



Reviews on *The Turns of Translation Studies* and the Definitions of Translation

LONG Jixing^{[a],*}

^[a]Associate Professor, School of Foreign Languages, Guizhou Normal University, Guiyang, China.

*Corresponding author.

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Abstract

With the development of such disciplines as linguistics, literature, sociology, anthropology, psychology and the rise of deconstructionism, post colonialism, feminism, more and more theories are applied to translation studies since the 1950s. The introduction of the theories from various kinds of thoughts and disciplines not only offers new perspectives for translation studies, but also brings new turns to it. As a specific turn of translation studies is one of the nuclear parts of translation studies, the study of translation and its turns attracts some scholars' attentions. Abroad, the representative figures are André Lefevere, Susan Bassnett, Mary Snell-Hornby, Jeremy Munday, and Edwin Gentzler and so on. In China, there are few scholars such as Wang Ning, Lü Jun, Xie Tianzheng have ever studied on the turns in translation studies. Owing to the role translation definition plays in translation studies as well as the turns of the methodology, the aspects of the research background are viewed in this paper: the studies on the translation turns and the definitions of translation at home and abroad. Based on literature review and comparative analysis, the paper finally comes to the conclusion: although translation studies have seen a great number of turns, few scholars studied turns of translation systematically and showed interests in the influence of the translation definitions on the turns.

Key words: Turns of translation studies; Definition of translation; Translation studies

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INTRODUCTION

Retrospect to the history of contemporary translation studies, though theorists have proposed many turns and definitions for translation, there were few systemic studies on them. As the turns come with the progress of translation studies, and meanwhile, influence the development of translation studies, scholars abroad mainly focused on the study of translation. By analyzing the achievements of some famous scholars, they then made comments on the turns of translation studies. As to translation definitions, there were also few special studies. Theorists only did some researches on generalizing and summarizing the previous definitions such as the explanation of translation definitions in *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. What's more, less attention has been paid to the relationship between the changing of translation definitions and the turns of translation studies. In China, though the study of translation definitions had its own historical background, the study of translation turns was along with the introduction of western translation theory. In general, contemporary translation studies in China was influenced largely by western translation studies. Both the study on the translation turns and the study on the translation definitions were combinations of western thoughts and Chinese domestic culture.

1. ACHIEVEMENTS WHICH BRING NEW TURNS TO TRANSLATION STUDIES

There are many essays and works which have profound influence on contemporary translation studies, and among

them, the most representative ones are: Catford's *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965), Nida's *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964) and *The Theory of Practice of Translation* (1969), Newmark's *A Textbook of Translation* (1988), Holmes's *The Name and Nature of Translation Studies* (1972), Bassnett's *Translation Studies* (1980), Lefevere's *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992), Hickey's *The Pragmatics of Translation* (1998), Venuti's *The Translator's Invisibility* (1995) and *Translation Studies Reader* (2002), Munday's *Introducing Translation Studies Theory and applications* (2001), Snell-Hornby's *Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach* (1988) and *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints* (2006), Gentzler's *Contemporary Translation Theories* (2001) and *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory* (2008), Tymoczko's *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* (2007) etc.. These works, especially Gentzler's, made great contribution to generalizing and summarizing the achievements of the previous studies and giving a macro-outline of the field. His *Contemporary Translation Theories* was regarded as "providing the first comprehensive overview of emerging trends in the rapidly developing inter-discipline of translation studies" by Susan Bassnett (Gentzler, 2008, p.x). According to this book, there are mainly five schools which are dominated in the current west academic realm: North American Translation Workshop, "Science" of Translation, Early Translation Studies, Poly-system Theory and Deconstruction. All the five schools present their own definition of translation. The understanding of translation is improved and translation studies views the transformation from prescriptive study to descriptive study. Consequently, scholars begin to take more aspects of translation into account. In their opinion, translation is no longer only the transfer of one language into another but the rewriting of the original. As a result, more factors such as context, power, poetics, and economy and so on are taken into consideration.

Catford, Nida and Newmark made the greatest contribution to the linguistic turn. Catford's *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* applied systemic language study into translation studies. Owing to his efforts, the study of translation began to be connected with linguistics. Meanwhile, the study ushered into a systemic research paradigm. Nida, on the other hand, introduced transformational generative grammar with aims to establish a scientific research system for translation studies. From then on, translation studies entered the era of inter-disciplinary research. As to Newmark, his contribution is the emphasis on the text-oriented theory for it greatly shocking the traditional author-oriented theory. In general, it is their studies that shift translation studies from philology paradigm to linguistic paradigm. Munday also focused on the linguistic turn. Her

Introducing Translation Studies (2006) gave a description of the field and especially a description of the study under the linguistic turn.

Bassnett and Lefevere can be recognized as the pioneers made the greatest contribution to the cultural turn in translation studies. In their book *Translation, History and Culture* (1990), they proposed the cultural turn. Based on the study, they put forward the translation turn in another book *Constructing Cultures* (1998/2000) and called on the translation turn of culture studies.

