

A Simple Analysis of Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations

Qing-ying Ming

Gannan Normal University

ABSTRACT: Based on the theory of language function of German psychologists, Reiss proposed text types in Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations, in an attempt to provide an objective standard for translation criticism. Reiss's analysis of text types and the factors limiting the text types are both focused on the realization of translation function when the original text is transferred to the translation text. Reiss's analysis of text types and the factors limiting the text types are both focused on the realization of translation function when the original text is transferred to the translation text. Translation is not only limited by objective factors, but also the subjective elements. Therefore, when criticizing the translation, objective and subjective elements factors need to be considered.

Key words: Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations, Function of the text, Text types

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, a school of translation theory starts to emerge in Germany. Some translators tried to combine language function with translation, advocated to strengthen the theory studies of translation, and implicitly put forward the some translation disciplines. Reiss put forward the functionalist translation thought for the first time, which exerts a profound influence on the development of contemporary translation theory. The appearance of the German school of functional translation theory is marked by Reiss's *Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations* published in 1971. In the book, he talks about the potential and limitations of translation criticism.

First, about the potential of translation criticism, Reiss tries to propose a set of available models and objective criteria for translation criticism, beginning with text type analysis, and then considering the intra-linguistic and extra-linguistic factors that restrict the translation when judging these different types of translations.

In terms of text types, Reiss divides text into four types: content-focused text, form-focused text, appeal-focused text, audio-media text. Content-focused text mainly expresses information, fact, knowledge, and view. Reiss states "a content-focused text is concerned with form as it relates to the effective communication and the accuracy of information" (Reiss 28). The feature of it is logic. The translator should express the same conception and information as the origin text. The content-focused usually is the formal text, the translator should be careful to grasp some polysemy to avoid mistranslation. This type includes news reports, operating

instructions, treaties, official documents, and so on. Political document is a typical type of official documents, which mainly transmit information and pay attention to the effect of communication. The purpose is to clarify the positions, viewpoints, policies and measures of the publishers and to create a good environment of international public opinion for a country's development. It often involves the country's important policies which are authoritative and solemn.

II. ANALYSIS OF REISS'S TRANSLATION THEORY

Reiss believes that the main function of the original text determines the method of translation. For the translation of this kind of text, exchanging information and conveying text information consistently are the first principles. For example, in Huang Huanhuan's paper "The Application of Skopos Theory in the Translation of the Government work report", a sentence is as follows:

1. 全面落实强农惠农富农政策。

We fully implement the policy of strengthening agriculture, farmers, and enhancing rural areas

The word “农” appears three times and consider carefully, you will find the different connotation of “农”, actually it represents three meanings, so we translate it into “agriculture, farmers, rural areas”.

The following is another example, which is from *The Journal of Chinese Translation*.

2. 发展平台经济、共享经济。

develop the platform economy and the sharing economy.

From the translation of these two political documents, we can see the content-focused text basically translated word by word to ensure the accuracy of original text. The two examples show us when translating a content-focused text should be equivalent to the information of the source text. And sometimes the connotation of the word should be revealed. Katharina Reiss refers to “the content-focused texts are judged in terms of their semantic, grammatical and stylistic characteristics, and this is reflected in translation” (Reiss 28).

The form-focused text is used by the message sender to express the feelings and attitude to the character. Reiss said, “Thus in a form-focused text the translator will not mimic slavishly (adopt) the forms of the source language, but also appreciate the form of the source language and be inspired by it to discover an analogous form in the target language” (Reiss 33). It takes the reader and effect into consideration. This type includes poetry, literary prose (essay, biographies, belles-lettres), imaginative prose (anecdotes, short stories, novellas, romances). Its character is esthetic. Form-focused texts are judged in terms of their esthetic and artistically creative nature of form. When translating the form-oriented text, Reiss thinks that the form can be changed in order to achieve a better translation and achieve similar aesthetic effect in poetry translation.

Poem is a classical type of form-focused text. For example, we can make a comparison between Yu Guangzhong's translation version and Qin Jun's translation version of *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* by Robert Frost.

The rhythm of the original poetry is AABA, BBCB CCDC, DDDD. Yu's rhyme is AABC, BBAB, CCAA, AAAA. And Qin's rhythm is AABA, BBCB, CCDC, DDDD, which is the same as the source text. But Yu's aesthetic effect is better than Qin's from the form and beauty of meaning. As for Qin's version, it seems too limited to the form to lose the beauty in meaning. So creativeness is necessary in the translation of a poem. On the contrary, Yu's translation realizes the beauty of rhythm and form, at the same time, he tries to give a full play of the beauty in meaning. For example, the “寒林、冰湖、黄昏” are all extremely accurate expressions of the original poem. His version is fit for Reiss's form-focused text, not just the beauty of form, but the innovation of the beauty in meaning.

