical, descriptive, models in which ideology is no longer seen as problematic. For example, Lenin (1990) treats ideology descriptively to refer to something like sets of political ideas which further the interests of particular classes. He describes the battle of ideas in his contemporary society as a battle which is increasingly polarized between 'bourgeois or socialist ideology', and in which to disparage the latter is to strengthen the former (1990, p. 23). So, particular classes might (or might not) adopt the ideology which furthers their interests. Lenin suggests that bourgeois ideology is usually the dominant ideology amongst the proletariat because it is more established, more fully elaborated, and more widely disseminated, than socialist ideology (p. 26). Lenin's conception of ideology marks a turn in the history of the concept from a negative, critical one to a neutral one to "express the political doctrines and ideas of all classes in struggle. In line with Lenin, Lukács associated ideology with class distinction and class consciousness and avoided the negative, pejorative, interpretation of Marx.

The next generation of Marxist scholars who followed Lenin and Lukács's descriptive interpretation of Marx's theory of ideology were the members of the Frankfurt School. "The Frankfurt School is known for a particular brand of culturally focused neo-Marxist theory—a rethinking of classical Marxism to update it to their socio-historical period—which proved seminal for the fields of sociology, cultural studies, and media studies" (Cole, 2019).

The Frankfurt School's most important purpose, as noted by Khaniki (2015) was to criticize bourgeoisie culture and way of thinking. So they abandoned Marx's social and historical theories and emphasized on culture and ideology as the major forces of sustaining domination. So they put their efforts on the critique of ideology as a major factor in the process of emancipation. It led to the critique of irrational beliefs and attitudes of man in modern society. To be able to analyze such issues the

School turned to the psychology of the individual, and psychoanalytic theory. The main purpose of the Frankfurt School's critique of ideology is to see how ideology is produced and how it is transmitted on the cultural level. They "turned their attention to the problem of rule through ideology, or rule carried out in the realm of culture. They believed that this form of rule was enabled by technological advancements in communications and the reproduction of ideas" (Cole, 2019).

The next great figure who focused on the concept of ideology is Antonio Gramsci. His analysis of the concept of ideology is included in his category of hegemony. The term was firstly "defined as a system of class alliance in which a hegemonic class exercised political leadership over subaltern classes by winning them over" (Ramos, 1982). This was a primitive definition. Later, Gramsci uses the term hegemony to indicate the ways "a governing power wins consent to its rule from those it subjugates" (Eagleton, 2012, p. 122). This definition shows an important distinction between the two concepts of hegemony and ideology. Unlike hegemony, ideologies may be imposed by force. There exists another difference; hegemony is a category broader than ideology: "it includes ideology, but is not reducible to it" (p. 122). Hegemony has other aspects besides ideological; it may have various cultural, political and economic aspects. "Ideology refers specifically to the way power struggles are fought out at the level of signification; and though such signification is involved in all hegemonic processes, it is not in all cases the dominant level by which rule is sustained" (p. 123).

Gramsci said that the function of hegemony was to transform ideology into culture—into a "world view" that is seen as "normal" and "natural" by everyone from the controlling class to the subordinate classes (Woodfin & Zarate, 2004, p. 124). Gramsci distinguishes between civil society—social institutions and structures—and political society—the infrastructural element of mode of production. Gramsci associated civil society with hegemony and political society with coercion. From these

concepts of civil and political society—hegemony and coercion—Althusser evolves ideological and repressive state apparatuses and establishes his ideology-theory.

As Klages (2006, pp. 131–132) remarks, Althusser distinguishes two mechanisms of insuring people's submission to the rules of that State, even when the rules are against interests. The first is called Repressive State Apparatuses (RSA), which enforces behavior directly, like the police, and the criminal justice and prison system. The second mechanism is Ideological State Apparatuses (ISA)—institutions that generate ideologies which people then internalize, and act in accordance with. These ISAs include schools, religions, the family, legal systems, politics, arts, sports, etc. (Althusser, 2014, p. 243). They generate systems of ideas and values, which we as individuals believe and embrace.

But the question Althusser tries to answer, as Klages (2006, p. 132) says is: How do people come to believe and internalize the ideologies that the ideological state apparatuses create? To provide an answer Althusser starts by making a distinction between ideologies and ideology. Ideologies are specific, historical, and differing; various ideologies may exist, such as Christian ideology, democratic ideology, etc. But Ideology, is structural. Althusser believes that ideology is a structure, and so it is "eternal," (2014, p. 176) and should be studied synchronically; this is why Althusser says that ideology has no history.

