RETROSPECTIVE VS PROSPECTIVE: AN INTEGRATED APPROACH IN TRANSLATION QUALITY ASSESSMENT

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Abstract This paper first gives a general survey of both the traditional ST-oriented retrospective translation criticism model and the present TT-oriented prospective model; then generalizes the modern functionalist trend in TQA studies on the basis of the traditional linguistic and pragmatic perspective; finally analyzes the key concepts proposed by several representatives in TQA: Reiss, House, Vermeer, Lefevere, Schaffner, Appiah, Gutt, Venuti, etc..

Keywords Translation Criticism, TQA, Retrospective, Prospective, Linguistic, Pragmatic, Functionalist, Reiss, House, Vermeer, Lefevere, Schaffner, Appiah, Gutt, Venuti

I. A Brief Review

So far, many scholars in translation studies have admitted that Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) is still under-researched due to two reasons: one is the subjective nature of TQA, and the other is the long-term low status of translation in academic studies.

TQA, according to James Holmes, is part of translation criticism, a branch of applied translation studies. (Maier, 2000: 150)

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Generally speaking, the traditional TQA theory in China is based on the one-way static standard: i.e. the ST-oriented loyalty, a result of the simplified inheritance ignoring and excluding many other important elements, such as the readers' reception, the function of different contexts and target texts, the socio-cultural factors and the key role of the translator, etc., which Many of Chinese scholars have much early tackled on, though not theoretically. (杨晓荣，2005: 191) Luckily, the modern Chinese TQA theories are becoming more tolerant and poly-systemic, paying more attention to the synthetic nature and the interrelationships among many factors, thus tapping multi-dimensionally, synthetically, descriptively as well as prescriptively the TQA problem from the philosophical perspective and on the basis of the traditional single loyalty standard. (Xiaorong Yang，2005: 200-202)

In similar, traditional TQA study in Europe and America is mainly ST-oriented, and carried out from the linguistic perspective. Generally speaking, traditional approaches to translation studies are rooted in the poetics of Romanticism, assuming: first, the genius and originality of the author as if there had not been previous writings before the original writer, second, the sacred character of the text, which is not to be tampered with – hence the horror with which "bad translations are rejected, third, the possibility of recovering the author's true intentions, and believing that works of literature should be judged on their intrinsic merit only. (Lefevere, 1982)

Currently, the definitions of quality and assessment have been altered. More and more scholars are being engaged in such new perspectives as poly-system theory (translation cultural studies) (see 2.4) and skopos theory (functionally appropriate translation) (see 2.3) in TQA, which are said to be closely related with translation theories: different translation theories lead to different TQA (Schaffner,1998:1), the key purpose of which is to develop a comprehensive set of conceptual tools to grasp the complex reality of translation process.

To sum up, there are two different models of TQA: one is the traditional micro-leveled equivalence-based approach stressing relationship between source text and target text and including both qualitative assessment and quantitative assessment; the other is the current macro-leveled functionalist approach stressing the intended function to be fulfilled by target text, which is a text itself. (Maier, 2000: 150)

The first approach is retrospective with the focus on the source text, lacking in the consideration of the function of the target text and the purpose of the translation; the second approach is prospective, centering on the function of the target text, which is based on the skopos theory and the text typology put forward by Reiss. The following is a sketchy comparison of the two approaches(taken from C. Schaffner, 2007):

A retrospective translation:

1.a bottom-up process: working from SL elements and transferring the text sentence by sentence, or phrase by phrase.
2.A linear process, moving from ST to TT, thus automatically giving a high status to the ST.

A prospective translation: a top-down process, starting on the pragmatic level by deciding on the intended function of the translation and asking for specific text-typological conventions, and for addressees' background knowledge and their communicative needs. It puts the TT in the centre and makes it clear that the ST is but one of the factors influencing the make-up of the TT.

A retrospective TR takes the ST as the yardstick for the quality of the TT, which result in a tendency to concentrate on linguistic aspects, I.e. micro-level decisions.

A prospective TR puts the TT into focus and concentrates on the appropriate functioning of the TT in a specific situation in a target

culture. The quality of the TT then becomes a functional and dynamic concept.

Functional approaches to translation, such as Skopos theory (cf. Reiss and Vermeer 1991), or the theory of translatorial action (Holz-Manttari 1984), offer a framework for such as shift from a retrospective to a prospective view of translation.