The appeal-focused text aims to persuade and impel the reader to take an act. It focuses on the receiver of the information and the effectiveness of the appeal, and language of this type usually bears the feature of a

dialogue. The commercial advertisement, preach, and propaganda are included in it. In Reiss book, she states, "The linguistic form of any given informational content in an appeal-focused text is distinctly secondary to achieving the non-linguistic purpose of its message. It should provoke a particular reaction on the part of the hearers or readers, inciting them to engage in specific actions"(Reiss 38). For example, the commercial advertisement of diet tea or beauty products, its final purpose is to attract people to buy it. This is the effect of the appeal-focused text.

Reiss refers to "the audio-medial texts are distinctive in their dependence on non-linguistic(technical)media and on graphic, acoustic, and visual kinds of expression"(Reiss 43). It mainly uses the non-linguistic media to communicate with the hearer, whether in the source or target language. Such as radio newscast and reports, topical surveys and dramatic production. And this type is especial, it also can be classified under other three types. For example, the dramatic text must combine with the non-linguistic media to communicate with the hearer. So when we read the text of drama, such as the play of Shakespeare, we may could not experience the feelings of the character very well, but when it is played on the stage and added with some non-linguistic media, the effect of the dramatic text is on full display.

Expect the text type analysis, intra-linguistic factor and extra-linguistic factors also limit the translation.

Intra-linguistic factors belong to linguistic category, including semantics elements, the lexical elements, the grammatical elements, the stylistic elements.

"Considering (or ignoring)the semantic component of a text is a critical factor in preserving the content and the meaning of the original text. Failure to recognize polysemous words and homonyms, the lack of congruence between source and target language terms, misinterpretations and arbitrary additions or omissions are the greatest source of danger for the translator, or consequently offer the most inviting openings for the critic" (Reiss 53). So, the translator must clearly know what the author intends by what is said. Only in this way, the content and meaning of the original text can be preserved and misinterpretation can be avoided. At the lexical level, Reiss refers to full equivalence with source text is the criterion by which the semantic components of the target text are to be judged, the standard for the lexical components must be adequacy. The critic has to determine whether the components of the original text have been adequately carried over to the target language on the lexical level. This involves observing whether the translator has demonstrated competence in dealing with technical terminology and special idioms. About the grammatical elements, Reiss divided it into two aspects: the stylistic factor and the idiomatic factor. The poem translation tends to the literary style. It emphasizes the equivalent to formal style, which style is the same as the original text. Here, the stylistic elements are colloquial, standard or formal.

Extra-linguistic factors determine the translation criticism and are classified to pragmatic category, containing the immediate situation, the subject matter, the time factor, the place factor, the audience factor, the speaker factor, the affective implication, and so on.

When we translate the source, these Extra-linguistic factors should be taken into account.

The immediate situation is a very important factor. The translator must imagine himself is in the same situation of the speaker to ensure that the same similarity and effectiveness of the original text will be reached.

The subject matter must be chosen congruously with the original text whether express love or sorrow. The time factor is often showed on the translation. Because the features of language are different as time goes on. To satisfied the requirement of press and the needs of reader, the translator will translate the original text into a target text which is not matched to the language characteristics of the era of the original text.

The place factor is necessary. Due to the different geographical location, there are great cultural differences between countries, and poetry has great cultural heritage, which brings some difficulties to translation. This requires the translator to be familiar with the cultures of the two countries so that the target

language readers can have the same aesthetic feelings as the source language readers

The audience factor is the translator must have in mind of the audience. Because the author of original text often take his readers in to account when he was creating the original text.

The speaker factor is the translator must understand the speaker's intention of the original text

The affective implication is the feelings of the source language author should be fully demonstrated in the translation.

Next, Reiss discusses the possibility of an objective criticism of translation, she analyze the results of the process under three different categories: a literary category (text types), a language category (linguistic elements), and a pragmatic category (non-linguistic determinants), but the three principal categories need to be supplemented by other perspectives when translation methods vary from the norms. So, she divided it into two aspects: objective and subjective limits of translation criticism. Reiss thinks there some special function of translation except the text types, "the purpose of the translation may be something other than the original; if it has to do with person, the translation may be addressed to a different readership than the original" (Reiss 89). So the objective limitation is the special function of translation and the specially targeted reader groups. The special functionary category is the replacement of the literary, linguistics and pragmatic categories of translation criticism

The special function of translation includes the resumés and summaries, rough translations, school and study editions, bible translations, transformation in literary works, interlinear versions, and scholarly translation. Here will choose the resumés and summaries, rough translations, school and study editions, bible translations to as examples to give a through explanation.

Reiss refers to the resumés and summaries includes analyses and summaries which appear in daily and trade newspaper and in scientific journals to report only the essential results or particular details of interest to a client. A large number of translators in the diplomatic service, in government offices, in commerce and industry, and in research centers need to master this genre. In this genre, the translator needs to grasp the essential content sufficiently to summarize the main idea and the gist to express it in the target language in a normal and fluent style. So the translator must be good at summarizing and have a proficient language competence.

