

A Study on the Chinese Translation of *The Invisible Man* Based on the Hermeneutic Motion Theory

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This paper dynamically analyzes how the translator Chen Zhen finishes the four motion steps, i.e., trust, aggression, incorporation, and compensation, in translating Herbert George Wells' novel *The Invisible Man* under the framework of the Hermeneutic Motion Theory. Through case analysis, it is found that the Hermeneutic Motion Theory could effectively guide and evaluate the whole dynamic translation process through the four successive motion-steps, and in the process, multiple translation strategies, methods, and skills are applied according to specific situation to reach a balanced translation effect.

Keywords: the Hermeneutic Motion Theory, *The Invisible Man*, translation, motion steps

Introduction

Herbert George Wells, one of the founding fathers of science fiction, demonstrated his critical thinking on the development of technology with his unique writing style. In his book *The Invisible Man* (Wells, 2005), Wells makes in-depth speculations on the possible negative effects of technology. His concise language, delicate descriptions, and ingenious plot make readers feel totally immersed in the story; and the translators of the novel play a crucial role to successfully reproduce all these elements into the translated text. Among the Chinese translation versions of *The Invisible Man*, Chen Zhen's version (2020) is widely acclaimed; and the overall idea, process, techniques, and skills are worth of research.

The recent 20 years witnessed the development of science fiction in China, and people paid more and more attention to renowned English writers of science fiction, including George Wells, due to the increased translation of their novels (Chen, 2011, p. 96). However, there are few studies on the translations of *The Invisible Man*. Under the framework of Lefevere's Rewriting Theory (2004), Zeng (2013, p. 46) researched the influence of ideology and poetics to the translation versions of *The Invisible Man* in different historical periods (e.g., in the 1950s and 1990s).

Traditional translation theories analyze translation in a rigid and static way. George Steiner questions such operation, and believes that "translation is an art, but not a science" and that "translation is not only interlingual, but also intra-lingual and inter-semiotic". From the hermeneutic perspective, Steiner considers translation in four

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successive motion-steps (Xi, 2009, p. 57), which is profitable to do dynamic analysis about the operation and process of translation.

Combining case analysis, this paper explores the motion-steps of Chen Zhen's translation of *The Invisible Man* under the framework of Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion Theory (2001), attempting to provide suggestions for more translation practices.

Hermeneutic Motion Theory

The term "hermeneutics" originates from the name of Hermes, a deity in ancient Greek mythology, who is a messenger transmitting and interpreting information from Zeus to the mortal beings. According to Gadamer (1986, pp. 292-300), Hermeneutics is about the transfer from one world to another, and from one language system to another. Western hermeneutics has been developed in four stages: classical hermeneutics, romantic hermeneutics, philosophical hermeneutics, and postmodern hermeneutics.

George Steiner combined the hermeneutic view with the study of translation and developed the Hermeneutic Motion Theory of translation (Xia, 2009, pp. 81-83). The theory considers translation in four successive motion-steps: trust, aggression, incorporation, and compensation. "Trust" means the translator's belief that a text holds and conveys something (meanings). Then, in the stage of understanding and concretizing meaning, the conception, values, or knowledge of the translator will all constitute the subjective "aggression" of the text, the purpose of which is to conduct "incorporation". But in the process of "incorporation", the original color of the source language is unavoidably lost, which makes the fourth step of "compensation" necessary. In fact, the loss of the original color of the source language can be manifested in all the above-mentioned stages. In this way, "compensation" is whole-process motion, because only through "compensation" can the balance be restored and the ideal state of translation be reached.

The Four Motions in the Translation of *The Invisible Man*

Trust in the Translation of *The Invisible Man*

Under the Hermeneutic Motion Framework (Steiner, 2001, pp. 312-313), trust is the first step of translation; and trust mainly comes from the value of the novel and the preference of the translator.

Herbert George Wells is known as the "Shakespeare in Science Fiction" and one of the "Fathers of Science Fiction". His realistic portrayal of life and the evocative expression of the psychology of his characters are among the factors that have made *The Invisible Man* a legendary classic (Yang, 1992, pp. 87-89). Moreover, *The Invisible Man* is a philosophical parable about the "evil" of human nature; the theme of the novel is worthy of deep thinking. The novel revealed the conflict between technological and ethics, expressing that scientific achievements do not necessarily promote the progress of society, but sometimes lead to the distortion of human nature and bring negative effects to human society (Wang, 2016, pp. 109-112).