Some critics contradict that the functionalist approach has dethroned the source text arbitrarily, leading to no absolute rules and just strategies.

Concerning this problem, Ernst-August Gutt, based on the principle of relevance and the presumption of optimal resemblance, proposes his Relevance-based account of translation as a general translation theory, which serves to be an inter-lingual interpretive use of translation, and describes what to convey for the translator is to offer adequate contextual effects and the best way for the translator to express is to achieve no unnecessary processing effort. Such optimal faithfulness of translation can only be achieved in relevance respects, thus, is context-determined and text-specific, with other specific rules and principles being different relevance rankings in different cognitive environment and changing with changing circumstances.(E-A. Gutt, 1991)

In one word, more and more translation scholars switch to put more focus on TL-oriented translation studies, bearing meanwhile in mind the ST specific situations.

II. Several of the TQA representatives

Several of the TQA representatives are worth mentioning: they are Reiss, House, Vermeer, Lefevere, Schaffner, Appiah, Gutt, Venuti etc.

2.1 Reiss

Reiss said evaluating a translation means reversing the translation process and reconstructing the translation strategies, (Maier, 2000，151) and according to her, translation criticism has both potentials and limitations. The potentials refer to the three important elements governing both TQA and translation process: i.e. text types, linguistic components, and extra-linguistic determinants, which give rise to the first three categories of Reiss's translation criticism. The limitations come from both the objective side and the subjective side. The former is caused by the function of the translated text, and the specific classifications of target text readers; whereas, the latter is caused by the translator's hermeneutic process As to Reiss's text types, they are the content-focused, the form-focused and the appeal-focused. In Reiss' idea, text types were the most important in translation, because she still adhered to the principle of preserving the original function of source text, but she based her contrastive approach not so much on lexical and syntactic units, but on text types. Text typology is a major step forward in introducing more flexibility into translation by moving away from a rigid system of contrastively defined equivalence. By making the dominant text type as the basis for translation-related decision-making process, Reiss firmly established that there was no 'absolute correct' translation of individual words or phrases out of context; translation was to preserve the function of the source text in the target text. Here the problem with Reiss is she didn't realize that there are changes of function through translation.

2.2 House

Similar to Reiss, House's translation theory is translating is a linguistic procedure aiming at functional equivalence on the text level, which can be roughly divided into the primary level and the secondary level. Therefore, House divided translation into covert translation and overt translation. Meanwhile, House divided TQA procedures into four steps: first, establishing a source text profile; second, establishing the function of the source text; third, comparing source text profile with target text; last, providing a statement of quality that lists, in addition to errors, the

matches, mismatches along the parameters of gener and register and comments on the translation strategy. (Maier, 2000, 153-155)

2.3 Vermeer

Vermeer moved on decisive step further than Reiss and House by placing translation firmly in the context of socio-linguistic pragmatics and declaring that translations must be seen as acts and the purpose of translation depends on the expectations and needs of target readers. "Translation is seen as the particular variety of translational action, based on a source text, aimed for a target text (translatum). The translational action needs to be negotiated between the client who commissions the action and the translator who takes it as a skopos and tries the mode of realization. Here the translator's skopos (the client's commission) is the decisive factor."(Vermeer, 1989)

Vermeer's functionalist translation theory and TQA is based on the skopos theory and functionalism focusing on the translator, giving him both more freedom and more responsibility. The skopos theory is the hare and tortoise theory: i.e. the skopos is always (already) there, at once, whether the translation is an assimilating one or deliberately marked or whatever. What the skopos states is that one must translate, consciously and consistently, in accordance with some principles respecting the TT. The translator must be aware that some **goal** exists. There are three senses of skopos: a. The translation process, and hence the goal of this process. b. The translation result, and hence the function of the translatum. c. The translation mode and hence the intention of this mode.(Vermeer, 1989) One fatal consequence of neglecting to specify the commission or the skopos has been the little agreement about the best method of translating a given text. In the context of skopos or commission, at least the macro-strategy of translation can become possible. Therefore, ST and TT may diverge from each other quite considerably, but they may have a degree of "inter-textual coherence" and functional constancy (exception rather than the rule) in terms of skopos theory.(Vermeer, 1989)

Vermeer's Skopos Theory has made great contributions: 1.One practical consequence of the skopos theory is a new concept of the status of the source text for a translation; Fidelity to the source text is only one possible and legitimate skopos or commission. 2.Another important point is that a given source text does not have one correct or best translation only. 3.The skopos theory also serves to relativize a viewpoint that has often been seen as the only valid one: that a ST should be translated "as literally as possible", which actually has been just one legitimate skopos.(Vermeer, 1989)