Klages (2006, p. 132) notes that because ideology is a structure, "its contents will vary"—it means that "you can fill it up with anything"—but the form of ideology, "like the structure of the unconscious, is always the same". "And ideology works 'unconsciously'". Like language, ideology is a structure/system which we inhabit, which speaks us, but which gives us the illusion that we're in charge, that we freely chose to believe the things we believe, and that we can find lots of reasons why we believe those things" (Klages, 2001).

Althusserian conception of ideology as material practice depends on the notion of the subject. He (2014, p. 187) asserts that, firstly, “there is no practice whatsoever except by and under an ideology”, and secondly, “there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects”.

After Althusser the concept of ideology was displaced by other concepts like discourse or power. Rehmann (2013, p. 180) remarks that three main currents followed Althusser and his ideology-theory. Firstly, there are the followers of Michel Pêcheux who developed a theory of discourse based both on the framework of Althusser and the class-project of communism. Secondly, “a ‘middle’ neo-Gramscian line” was formed following Ernesto Laclau, and Stuart Hall—collectively known as the *Hegemony Research Group*. They tried to integrate “linguistic and semiotic approaches into an ideology-theory in order to be able to analyze neoliberalism, rightwing populism and popular culture”. Finally, influenced by the works of Michael Foucault, a poststructuralist trend, led by Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, came into being. They “accused Marxism of ‘essentialism’ and replaced the concepts of ideology, culture and language with that of discourse as the paradigmatic principle of constitution of the social” (p. 180).

### 3. Ideology in Translation Studies

Fang (2011) remarks that scholars like Lefevere, Hermans and Venuti have previously recognized “the important role of ideology in Translation Studies” (p. 155). Andre Lefevere’s *Systems Thinking and Cultural Relativism* (1987) was the first instance of using a theory of ideology in Translation Studies. He investigates the role of “rewriters”—“the translators, the critics, historiographers and anthologizers of literature” (p. 27)—in domination in this article. Lefevere quotes Terry Eagleton’s definition of ideology: “a set of discourses which wrestle over interests which are in some way relevant to the maintenance or interrogation of power structures central to a whole form of social and historical life” (p. 27).



In his subsequent works (e.g. (1992a), and (1992b)), Lefevere developed his theory of Patronage in translation and modified his definition and conception of ideology. Defining patronage, Lefevere (1992b) said:

[Patronage] will be understood to mean something like the powers [in the Foucauldian sense] that can further or hinder the reading, writing, and rewriting of literature. [...] Patronage is usually more interested in the ideology of literature than in its poetics [...] Patronage can be exerted by persons [...] and also by groups of persons, a religious body, a political party, a social class, a royal court, publishers, and, last but not least, the media, both newspapers and magazines and larger television corporations. Patrons try to regulate the relationship between the literary system and the other systems, which, together, make up a society, a culture. (p. 15)

Jacquemond (1992) is another TS scholar who focuses on the concept of ideology. He uses Gramscian concepts of hegemony and cultural hegemony to criticize “cultural hegemonists’ distortion and vilification of minority cultures through translation” (Dai, 2016, p. 504). He shows how the dominant, hegemonic cultures use translation as a major tool to maintain cultural hegemony and “to assert their grip on the country” (Jacquemond, 2009, p. 16).

Although Jacquemond’s work is significant in moving from ideology and hegemony theory to a survey of translation in postcolonial moment, it lacks an analysis of the role of social institutions—specifically those involved in the process of translation—in maintaining cultural hegemony. Neither has it given a comprehensive account of how translations contribute to setting norms and values in the society. It seems that Jacquemond uses the general, broad definition of hegemony as “the dominance of one group over another, often supported by legitimating norms and ideas” (Rosamond, 2016). Jacquemond’s work is not based on an elaborated theoretical understanding of the concept of hegemony and how it functions. It does not acknowledge Gramsci’s contribution to the concept either.