Chen Zhen is a Chinese translator with professional knowledge and skills. Chen highly appreciated Wells' writing skills and rich imagination in his post-translation notes, and affirmed the value of his work in translation (Chen, 2020, pp. 276-278). In particular, when choosing the novel *The Invisible Man* for translation, Chen considered the market reception of the novel and confirmed that the theme of the novel was valuable and worthy of probing. So, the translator, who thinks highly of the author and the novel, could easily finish the first motion of trust.

Aggression in the Translation of *The Invisible Man*

Aggression is the second step of translation based on Steiner's Hermeneutic Motion Theory (Steiner, 2001, pp. 313-314), which will be analyzed mainly from the cultural and logical aspects.

Aggression in the cultural aspect. In the novel, even a small word is closely connected with the plots and contains abundant meaning and information, which shall be thought over in the translation.

Example 1: "And with that much introduction, that and a couple of sovereigns flung upon the table, he took up his quarters in the inn." (他没有再发一言, 把两金镑朝桌上一扔, 便在车马旅店住了下来。)

In Example 1, there is a noun "inn", which is defined as "a small hotel or pub, usually an old one" in the *Collins Online Dictionary* (2022). In the storyline of the novel, the main character, Griffin, stumbles into the "Coach and Horses" with his suitcase, indicating that he is in a trip; and the inn is for business travelers to have a temporary rest, with small size and old facilities. In ancient China, a post station is very similar to the inn, which serves as a place for those who deliver official documents to have a rest or for officials to change horses and accommodation on their way. In the translation, Chen invaded into the sentence at the cultural level to fit with the culture background of the target language. From the perspective of the cultural background of readers, Chen has handled the situation well here by precisely translating the word "inn" into "车马旅店".

Aggression in the logical aspect. The sentence structures in English are typical of hypotaxis, while those in Chinese are typical of parataxis. In English, logic is explicit, with the logical relationship and coherence within and between sentences being expressed through overt indicators. Chinese focuses on implicit logic; and the logical relationship within and between sentences does not embody in the form, but finds expression in the coherence of meaning (Wang, 2021, p. 116). Therefore, translators should pay attention to the translation of logical words and convey the logical relationship of the text according to the expression habits of Chinese.

Example 2: "Mr. Henfrey had intended to apologize and withdraw, but this anticipation reassured him." (亨利先生本打算道个歉就离开, 听到这话便安心留了下来。)

In Example 2, Chen chose to omit the logical relation expressed by the conjunction "but", and directly presented the result of the action represented by the verb "reassure", using the skill of hypotaxis-parataxis shift at logical level.

Incorporation in the Translation of *The Invisible Man*

After the second stage of "aggression", the translator will proceed to the third step "incorporation" (Steiner, 2001, pp. 314-316). This process is a transition from understanding to expression, from the source text to the target text, which is a key part to make use of translation strategies, skills, and methods. This paper would analyze this step mainly from two perspectives: incorporation crystallized in the description of the novel characters and that of the environment.

Incorporation crystallized in the description of the characters.

Example 3: "He was wrapped up from head to foot, and the brim of his soft felt hat hid every inch of his face but the shiny tip of his nose." (他从头到脚裹得严严实实, 软毡帽的帽檐遮住整张脸庞, 只露出闪亮的鼻尖。)

Example 3 depicts the image of the main character when he first appears. For the sentence, the translator adopted literal translation, following the content and form of the original text. However, Chen also used the skill of amplification, such as the addition of an adverb "严严实实" to emphasize the tightness of the wrapping, thus further adding to the mysteriousness of Griffin and arousing the reader's interest in reading.

In some cases, Chen changed passive sentences to active ones, which reflects and fits the difference habits in Chinese and English expressions (Liu, 2001, pp. 3-4).

Incorporation crystallized in the description of the environment.

