An Analysis of the Translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* From the Perspective of "Three-Dimensional Transformation"

LI Xiao, YU Yiqi

University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China

Romance of the Three Kingdoms describes the history of nearly a hundred years from the end of the Eastern Han Dynasty to the beginning of the Western Jin Dynasty. This paper analyzes the translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus World, and through case analysis, explores whether Chinese culture in its classical novels can be successfully translated into another one through the translation method of "three-dimensional transformation" in ecological translation theory.

Keywords: three-dimensional transformation, text transplantation, Chinese classics

Introduction

Before exploring the translation of classical novels, the author has thought that the ancient characteristic of classics should be taken into consideration while translating, that is, the words and grammar used in the target text should be different from modern English. However, after studying the translated *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in "Chinese-English Parallel Corpus World", the author found that classical novels are translated in plain modern English, even in simple sentences. Given the huge difference between Chinese and western cultures, how can simple sentences convey the ideas of classical novels, or is there an insurmountable cultural gap? From the perspective of ecological translation and based on the theory of "three-dimensional transformation", the author analyzes the translation of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* in the Chinese-English Parallel Corpus World, and explores which dimension of three-dimensional translation should be emphasized in the translation of Chinese classical novels. Currently, there is little research which adopts the theory of ecological translation to study *Romance of the Three Kingdoms.* The author only got two results in CNKI (Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure) when inputting the two key words "ecological translation" and "Romance of the Three Kingdoms". The author decides to study "Chinese-English Parallel Corpus of China World", enriching the research of ecological translation theory of classics.

Ecological Translation

Since the birth of translation and its rational thinking, binary epistemology has been dominant (Jiang & Yang, 2004). However, this thinking mode also limits our research to a great extent, making us consciously or

LI Xiao, Master, Foreign Language School, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.
YU Yiqi, Dr., associate professor, Foreign Language School, University of Shanghai for Science and Technology, Shanghai, China.

unconsciously put concepts that are not necessarily opposite against each other, and even easy to think from both sides when considering problems (Zhang, 2001). Translation studies have also fallen into a paradigm crisis in the face of the dualistic opposite thinking, such as literal translation verses free translation, domestication verses alienation, equivalence verses asymmetry, loyalty verses treason, object verses subject. Behind the paradigm crisis is the reflection on the dualistic opposite thinking, and the choice of pluralistic integrated thinking. The pluralistic integrated thinking reflects the dialectical unity between literal translation and free translation, domestication and foreignization, loyalty and treason, and object and subject under the translation category system, and advocates the ecological perspective of translation studies (Hu, 2019).

Language Dimension

The so-called "adaptive selection transformation of language dimension" refers to the translator's adaptive selection transformation of language form in the process of translation. This adaptive selection transformation of language dimension is carried out in different aspects and at different levels (Hu, 2011), such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, texts, and so on.

Words. Considering the flexibility of Chinese and the rigor of English, translators can translate at the height of writing, that is, creation. Although the translator is bound by the original text, he has some freedom to play. Benjamin emphasizes the coherence between the target text and the original text (Sun, 2020). The tangential movement occurs at an infinitesimal point in the meaning of the original text and then continues its trajectory according to the principle of fidelity and due to the free flow of language (Benjamin, 2000). The tangential action is in a faithful core position, avoiding unnecessary offsets. But at the same time, "freedom" is also proved to be the premise of translation (Sun, 2020).

Chinese: 董卓为人敬贤礼士，赏罚分明，终成大业。 (Luo, 1996)

English: He is one who respects wisdom and reveres scholarship…

Analysis: The translator should translate from the linguistic dimension, because "礼" is usually a noun, meaning "gift", "etiquette", and so on. But here, "礼" is used as a verb, meaning "to treat with courtesy". The translator chose the word "revere" and successfully transplanted the original text into the English ecosphere from the linguistic dimension.

Grammar. This is also a difficulty in the translation of classical novels, because in the linguistic dimension, the grammar of classical Chinese is different from that of modern Chinese, and the translator needs to adjust the word order of classical Chinese to modern Chinese before translating.

Chinese: 孔明安在？ (Luo, 1996)

English: Where is Zhuge Liang?

Analysis: This is a typical object presentence. The translator can not directly translate from Chinese to English, but should follow the thinking logic—Chinese to Chinese to English—to determine the accurate translation, that is, firstly "孔明安在" is converted into "孔明在安", and then the translator carried out Chinese-English translation.

Sentence patterns. The common sentence patterns in ancient Chinese include considering sentence, ellipsis sentence, passive sentence, and inversion sentence. Signs of assertion include "者", "也", "乃", "是", "为", and so on. Ellipsis includes subject ellipsis, predicate ellipsis, object ellipsis, and preposition ellipsis. Passive sentences are marked as "为……所……", "于", and so on; inversion sentences include subject-verb inversion, object preposition, attribute postposition, and so on.

Chinese: 角拜问姓名，老人曰："吾乃南华老仙也"。 (Luo, 1996)

English: With a humble obeisance, Zhang Jue took the book and asked the name of his benefactor. "I am Saint Hermit of the Southern Land".

Analysis: The "也" in the original is a sign of assertion. The translation is very accurate in the linguistic dimension. Instead of translating it into "also", the translator used "am" to express the judgment, which makes an adaptive transformation in the linguistic dimension.