Calzada Pérez (2003) also reviews different definitions of ideology in TS. She refers to the concept “as a system of wrong, false, distorted or otherwise misguided beliefs” (p. 3), and remarks that this conception and notion of ideology is “the legacy of a Marxist (and neo-Marxist) tradition which saw ideology as tantamount to political domination, in the form of covert manipulation, and always related to the concepts of power and hegemony”. She notes that ideology is imposed in an unnoticeable fashion, and little by little it becomes the common way of thinking (consider its similarity to Gramsci’s notion of common sense) among members of a society.

Pérez (2003, p. 4) further refers to the distinction Van Dijk (1998, p. 2) made between “Truth”—“our own belief systems or convictions”—and ideologies—their belief systems or convictions. This distinction shows the pejorative (destructive) sense of the concept. It also shows ideology as “a pernicious, destructive force that should be opposed, fought, and conquered” (Pérez, 2003, p. 4). However, as Pérez emphasizes, there are positive (constructive) approaches toward the concept of ideology. An example is the approach of Lenin “who described Socialist ideology as a force that encourages revolutionary consciousness and fosters progress” (p. 4).

According to Pérez (2003, p. 4), TS is also under the influence of the political definitions of ideology. She tries to put forward a definition of ideology which is not “limited to political sphere” and “allows researchers to investigate modes of thinking, forms of evaluating, and codes of behavior which govern a community by virtue of being regarded as the norm” (2003, p. 5).

Ideology is also a major theme in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). One of the most significant studies with “explicit statements about ideology from a critical linguistic and discourse analysis perspective” (Munday, 2007, p. 199) is Hatim and Mason’s *The Translator as Communicator* (1997). They make a distinction between “the ideology of translating” and “the translation of ideology” (p. 119). They used the former to claim that translating in itself is an ideological activity (p. 121). The second

concept—"the translation of ideology"—tries to show that "the translator, as processor of texts, filters the text world of the source text through his/her own world-view/ideology, with differing results" (p. 122).

To start their discussion of the role and position of ideology in translation, Hatim and Mason (1997) try to give a definition of ideology useful for linguistics. Following Simpson (1993, pp. 17–18), they define ideology as "the tacit assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared collectively by social groups" (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 120). They also propose a definition of discourse which is in close association to their conception of ideology. Discourse, for them, is the "institutionalized modes of speaking and writing which give expression to particular attitudes towards areas of socio-cultural activity" (p. 120). Their definition refers to the role social groups and institutions play in establishing discursive practices. They identify a two-way process in the interaction between the social groups, institutions and discursive practices: "users are 'at one and the same time an active subject (agent) in the Discourse and passively subjected to its authority'" (Gee, 1990, p. 174 cited in Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 120). Hatim and Mason use the toolkit of critical discourse analysis in order to survey the role of translator in "the translation of ideology" and determine the "degrees of mediation, that is, the extent to which translators intervene in the transfer process" (Hatim & Mason, 1997, p. 122). The theories talking about translator's Positionality, e.g. von Flotow (2000), also use the descriptive sense of the concept of ideology. These theories see ideologies as "social and political trends of the moment" (Palumbo, 2009, p. 58).

#### 4. Conclusion

A review of the Marxist theories of ideology shows that, as Geuss (1981, pp. 4–26) remarks, they can be classified into three categories: critical or "pejorative", positive, and descriptive. In the critical sense, ideology refers to the "false and

misleading forms of understanding" (Leopold, 2013, p. 2). This is the dominant view in the writings of Marx. He believed that human's consciousness is the product of his/her social relations—property relations of society.

This view of ideology is similar to the first instance of using a theory of ideology in TS by Lefevere (1987). He investigated the role of the translators (rewriters) in domination. He emphasized the role of ideology that it "wrestles over interests" and sheds light on power relations in social life. It is power relations shaded by ideologies that are juxtaposed with target text as the object of early writings of Lefevere. Translations give a false consciousness of the power relations concealed behind the process and product of translation.

Although Lefevere did not mention the role of the ruling classes in his theory, his theory of patronage amounts to the same conclusion. Patrons provide translators (their ideologues) with "economic subsistence and a certain status". They control the ideological, economic, and status components. Translation, as a "means of mental production", is dominated by the patronage, the ruling class who have economic power and social authority, in order to shed light on power relations and to maintain social structure desirable for them. So, the early conception of ideology in the writings of Lefevere is—in line with Marx—pejorative.