Neither skopos nor commission is new concepts as such---- both simply **make explicit** something which has always existed. The skopos, which is (or should be) defined in the commission, **expands** the possibilities of translation, **increases** the range of possible translation strategies, and **releases** the translator from the corset of an enforced – and hence often meaningless – literalness, i**ncorporates and enlarges** the accountability (ethos) of the translator.(Vermeer, 1989)

From Vermeer, translation is no more a purely linguistic activity. More knowledge and methods from other disciplines are integrated into translation studies, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, communicative studies, etc. In functionalist approaches, there can never be absolutes. Its principle is the necessary degree of precision, depending on the function of the translation, which gives the translator the maximum freedom and responsibility as well. The functionalist Loyalty of the translator means acting in the best interests of the translator's client, it is a matter of necessity. The functionalist approach has got didactic value by giving translation the guidelines they need for the decision-making process: i.e. translators should be able to start a chain of reflection to see the links between the textual item, the immediate context, the larger context, the function of the source text, the skopos of target text in its target cultural situation.

However, there are some arguments against the Skopos Theory: Objection1: not all actions have an aim. Objection2: (a particular variant of objection1) not every translation can be assigned a purpose, an intention. Objection3: there are too many confusing terms: aim/ goal/ skopos/ intention / purpose/function, which need to be clarified. And above all, Vermeer is accused of advocating arbitrariness and a disregard for the source text value. (Schaffner, 1998: 10)

2.4 Lefevere's epoch-making systemic approach to literature and translation studies

Refraction is the key concept in Lefevere's systemic approach, meaning the adaptation of a work of literature to a different audience, with the intention of influencing the way in which that audience reads the work. Refractions are to be found in the obvious form of translation, or in the less obvious forms of criticism, commentary, historiography, etc. Refractions have been extremely influential in establishing the reputation of a writer and his or her work. So-called "refractions" means a writer's work gains exposure and achieves influence mainly through "misunderstandings and misconceptions.(Lefevere, 1982)As is well known, writers and their works are always understood and conceived against a certain background or, if you will, are refracted through a certain spectrum, just as their work itself can refract previous works through a certain spectrum. The spectrum through which refractions are made changes in the course of time. Both the natural language and the politics of the receiving system keep changing. (Lefevere, 1982)

Since refractions exist and are influential, refractions need to be studied: how does refraction really operate? What implications could it have for a theory of literature and TS? But the truth is refractions have been lamented for being unfaithful, ignored for what should not be cannot be, unstudied because there has not been a framework that could make analysis of refractions relevant within the wider context of an alternative theory. Therefore, to study existent refractions, we need to think of

refractions as part of a system and describe the spectrum that refracts them in a systems approach.(*cultural turn)(Lefevere, 1982)

Undoubtedly Literature is a system, embedded in the environment of a culture or society; a contrived system, consisting of both objects(texts) and people who write, refract, distribute, read those texts; a stochastic not a mechanistic system, relatively indeterminate and admitting of predictions that have a certain degree of probability, without being absolute. It could be presented in an abstract, formalized way. That is to say, there are certain constraints within the literary system: first, The literary system possesses a regulatory body: the person, persons, institutions who or which extend(s) patronage to it. Specificly speaking, Patronage consists of at least three components: 1.An ideological one (conforming to other systems in a given society) 2.An economic one (assuring the translator's livelihood) 3.A status component (enabling the writer to achieve a certain position in society). Second, there are two kinds of patronage: 1.Differentiated: with different patrons representing different, conflicting ideologies. E.g. the ideological and the economic component of patronage are no longer necessarily linked. 2. Undifferentiated: having the same ideology. The literary system also possesses a kind of code of behavior, a poetics, consisting of two components: 1.An inventory component: genre, certain symbols, characters, prototypical situations. 2.A functional component: how literature has to , or may be allowed to, function in society. The final constraint within the system is the natural language including both the formal side (grammars) and the pragmatic side (language reflecting culture).(Lefevere, 1982)Among all these constraints, patronage and poetics are often much more influential in the shaping of the translation than are the semantic or linguistic ones. Translations are produced under constraints that go far beyond those of natural language.(Lefevere, 1982)