Gentzler's latest work *Translation and Identity in the Americas: New Directions in Translation Theory*, which was regarded as a sequel to his early study, discussed translation from the perspective of society and psychology and connected translation studies with identity studies. He drew attention to the fictional turn. By analyzing the fictional turn and based on the study of translation in the Americas by plenty of scholars, he suggested the social and psychological turn at the next turn of translation studies.

2. STUDIES ON TURNS OF TRANSLATION STUDIES

Contemporary translation studies have seen a great number of turns, such as linguistic turn, pragmatic turn, cultural turn, translation turn, power turn and fictional turn. Though translation studies witnessed a lot turns, it was only Snell-Hornby who studied the turns systematically. Her book *The Turns of Translation Studies: New Paradigms or Shifting Viewpoints* (2006) gave a particular description of the turns, in addition, from the perspective of translation studies, distinguished the paradigm of translation studies. According to Snell-Hornby, the turns of translation studies are determined by the study orientation of the scholars. Their achievements, to some extent, promoted the development of translation studies. For example, the linguistic turn of translation studies is primarily attributed to the achievements made by the scholars of linguistic school such as Roman Jakobson, Eugene A. Nida, J. C. Catford, Peter Newmark, Basil Hatim, Mary Snell-Hornby and Mona Baker. As to the culture turn, it mainly owns to the studies by the scholars such as James Holmes, Itamar Even-Zohar, Gideon Toury, Andre Lefevere and Susan Bassnett.

In China, the study of translation turns began with the introduction of western translation theory. Since the 1970s, with the unremitting efforts of many scholars such as Wang Zongyan, Liu Chongde, Tan Zaixi, Mu Lei, Jin Di, a great number of western translation theories have been introduced to China. Ever since then, the study of western translation theories is like an upsurge swarming into Chinese translation realm. Hundreds of scholars paid attention to it and some of them have made great achievements (e.g. Shen, 2000; Wang, 2000,

2005; Lü, 2000a, 2000b, 2004; Wang, 1999, 2000; Liao, 2001; Fu, 2001, 2003; Xie, 2001, 2003, 2006; Xu, 2002; Jiang & Yang, 2004). Unlike the study abroad, the study at home mainly focused on the comprehension of western translation theories. As to the study of the turns of translation studies, however, only Wang Ning and Xie Tianzheng have done deeper studies. They mainly studied on the cultural turn and the translation turn and did not carry on systemic researches about the turns of contemporary translation studies. What's more, their studies were primarily comparative studies. By studying the influence of the turns, moreover, comparing the status of western translation studies with Chinese translation studies, they provided new perspective for Chinese translation studies.

3. STUDIES ON DEFINITIONS OF TRANSLATION

In this section, two aspects of the research background will be reviewed. In the first place, it will give a brief introduction to the most influential current translation definitions. In the second place, it will make a summary of the study of the definitions.

To begin with the definition of translation, Roman Jakobson's definition of translation is widely accepted by contemporary translation theorists. He classified translation into three types, which are intralingua translation, interlingua translation and intersemiotic translation. Based on his classification, especially the definition of interlingua translation which is also called translation proper, many scholars defined translation from various kinds of perspectives. Some representative ones are discussed as follows:

Catford defined translation as "an operation performed on languages", that is, "a process of substituting a text in one language for a text in another" (Catford, 1965, p.1). From the perspective of Nida, translation could be regarded as transference of messages from one language to another and it could be described in a scientific way. With plenty of experience of Bible translation, he shifted the focus from the form of the message to the response of the receptor and proposed the concept of "dynamic translation—the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style". (Nida & Taber, 1969/2004, p.12) Translation, in Newmark's opinion, was "rendering the meaning of a text into another language in the way that the author intended the text" (Newmark, 1988/2001, p.5). George Steiner stated that understanding as translation. In his work *After Babel—Aspects of Language and Translation*, he explained that "when we read or hear any language-statement from the past, be it Leviticus or last year's best-seller, we translate" (Steiner, 1975/2001, p.28) and further pointed out "the existence of art and literature,

the reality of felt history in a community, depend on a never-ending, though very often unconscious, act of internal translation" (op.cit. p.31). Moreover, he related human communication to translation and maintained "any model of communication is at the same time a model of translation, of a vertical or horizontal transfer of significance" (op.cit. p.49) which equals communication to translation.