According to Reiss, the rough translations is typically fulfill a special function, for example, the raw translation of theatrical works are revised for dramatic presentation by a playwright or dramatic editor, the translator is simply informed to offer a literal translation, but the deeper meaning can not be demonstrated.

Reiss thinks if the translations are for stage productions, their audio-media text type is cline to the consideration of oral delivery, acting, and dramatic effectiveness. But if the translation is for school and study editions of dramatic works, the function of the translation justifies the use of a translation method for form-focused text. The result of such a translation can not be criticized as simply useless because they are ill adapted to stage delivery. That is to say different translations servers for different purpose, it can not be judged as useless in terms of other translation criticism criteria.

In Reiss's view, the translations of Bible are various because of the different purpose. For example, the intention of the Luther translation serves for missionary purpose which is regarded as an appeal-focused text. But, The German translation of Bible by Buber and Rosenzweig is a form-focused text, their translation is a different goal, they tries to make the poem, the momentum, the expressiveness of the Hebrew text in the target text in a way would preserve the sacred character of the original text. So the Bible's translations also show the special function of translation that is the purpose of translation.

About the specially targeted reader groups, Reiss talks about the editions for children and youth, the translation of Children's book are provided for children, so there will be many modifications, such as abbreviation, omission, simplification in order to make the children easily understand. For example, the

translation of *Robinson Crusoe* in the target language has to be revised or adapted for children. This translation can no longer be called a translation in the strict sense. As a result, the normal criteria is not fit for this translation. So when we criticize this type of translation we should consider its special function.

All in all, the translator must take the special function of text, the criticism of translation will be objective.

The subjective limits of translation criticism contain the personal character, historical setting in time and space, the degree of facility with languages, educational level of the translator and so on. Let us compare a part of the translation of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Zhang Guroo and Sun Fali. They take different translation strategies to translate the work in order to follow the historical setting in time and space. And the personal character of the translator also is concluded.

Oh—nothing, nothing; except chasten yourself with the thought of 'how are the mighty fallen'.

张译:哦, 没什么办法, 没什么办法, '一世之雄, 而今安在'。你只有记着这句话警戒警戒你自己好了。

孙译:啊, 没办法, 没办法喽, 只好用《圣经》上的话来鞭策自己了: '大英雄何竟死亡'。

This was the priest's reply when Urberville heard he was the direct line of descent of a notable family-Urberville, he asked the priest. 'how are the mighty fallen' is from the Bible. Sun's translation is adopted the foreignizing translation. But Zhang's translation, '大英雄何竟死亡' comes from one of Chinese allusion, someone holds the view that it refers to the famous people, Caocao, in ancient China, but others argue that it refers to another remarkable person, Zhuoyu, in ancient China. Sun takes the domesticating translation strategy. One major factor causing this difference is the historical setting. Zhang's translation is a revised edition of 1957, the year which is at feudal times in China, so the translator of that age is cling to domesticating translation strategy. But Sun's translation is based on a period of reform and opening up, so many foreign cultures are absorbed, the foreignizing translation strategy are used by the translator. However, another factors, such as, the translator's personal intention is also included, Zhang prefers to use domesticating translation personally in terms of his other translation texts.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, translation is not only limited by objective factors, but also the subjective elements, when criticizing the translation, all the factors need to be considered.

Reiss is at a special era, which translation studies in the 1970s are experiencing a transition from linguistics to culture, so her theory is limited by times, but also advanced. Her study of translation criticism theory is based on analyzing linguistics, so some scholars argue that there are few translations are totally belonged to an exact text type in practice. Although Reiss theory has its deficiency, her book, *Translation Criticism: The Potentials & Limitations* boasts a profound influence, which makes a reference for foreign translation studies and the discussion of new problems in translation practice and teaching. The book does not fully explain the non-linguistic factors that affect translation, such as culture and society, but it deals with some important issues in the translation process from a newer and higher perspective.

WORKS CITED

- [1]. Katharina, Reiss. Translation Criticism-the Potentials & Limitations. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2004.
- [2]. Hardy, Thomas. Tess of D'Urbervilles. Shanghai: Shanghai Xingjie Book Press, 2003.
- [3]. 程镇球. 政治文献的翻译[J]. 中国翻译, 2004, (1):48-5.
- [4]. 黄欢欢. 目的论在《政府工作报告》翻译中的应用[J]. 山西青年, 2016, (13):94.
- [5]. 吕行. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening 译文对比赏析[J]. 时代教育(教育教学), 2012, (1):178-180.
- [6]. 孙法理译. 德伯家的苔丝[M]. 郑州: 河南人民文学出版社, 2000.
- [7]. 张若谷译. 德伯家的苔丝[M]. 北京: 北京人民文学出版社, 1992.

Qing-ying Ming
Gannan Normal University