

On the Harmonious Unity of Subjective and Objective Factors in Translation with Reference to Functionalist Approach

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Abstract: This paper is to discuss the principles for the harmonious unity of subjective and objective factors in translation, and several practical strategies for the harmonious unity of these factors by abiding by the functional approach. Upon the study, this paper is to prove that, translation process should be regarded as a dialectical unity in which all the subjective and objective factors involved should be integrated as a whole under the direction of Skopos principle, coherence principle and fidelity principle.

1 Introduction

Philosophically speaking, the world is a dialectically united whole, and things in the world can be grouped into material and spiritual ones, which are respectively labeled as objective and subjective factors. So is it that in the world of translation. What it implies just goes like that, only by achieving the harmonious unity of subjective and objective factors, can translator produce an ideal translation. This paper is devoted to the discussion on the harmonious unity of these factors from the functional translational approach by putting into force three basic principles of skopos principle, coherence principle and fidelity principle.

2 Principles for Harmonious Unity

2.1 Skopos Principle

According to the Skopos theory, the basic principle determining the translating process is the purpose (the Skopos) of the translational action. There are three possible kinds of purpose in the field of translation: (1) the translator's general purpose; (2) the communicative purpose; (3) the purpose aimed at by a particular translation strategy or procedure [1].

To successfully achieve the translational purpose and function, subjective and objective factors in translation must be harmonized together by complying with this Skopos principle. This principle plays a very important role in coordinating the interrelationship between these factors. It decides the translating orientation and every factor's role in translation. Without Skopos, there will be nothing to thread the relevant subjective and objective factors. However, the Skopos principle is not the only principle for translators to abide by in translating process. The Skopos principle is intended to solve the eternal dilemmas of free vs. faithful translation, dynamic vs. formal equivalence, good interpreters vs. slavish translators, and so on.

2.2 Coherence Principle

The coherence principle, or in Vermeer's terms, the standard of "intratextual coherence", specifies that the translation should be acceptable in a sense that it is coherent with the reader's situation; it should make sense in the communicative situation and cultures in which it is received. Different readers (or even the same reader) at different times find different meanings in the same linguistic material. Guided by the translation brief, the translator selects certain items from the source-language offer of information (originally meant for source-culture addressees) and processes

them in order to form a new offer of information in the target language, from which the target-culture addressees can in turn select what they consider to be meaningful in their own situation.

The coherence principle points out the necessity of the harmonious unity of subjective and objective factors in the target cultural environment for the fulfillment of the translational function. To meet the special needs of the target culture addressees, the translator must harmonize his subjectivity, the objective factors of the source text and the target text with target text reader. This principle makes the target text meaningful or understandable for and acceptable by the target text readers.

2.3 Fidelity Principle

A translation must bear some kind of relationship with the corresponding source text. This is the intertextual principle, i.e. the “fidelity principle”. Intertextual coherence existing between original and target texts either can be observed from the levels at which the TT is faithful to the ST, or can be observed from the extent to which the TT is faithful to the ST, the extent ranging between the two extremes of complete imitation and complete deviation. One possible kind of intertextual coherence could be a maximally faithful imitation of the source text, as the translation Skopos requires, for example, a news item should be translated “as it was in the original” [2]. The other extreme of intertextual coherence could be a maximally unfaithful deviation from the source text when there is a change in the intention or purpose of the target text. However, the source text is intended for the source culture readers rather than for translation, so the function of the target text, or the purpose of the translation may be different from that of the source text. In this case, the fidelity principle should give way to the Skopos principle.

The coherence principle must also be harmonized with the fidelity principle. The target text and the source text are a natural harmonious unity from the very beginning of translation. The target text must get its primary information from the source text and be faithful to the source text. The information that the target text obtains from the source text harmonizes the two factors together, and it is this information that reflects the target text’s faithfulness and fidelity to the source text. Although the intention of the source text may be changed, the source text cannot be removed completely and it certainly will be harmonized in the translational function and the target text.