The second category of Marxist theories of ideology are positive theories. They see ideology as "a world-view providing the members of a group with a sense of meaning and identity" (Leopold, 2013, p. 2). This notion of ideology is prominent in the thoughts of Lenin and Lukács. They associate ideology with class distinction and class consciousness. This view of ideology is also present in the works of Gramsci and in his theory of hegemony. Gramsci said that the function of hegemony was to transform ideology into culture—into a "world view" that is seen as "normal" and "natural" by everyone from the controlling class to the subordinate classes (Woodfin & Zarate, 2004, p. 124). This notion of ideology and hegemony is the one mainly

used in postcolonial studies of translation, e.g. Jacquemond (1992). Jacquemond (1992) uses Gramscian concepts of hegemony and cultural hegemony to criticize “cultural hegemonists’ distortion and vilification of minority cultures through translation” (Dai, 2016, p. 504). He shows how the dominant, hegemonic cultures use translation as a major tool to maintain cultural hegemony and “to assert their grip on the country” (Jacquemond, 2009, p. 16).

The third category of Marxist theories of ideology, the descriptive theories, involves “a broadly anthropological study of the beliefs and rituals characteristic of certain groups” (Leopold, 2013, p. 2). The transition from critical theories of ideology to more descriptive ones started by Lenin. But the one theory of ideology which is predominantly descriptive is Althusser’s theory of Ideological State Apparatuses. He defined ideology “by its practico-social function of moulding and cementing individuals to their social roles, and that practico-social function would seem to be required in all societies” (Leopold, 2013, p. 15).

The descriptive account of ideology is the prominent one in the majority of theories that use Critical Discourse Analysis in their investigation of translation process and product, e.g. Hatim and Mason (1997). This definition of ideology is similar to that of Lenin and Lukács in that it is non-critical, but descriptive. The theories talking about translator’s Positionality also use the concept of ideology in its descriptive sense.

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## مطالعه تطبیقی مفهوم ایدئولوژی در مارکسیسم و مطالعات ترجمه<sup>۱</sup>

حسین ملانظر<sup>۲</sup> و سعید فولادی<sup>۳</sup>

### چکیده

مارکسیسم و مطالعات ترجمه هر دو به شکل گسترده‌ای به مفهوم ایدئولوژی پرداخته‌اند. رابطه نزدیک ایدئولوژی و ترجمه نخستین بار مورد توجه پژوهشگرانی قرار گرفت که از دریچه مطالعات فرهنگی به ترجمه نگاه می‌کردند (برای مثال سوزان بسنت، آندره لفور، تئو هرمانس و دیگران). درباره تعریف مفهوم ایدئولوژی در میان پژوهشگران مطالعات ترجمه اجماع وجود ندارد. پژوهش حاضر تلاشی است برای مطالعه خاستگاه و تاریخچه مفهوم ایدئولوژی و نگاه سنت مارکسیستی به این مفهوم با هدف روشن کردن ماهیت مبهم آن خصوصاً در مطالعات ترجمه. به این منظور منابع موجود درباره ایدئولوژی در مارکسیسم و مطالعات ترجمه مورد مطالعه قرار گرفتند. نظریات مارکسیستی در باب ایدئولوژی به سه دسته تقسیم شدند: انتقادی، مثبت-نگر و توصیفی. نگاه انتقادی که ایدئولوژی را به مثابه آگاهی کاذب می‌نگرد، نگاه غالب در آثار خود مارکس است. نگاه مثبت-نگر ایدئولوژی را به تمایز طبقات و نیز آگاهی طبقاتی پیوند می‌دهد. نگاه توصیفی اما به مطالعه مردم‌شناسانه باورها و آیین‌های گروه‌های مختلف می‌پردازد. بررسی آراء و نظریاتی که در مطالعات ترجمه به مفهوم ایدئولوژی پرداخته‌اند نشان داد که به جز مواردی اندک (مثلاً لفور ۱۹۸۷ و جکمونند ۱۹۹۲) اکثریت آنها مفهوم ایدئولوژی را در معنای توصیفی آن به کار گرفته‌اند.

**واژه‌های راهنما:** مارکسیسم، ایدئولوژی، هژمونی، مطالعات ترجمه، آگاهی کاذب

۱. این مقاله در تاریخ ۱۴۰۰/۰۱/۱۴ دریافت شد و در تاریخ ۱۴۰۰/۰۴/۰۶ به تصویب رسید.

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