Example 4: “He worked with the lamp close to him, and the green shade threw a brilliant light upon his hands, and upon the frame and wheels, and left the rest of the room shadowy. When he looked up, colored patches swam in his eyes.” (那盏灯紧挨着他, 强烈的光线透过绿色的灯罩投射在他的手上、钟框和齿轮上, 房间的其他地方则是一片幽暗。他抬起头来, 眼前游动着斑驳的光影。)

Example 4 depicts the clock-jobber Teddy Henfrey repairing the clock under the gaze of Griffin. The contrast of dark and light and the detailed description create a quiet and eerie atmosphere. In the translation of the last part of the sentence, Chen switched the position of the subject and object to make the sentence in line with the Chinese habit of expression.

Compensation in the Translation of *The Invisible Man*

Based on the Hermeneutic Motion Theory, compensation is the last motion of translation (Steiner, 2001, pp. 316-319). After the stages of aggression and incorporation, some information in the source text has been inevitably missed out. It is the translator’s responsibility to compensate for the missing information to achieve a balance between the source text and the target text. This paper analyzes this step mainly from three levels, namely, the linguistic level, cultural level, and aesthetic level.

Compensation at the linguistic level.

Example 5: “Oh!—disillusionment again. I thought my troubles were over. Practically I thought I had impunity to do whatever I chose, everything—save to give away my secret.” (“噢! 又让我大失所望。我还以为麻烦结束了呢。我以为只要不泄露天机, 就可以为所欲为。 ”)

In the translation of the word “disillusionment”, Chen has chosen to expand a word into a sentence so that the meaning is conveyed in a clear and accurate way. In the ending part of the sentence, the translator chose to utter the information in an opposite angle from the original text to maintain the emotional color; besides, he exchanged the position of the conditional sentence and the result sentence to cater to the reader’s language habit.

Compensation at the cultural level. Due to the difference in cultures, the translated text may still lack necessary information. In view of this, the translators need to use their knowledge and skills to compensate for the insufficient information so as to seek the desired effect.

Example 6: “You want horseshoes for such gentry as he.” (“得用马蹄铁¹对付他。 ”)

Chinese readers may be confused when reading “马蹄铁 (horseshoes)” in Example 6, as the word involves specific knowledge in western culture. Chen annotated this knowledge by using note: Horseshoes have the power to fight witchcraft. In this way, the translator supplemented cultural information and compensated for the meaning loss in the language conversion.

Compensation at the aesthetic level. From an aesthetic point of view, a literary work is a self-contained artistic world. In literary translation, the translator must also use techniques to try to achieve the desired aesthetic effect (Yang, 2022, p. 96). Example 7 is a description of Griffin who has murdered his first victim and felt more or less remorseful. Chen used the translation skill of repetition, four “一会儿” in a row highlighting his moodiness and hysteria.

¹ Horseshoe is regarded to have the power resisting witchcraft in western cultures.

Example 7: It was wailing and laughing, sobbing and groaning, and ever and again it shouted. It must have been queer hearing. (它一会儿痛哭, 一会儿大笑, 一会儿抽噎, 一会儿呻吟, 还不时大叫几声。)

Conclusions

This paper dynamically analyzes how the translator Chen Zhen achieves the four motion steps in translating *The Invisible Man* under the framework of the Hermeneutic Motion Theory.

Firstly, the translator Chen Zhen, who thinks highly of the author and the novel, easily finished the first motion of trust. In the second motion of aggression, Chen showed a deep understanding of the original text, and used his linguistic and cultural knowledge to bridge the gap between the original and target cultures. For example, he translated English certain words/phrases into Chinese idioms that are typical in Chinese culture. In the third step, Chen combined the strategies of domestication and foreignization, employed multiple methods, such as liberal translation, literal translation, transliteration, and used many skills, like amplification, division, combination, negation, repetition, and transition, to achieve incorporation. In the last step of compensation, Chen added necessary information to restore a balance between the original and target texts.

In a conclusion, the Hermeneutic Motion Theory could be used to guide and evaluate the whole dynamic translation process through four successive motion-steps, and in the process, multiple translation strategies, methods, and skills are applied according to specific situation to reach a balanced translation effect.

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