Cultural Dimension

In addition to the adaptive selection of linguistic dimensions, translators should also pay attention to the transmission and interpretation of cultural connotations in the process of translation. This kind of adaptive selection transformation of cultural dimension is to pay attention to the differences in nature and content between the source language culture and the target language culture, avoiding misinterpreting the original text. The translator should pay attention the whole source cultural system while conducting the conversion of the source language (Hu, 2011).

Chinese: 何进出，召三公共议。 (Luo, 1996)

English: He went out and took counsel with the principal officers of state.

Analysis: In ancient Chinese, "公" had many meanings, including "in public" and "fair"; it is also a respectful title for a man, a husband, or a father. Here involves the cultural aspects of two language ecosystems. If a translator wants to accurately transplant "公", he must first understand who it refers to in the original text. Secondly, the translator can justify that the phrase "principal officers of state" in the English ecosystem is exactly equivalent to the original text.

Communicative Dimension

The so-called "adaptive selection transformation of communicative dimension" refers to the transformation in which translators pay attention to bilingual communicative intention in the process of translation. The adaptive selection transformation of such communicative dimension requires translators to focus on the communicative level and pay attention to whether the communicative intention in the original text is reflected in the target text while transforming the language and transplanting the culture (Hu, 2011). Translation serves readers. The purpose of translating original works is to let target readers who do not understand the original works appreciate and read the original works with the help of translation (Chen, 2002). Therefore, translators should not blindly pursue literal correspondence, which may make foreign readers confused. Translators should first understand the logic and meaning of the original text, and then adapt to the translation in the communicative dimension.

Chinese: 公既与曹公有旧，何不弃暗投明？ (Luo, 1996)

English: You are an old friend of Cao Cao's: Why not abandon the shade for the sunlight?

Analysis: "暗" and "明" in the original text are adjectives themselves, but the translator could not directly translate them into "dark" and "bright", because the adjectives here are flexibly used as nouns in the original text. After accurately grasping the original text, the translator chose the appropriate translation in linguistic dimension, namely "shade" and "sunlight". These two words in English precisely express the metaphorical meaning of "暗" and "明" in the original text.

Translator Subjectivity

Ecological translation theory does not look at translation from the point of view of the author or the source text, nor from the point of view of the reader or the target text, but interprets translation from the point of view of the translator. Therefore, as to whether translation should be foreignized or naturalized, literal translation or free translation, and which level of transformation should be carried out, we can summarize it as follows: Judge the situation and choose the best (Song & Hu, 2016).

According to the respected translator Andrew Chesterman: "Integrate the behavior of translation into the social and cultural context, translators can overcome the dualistic opposite thinking, and understand comprehensively the dimensions of translation, which can improve the explanatory and predictive functions of translation, bringing a more objective translation activities, and providing feasible evaluation system for translation quality". In other words, when translating, translators make use of their deep understanding of two languages and cultures, and take into account the social culture and receptive ability of target readers, so that readers can understand the emotional color of the original text with the help of their cultural background. This also shows that language, culture, and communication are dynamically linked in translation activities. They interact and influence each other and organically combine together.

Chinese: 贤弟可弃此卑官，一同讨贼，力扶汉室，若何？ (Luo, 1996)

English: My brother, you would do better to abandon this petty place and join us in restoring the House of Han. Why not?

Analysis: If text transplantation is carried out from the linguistic dimension, then according to the meaning of "若何" in the original text, English is "How is it?" However, the translator chooses the communicative dimension, embodying the speaker's strong desire and urgent tone through "Why not?"

Conclusions

From the perspective of ecological translation, translatability involves not only the differences between the source language system and the target language system, but also the cultural and communicative systems. Generally speaking, the smaller the differences are, the greater the translatability is (Song & Hu, 2016). But in the final analysis, translation is an activity for communication aiming to achieve a certain purpose of the speaker.

When translating classical novels, the translator should first understand what exactly the original text means and then look for corresponding translations from the cultural dimension. However, if the translation from the cultural dimension is difficult to understand, the translator needs to turn to the communicative dimension with creation. At the same time, because the grammar and words of classical novels are different from those of modern Chinese, the translator should translate the original Chinese text into modern Chinese and then transplant the modern Chinese into English.

References

Benjamin, W. (2000). *The task of the translator*. London and New York: Routledge.

Chen, X. (2002). On translator's involvement. *China Translation, 23*(1), 19-22.

Hu, G. S. (2011). The research focus and theoretical perspective of ecological translation. *China Translation, 32*(2), 5-9.

Hu, G. S. (2019). The theoretical construction of "ecological paradigm" in translation studies. *China Translation, 40*(4), 24-33.

Jiang, Q., & Yang, P. (2004). The philosophical paradigm of theoretical approaches to translation studies: One of the methodologies of translation studies. *China Translation, 25*(6), 10-14.

Luo, G. (1996). *Romance of the three kingdoms*. Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Publishing House.

Sun, Y. F. (2019). Translation studies and world literature. *Chinese Translation, 40*(1), 5-18, 189.

Sun, Y. F. (2020). Exploring the space of translation. *Chinese Translation, 40*(1), 5-18, 188.

Song, Z. P., & Hu, G. S. (2016). An ecological translation approach to key issues in translation studies. *Foreign Language Teaching, 37*(1), 107-110.

Zhang, J. (2001). Updating the thinking mode and exploring new methods: Methodological thinking of foreign literature and translation studies. *Foreign Language and Foreign Language Teaching*, (10), 55-58.