



On Translators' Cultrual Frame of Functionist Reference

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Abstract

A deep cognition with translators' cultural frame of functionist reference can help instructors and teachers adjust and extend patterns and schemes of translation and generate the optimal classroom conditions for acquisition of the target language. The author of the paper, in the perspectives of motivational, cognitive and communicative functionist styles, has probed into their respective common patterns that are grounded in the connotation of Chinese culture and examined the implications these three important components have for the would-be translators to work out ways to promote functionist translation.

Keywords: Cultrual frame, Functionist reference, Motivation style, Cognitive style, Communicative style, Translation teaching

Translation, for a long time, has been considered as derivatives, copies, and translators as mechanical devices replacing linguistic codes (equivalents) from one language into another, and the translator's autonomy was always questioned (and is still being questioned) by those who thought of him/her 'as a monkey, with no choice save to make the same grimaces as his master' (Leppihalme, 1997: 19), until recent years when, under the influence of poststructuralism and functionalism, the focus of attention has been shifted to the issue of translator's agency and subjectivity, and the notions of originality and (absolute) equivalence and also author's superiority over translator has been severely questioned. Awareness of complexity of translation process and avoidance of the simplistic view of regarding translation as mere process of transferring words from one text to another will result in realizing the importance of the cultural frame of functionist reference underlying a translation. They argue that behind every one of the translator's selections, as what to add, what to leave out, which words to choose and how to place them, there is a voluntary act that reveals his history and the socio-political milieu that surrounds him; in other words, his own cultural and ideological frame of functionist reference. (Alvarez & Vidal, 1996: 5).

So long, common cultural thinking and behaviour patterns can be identified in China's translation studies, as are evident in students' motivation orientation, cognitive style preference and communication style. To succeed in teaching this particular large group of students specialized in translation, the relevant teachers have to acquire a good understanding of their effect and cognitive domains. Lack of knowledge in this respect tends to bring about disparity in translational expectations, the miscoding between learning styles and instructional styles, and may even cause discomfort, disappointment and frustration both to students and teachers in translation study.

A case in point is functionalism, whose advocates claim its theories to be comprehensive and suitable of all types of translation in all situations (Hilliday 1985). On the basis of all transfers among dynamic and functional equivalence (Nida 1964), the functionist schematic view is normalized as: Is loyal to his client? Must be visible? Target text oriented, communicative acceptability, psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic and text-linguistic perspectives in one, and building bridge between the intercode and intercultural communication? As we know, translators are those who let their knowledge govern their behaviors. And that knowledge is ideological. It is controlled by ideological norms. If you want to become a translator, you must submit to the translator's submissive role, submit to being possessed by what According to Schaffner (1996), 'Functionist approach is a kind of cover term for the research of scholars who argue that the purpose of the TT is the most important criterion in any translation' (p.2). Functionalism is a major shift from 'linguistic equivalence' to 'functional appropriateness'. From the perspective of functionist approaches to translation, translation is viewed as a communicative act. In this view, translation is conceived primarily 'as a process of intercultural communication, whose end product is a text which is capable of functioning appropriately in specific situations and context of use' (Schaffner, 1996: 3).

If we, the teachers of translation studies, can unveil translators' cultural frame of reference embedded in immediate classrooms, it will help translators become more flexible in adjusting and expanding the patterns of functionist transfer and in tailoring our teaching to the needs of the Chinese students. Discontinuities that potentially exist between their cultural absorbed ways of communication and those expected in classroom will be mitigated. Translators' motivation will be enhanced, cognitive competences maximized, and participation in autonomic translation increased.

Nevertheless, the linguistics-oriented approaches to translation studies have failed to address the concept of cultural frame of reference through years of their prevalence, because such approaches are limited to their scientific models for

research and the empirical data they collect, so that ‘they remain reluctant to take into account the social values [and ideologies] that enter into translating as well as the study of it’ (Venuti, 1998a: 1). The deficiency of old linguistics-based approaches – which ‘are mainly descriptive studies focusing on textual forms’ (Calzada-Perez, 2003: 8) – in accounting for social values and cultural frame of reference in translation and other aspects of language use resulted in developing a new trend of research called Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) ‘whose primary aim is to expose the ideological forces that underlie communicative exchanges [like translating]’ (Calzada-Perez, 2003: 2). According to CDA advocates, all language use, including translation, is both cultural and functional, and this means that translation is always a site for cultural encounters. Similarly, Schaffner (2003) claims that all translations are cultural and ideological since ‘the choice of a source text and the use to which the subsequent target text is put are determined by the interests, aims, and objectives of social agents’ (p. 23), and the very cores of a certain culture and a society.