Translators (refractors) devise various strategies to live with these constraints, ranging hypothetically from full acceptance to full defiance. A refraction tries to carry a work of literature over from one system into

another, represents a compromise between two systems and is, as such, the perfect indicator of the dominant constraints in both systems. The degree of compromise in a refraction will depend on the reputation of the writer being translated within the system from which the translation is made. The degree to which the foreign writer is accepted into the native system will, on the other hand, be determined by the need that native system has of him in a certain phase of its evolution.(Lefevere, 1982)Refractions keep a literary system going, though having been ignored (underestimated) by Romanticism-based approaches to literature. It is through critical refractions that a text establishes itself inside a given system. It is through translations combined with critical refractions that a work of literature produced outside a given system takes its place in that "new" system. It is through refractions in the social system's educational set-up that canonization is achieved and, more importantly, maintained.(Lefevere, 1982)

Such a systems approach to literature, emphasizing the role played by refractions, or rather, integrating them, revalidates the concept of literature as something that is made, not in the vacuum of unfettered genius, for genius is never unfettered, but out of the tension between genius and the constraints that genius has to operate under, accepting them or subverting them.(Lefevere, 1982)

Both Vermeer's skopos theory and Lefevere's refraction theory have pushed forward the development of translation studies from the traditional linguistic approach. To make a brief comparison of the two seminal perspectives, we may find that:

1. **Skopos theory** is based on the action theory, while **Refraction theory** is based on the system theory.
2. **According to Skopos theory**, translation is a negotiation between the translator and the commissioner, resulting in the translatum; but according to **Refraction theory**, translation is a compromise between the ST literary system and the TT literary system, resulting in refractions.

3. In **Skopos theory**, the decisive factor is the client and its commission(skopos); whereas, in **Refraction theory**, there are many constraints in the TT system (patronage, poetics, natural language)
4. in Skopos theory: the skopos includes the goal of process, the function of translatum, the intention of the translation mode; but in Refraction theory, the patronage includes the ideological one, the economic one, the status one.
5. Skopos theory makes the macro-strategy of translation become possible, such as the inter-textual coherence and functional constancy; while refraction theory emphasizes the flexible manner and suggests some possible micro-strategies.
6. According to **Skopos theory**, there is no one best translation due to different skopos; similarly, according to **refraction theory,** there is no one best translation, only refractions due to the changing system or spectrum.
7. **Both Skopos theory and refraction theory** break the constraints of the traditional static, mechanic translation theories, emphasizing the increasing role played by the translator.
8. **Comparatively speaking**, the refraction theory puts translation studies in a larger scope of analysis and examination.

III. Unity in Diversity

Besides the above-mentioned representatives in the field of TQA, there are still more researchers starting to study translation action from the cultural, functionalist and pragmatist perspective. Such as Kwame Anthony Appiah proposes his definition of thick translation, making it clear that translating is far from getting the original ST meaning right. According to Gricean Mechanism, which includes conversational maxims and conversational implicatures, an utterance has its literal meanings and intentions, and thus makes possible the literal translation conveying the original ST literal intentions. However, an utterance can also be divided into direct and indirect speech act, the distinction of which is not the same as that between literal and non-literal uses. Since

literary works have both linguistic literal intentions, which employs Gricean Mechanism, and literary conventions which do not usually invoke the Gricean Mechanism, literary translation cannot be settled by convention; instead, our understanding of literary judgment matters more to it, which might lead to a correlative notion of productive modes of translation in the pragmatic spirit—that is highly context-dependent thick translation.(K. A. Appiah. 1993)And according to Venuti, translation is the domestic inscription of the linguistic and cultural differences in foreign texts, beginning from choosing the foreign text and continuing in developing discursive translation strategies, which might invoke an ethical reflection of translation and a political agenda. (L. Venuti, 2000)

Such domestically inscribed translation serves to fulfill communication for heterogeneous domestic communities by importing foreign ideas. Thus, translating is always ideological because it releases a domestic remainder, an inscription of values, beliefs, and representations linked to historical moments and social positions in the domestic culture. (L. Venuti, 2000)

In supplying an ideological resolution, a translation projects a utopian community that is not yet realized; in this sense, we say translation is also utopian by harboring the utopian dream of a common understanding between foreign and domestic cultures. The utopian projection does express the hope that linguistic and cultural differences will not result in the exclusion of foreign constituencies from the domestic scene. (L. Venuti, 2000)

Therefore, to achieve unity in the diversity is the utopian ideology of all translation researchers.

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