Although the definitions above widened the perspective of translation studies, they were still restricted in the field of linguistics. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere, from the perspective of comparative literature, further developed the definitions of translation. They classified the texts of translation into four types: a) texts are designed to "convey information"; b) texts are designed to "entertain"; c) texts which "tries to persuade"; d) texts are seen as "belonging to the cultural capital of a given culture" (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1998/2000, pp.4-5). In addition, Bassnett distinguished pseudo-translation from translation. She attributed the phenomenon to "the vague and unhelpful of the category of translation" and appealed to be "free from the constraints the term translation has placed upon us" (op.cit. pp.38-39). Lefevere, however, from the perspective of ideology and poetics, proposed translation as rewriting. Furthermore, they two together proposed the cultural turn of translation. It was the collection of essays titled *Translation, History, and Cultural*, co-edited by them that pushed the cultural turn of translation. They therefore redefined "the object of translation studies as a verbal text within the network of literary and extra-literary signs in both the source and target cultures" and expanded the text of translation to the "inter-temporal" and "intercultural" (op.cit. Xi, p.135) field.

The deconstructionists also showed their interests in the definition of translation. Their representatives such as Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Paul De Man all once presented their views on translation, especially Derrida, whose ideas was most influential and, again, broadened the concept of translation. In his paper *What Is a "Relevant" Translation*, he presented that "the relation of the letter to the spirit, of the body of literalness to the ideal interiority of sense is also the site of the passage of translation, of this conversion that is called translation" (Derrida, p.184; Tr. Venuti) Gentzler made some evaluation on Derrida's point: "translation theories historically – both before and after Jakobson – presume differing and distinct systems and according to Derrida, in translation, the impurities manifest themselves, the accidents occur and the deschematization process becomes visible" (Gentzler, 2001/2004, pp.165-166).

In *Translation and Identity in the Americas*, a new sequel to *Contemporary Translation Theory*, Gentzler proposed that it is better to view translation as a discursive practice constructed by cultures instead of

seeing it as a rhetorical form. And he suggested that the definition of translation should include “social and psychological aspects” for the prediction of “a social and psychological turn as the next turn in translation studies” (Gentzler, 2008, p.180). The new definition developed the previous definitions to a great extent for both social and psychological factors being taken into consideration.

From the introduction above, it is obvious that theorists proposed many definitions and the understanding of translation has been clearer and clearer. However, as to the study of these translation definitions, few of them did systemic research. Overall, though the understanding of translation was improved on the basis of forefathers as time went by, there were few specialized researches on the definitions. Some theorists only focused on the definitions in their schools, while others just did research on generalizing and summarizing the previous definitions such as the explanation of translation definitions in *Dictionary of Translation Studies*. As far as the role of translation definition was concerned, there was only Maria Tymoczko’s *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators* dealing with the relationship between definition and translation.

Likewise, study on western translation definitions in China was not systemic. To some extent, it just limited to the comparative study between western definition and Chinese definition. Some representative researches were illustrated as follows: Liu Chongde’s research was chosen to talk about first and foremost. His first published translation paper was a comparative study of the translation definitions between the west and China’s. His understanding of translation was connected closely with his criterion. “Based on Yan Fu’s three principles of ‘Xin, Da, Ya’ and Tylter’s translation principles, he proposed the principle of ‘Xin, Da, Qie’” (Liu, 2003, p.xix) as the criteria of translation. Xie Tianzhen also published many papers on the study of western translation theories. His views on the definition of translation were mainly reflected in his work *New Perspectives for Translation Studies* and his new edited book *The Introduction of Contemporary Overseas Translation Theory*. In the foreword of the second book, he quite agreed with Gentzler who viewed translation as inter-discipline. Wang (1997) suggested introducing the concept of translator and culture into the definition of translation. He defined translation as “a cultural activity in which translator expresses the meaning of one language by using another language”. From the global perspective, Wang (2000, p.12) also proposed to “interpret the definition of translation from the perspective of Cultural Studies”. In the paper *A Survey of Contemporary Translation Studies in the West*, Ma (2001, p.63). Agreed with Maria Tymoczko who “viewed translation as a cluster concept and regarded Toury’s definition of translation as the best among the definitions” Xu Jun viewed translation as a cross cultural communication. He proposed “translation is a cross

cultural communication with semiotic transfer as the method and meaning reoccur the task” (Xun, 2003). Similarly, Cao Minglun regarded translation as “a creative cultural activity which transfers the meaning by semiotic conversion” (Cao, 2006, p.6).

From the analysis above, it is not difficult for us to see that research in China still focuses on the understanding of the western definitions and is mainly a comparative study. Few scholars draw attention to the relationship between the definition and its defined text and studied translation from the perspective of definition studies.

SUMMARY

From what reviewed above, it can conclude that although translation studies have seen a great number of turns, inside translation circle, few scholars studied the turns systematically and tried their studies from the perspective of translation definition. Moreover, even if some scholars have paid attention to the influence of the definitions, few of them related the changes of the definitions with the turns of translation studies. Besides, as the new turn of translation studies, social and psychological turn did not attract much attention. Most of scholars just concentrated on one turn or two turns of translation studies and did not focus on the social and psychological turn. As to the studies on translation definitions, similarly, few scholars shed light on them systematically and related them to the studies of the turns. In short, few scholars studied the turns of translation systematically and showed interests in the influence of the translation definitions on the turns.

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