In Perspective of Motivation Styles

As for the perspective of motivation styles which diversely reveals on functionist transfer and equivalence, there is a must to center on the two opposite pairs of frame of reference, i.e. The integrative motivation vs. instrumental motivation, intrinsic motivation vs. extrinsic motivation. The integrative orientation is characterized by the learner’s favorable attitude towards the target language and his/her desire to integrate into the transfer of target language culture, as Hawkes in translating *The Story of The Stone* tended to domesticate on the target culture. The instrumental motivation concerns a more practical value and advantages to be gained through the source language achievement as in the translation of *A Dream of Red Mansions* by Yang Yi-xian and his wife, focused on source language cultural orientation. And the other dimension of motivation discussed in theory and practice of translation is the extent to which translators are intrinsically or extrinsically stimulated to succeed in practical translation task. Intrinsic motivation stirs the translators regard translating as a self-rewarding process with endeavours made to build a sense of translating competence and self-determination despite the presence of absence of external rewards with great autonomy. To arouse and sustain the intrinsic interests is the view underlying the notion of intrinsic motivation and to provide opportunities for smooth and frequent translating practice. While the extrinsic motivation lays greater emphasis on its direct goal for translating behaviours and translating products, such as money, fame, prizes, grades and even positive feedback (Brown 2000). Provision of external incentives may result in a tendency to better performance but a major disadvantage lies in its “addictive nature”. Dependence on the extrinsic benefits may increase once tangible stimuli to translate and to make extra efforts, even to extinguish self-actualization that are offered both in Chinese and Western cultures. The issue of motivation and successful acquisition of a foreign language as English in China is complex. To most Chinese, interwoven with the typical intrinsic drive to take in translation is the culturally acquired extrinsic motivation, which stems from a deep-rooted tradition and sense of family consciousness and family honor. Striving for success to bring credit to the whole family has long been an important belief embedded in Chinese children’s minds, an unreserved devotion to the pleasure of their parents in every possible way is central to the family ideal. Through an insight into the existing educational, social, religious, historical and cultural context (including TT, ST, and TR, SR), Chinese translation learners are often found to be extrinsically motivated. So, naturally and accidentally, with limited exposure to the English culture in translating theory and practice in and out of class where test-oriented teaching dominates, the goal-directed intrinsic orientation helps more to engage translation learners on learning tasks and maintain that engagement to achieve translating competence for future employment and career as a translator.

In Perspective of Cognitive Styles

Cognitive consideration is another intrinsic factor that equally contributes in a significant way to success in interlinguistic and intercultural translation upon theory and practice. The cognitive domain of translation studies is related to facts, theories, concepts and problem-solving which is a particular way for translators’ preference to process information or to approach a translating task and are always specified as following three aspects: major cognitive styles, culturally acquired cognitive styles and general styles preference in the Chinese texts and versions. And focuses on the concrete items of translation, esp. in field independence and field dependence, reflectivity and impulsivity, tolerance and intolerance, visual and auditory, etc. which are implying into the essences of functionist transfers in English to Chinese or Chinese to English. All the way, cognitive styles are typically studied as the two poles along a continuum; in reality, every translator more likely shows general tendencies towards one style or another. Different styles may be invoked in the same individual translator with the varying source text and target text in learning theory and practice in translation, and become good at handling both ends of a style continuum in special sorts of culture beyond his/her native one. The preconceived notions within translators are culture based and constitute an important predictor of how they would contribute to the dynamics or functional competence of translating (Johnson, 2000).

And there are specific approaches that Chinese translators perceive and process information have been characterized as analytical and transferring mechanism, thinking oriented, authority-oriented and closure-oriented, visual learning (Rao 2001) in translation studies upon foreignization and assimilation. Functionist references is manifested through translators’ obsessive concern for precision. They have been taught not to take immediate risk in practical translation

but weigh every consideration before performing the theories and practical strategies in translation. Governed by Confucius' authoritarian principles, the Chinese translators imply high respect for those teaching and passive subordination by those being taught for a long and long time. It is very rare to challenge to both books and teachers with a so-called embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. How to overcome and solve these appears very necessary for the autonomic translators in input and output intercode transferring process. The awareness of the requirements of the functionalism certainly 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. The translator thus becomes a target-text author freed from the limitations and restrictions imposed by a narrowly defined concept of loyalty to the source text alone.

In Perspective of Communicative Styles

The sociocultural milieu that has an enormous impact on translators' cognitive styles is also held in large measure responsible for the communicative patterns readily observed in China's translators' frame of functionalist translating references. Culture, as the contents of a language, exerts an enormous influence on people's perception of the universe, which makes people send and receive messages on different channels and in different networks and conditions people towards on particular mode of communication over another. To know the social and cultural groups from which translators come is a prerequisite for effective instruction in translation study.

Basically, born into the Confucius heritage culture, as the carry-over from Confucianism means that even today China's translators are still conscious of such a "hierarchical role framework" (Li 1999: 5) and the preservation of harmony in most social interaction. Any cultural-specific pattern of a social interaction represent translators the learned ways of communicating within a distinctive culture. In the Chinese source text, the communicative style tends to be moderate, indirect, and context-dependent. Reticence and obedience in the target texts is held in high respect relatively. And in the aspects of functionalism, they tend to be less autonomous and more dependent on the authority figures of the circle of China's translation studies and conforming strictly to rules and criteria of translation.

Concluding Point

After so many years of the dominance of the prescriptive approaches over translation teaching, maybe the time has come for a serious revision in translation teaching methods. Translation teaching should no longer be seen as a set of rules and instructions prescribed by translation teachers to the students as to what strategies will lead to a 'good' or 'correct' translation and what to a 'wrong' and 'incorrect' one. Understanding the importance of decision-making in translation, the translation teachers should try to describe the actual translational decisions made by actual translators under different socio-cultural and functionalist frame and settings in real life and real situations of dynamic and functional equivalence, and explain the perlocutionary consequences resulted from adoption of such decisions for the future translators. They should allow the students to select voluntarily between different options they have at hand, reminding them that they will be responsible for the selections they make. It is necessary for translation teachers to make it clear for the students that every translation has its own aim determined by its translator, and that they could freely choose the options that best function their intended goals of translation and fully put it in actual implications of translating theories and practice.

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