3 Harmonious Unity of Subjective and Objective Factors

3.1 Harmonious Unity of Translator, Initiator and Source Text Producer

From the functional translational approach, if the source text is produced for a particular translation process, the source text producer may have the similar subjective intention with translator and initiator. As a result, these three subjective factors are harmonized together in the translating activity by their common intentionality. The translator should make a full exertion of his subjective creativity to balance and harmonize the initiator’s requirements and the source text producer’s subjective creativity. The source text producer’s subjective creativity is the base of the initiator’s requirement and the translator’s subjective creativity. Let us look at an example,

TT: In 1905, the first park in Tianjin, called the Chung-shan Park, was opened to the public. At the same time, Zhou Enlai, who later became the first premier of P. R. China, and Dr. Sun Yat-sen, or Sun Chung-shan, the father of modern China, gave speeches in the park to call for democracy. [3]

In translating this newscast, the translator must be conscious of the translational function and the initiator’s intention. The purpose of translating is to broadcast and to make the foreigners be familiar with background knowledge of the Chung-shan Park. The source text producer’s intention is to publicize the cultural background of the Chung-shan Park. The initiator’s intention is to publicize the Chung-shan Park to the foreigners through the radio and broadcast. Because of the different media, the source text producer’s intention should be altered to cater for the initiator’s intention. Then the translator thread and harmonize the initiator’s and the source text producer’s subjective intentionality together by making a full exertion of his subjective creativity by means of

adding the information who later became the first premier of P. R. China and the father of modern China, which are not in the original text.

3.2 Harmonious Unity of Initiator, Source Text Producer, and Texts

The initiator and the source text producer sometimes have different purposes in translation. The translator compares the target text with the material offered by the source text, analyzing the initiator's intentions, and harmonizes the two subjective factors together with the source and the target texts in the purposeful translational activity. Let us look at an example,

TT: Tuanjiehu (Quanjude) Beijing Roast Duck Restaurant. [4]

So with a view to fulfill the intended purpose, the translator reorganizes and adapts the source text, chooses the needed information while omits (Quanjude) in the original text, which is unhelpful and even harmful to achieve the function intended for the target text: the introduction to Tuanjiehu. So, the translator even prefers Tuanjiehu to the trademark of Quanjude.

3.3 Harmonious Unity of Initiator, Texts, and Target Text Receiver

Because of different cultural backgrounds, different target text receivers certainly have their respective viewpoints toward the same work. Even under the same cultural background, target text receivers have different appreciation levels and interests. The initiator, in order to cater for the special target text receivers' needs, must get a full understanding of their subjective intention for the target text, and tries to harmonize his subjective intention with the target text receivers'. The harmonious unity of the initiator's and the target text receivers' intentions is to be transferred to the target text. The target text is completed to fulfill certain function and to meet certain group's (target text receiver's) needs. For example,

ST: Liberty, Love!/These two I need./For my love I sacrifice life,/For liberty I will sacrifice my love. [5]

The source text is a Hungarian poem. If a target text receiver wants to learn something of Hungarian literature, perhaps he will regard Xing's translation as the better one. And from the perspective of translation study, Xing's translation is also accepted as the more qualified one. Yinfu's translation is a kind of adaptation or recreation upon the original poem, because his translation has been colored with Chinese cultural characteristics and he has pushed aside the linguistic features of the original work.

In this case, the initiator and the translator in fact are played by the same one — the translator. The initiator lived in the special times and political environments. These factors consist of part of translation brief that decides the target text's orientation. From the second target text, it is well known that this translated poem is widely accepted as a 'Chinese' poem functioned as a forceful weapon at that revolutionary time against the reactionaries. Therefore, from the functional point of view, the second target text is also a very successful example of harmonizing the initiator, the target text receivers, the source text and the target text.

3.4 Harmonious Unity of Initiator, Translator, Texts, and Target Text User

The initiator starts off the translation process and defines the translating purpose. From the functional translational approach, the translator's activity should be in accordance with the initiator's subjective intention. At the very beginning, the initiator gives some demands to the translator. The translator should adopt his translating methods according to the initiator's task and demands. In addition, the translator will also take the texts into consideration when he selects translating methods. According to the coherence principle of functionalism, the target text should be understood by its receiver in the communicative situation and culture. Then the initiator, translator, the source text, the target text and target text user are united together harmoniously from the functional translational approach. Let us look at an example,

ST: Lord Windermere: Your carriage has not come back yet, Mrs Erlynne.

Mrs Erlynne: It makes no matter. I'll take a hansom. There is nothing in the world so respectable as a good Shrewsbury and Talbot [6].

In this dialogue, 'Shrewsbury and Talbot' is a kind of luxury carriage. It is very difficult for the

audience (the target text user) to understand the dialogue and even the play (the target text) if it is translated word-for-word. In order for meeting the audience's appreciation need, the source text producer's subjective creativity should be harmonized together with the audience's subjective intention. Shrewsbury and Talbot in the sentence of There is nothing in the world so respectable as a good Shrewsbury and Talbot will possibly cause the confusion in the audiences and so the whole sentence is deleted in the target text.

In line with the functional translational approach, this dialogue is translated in the first place according to the Skopos principle. By this principle, the initiator and the translator are harmonized together by the same communicative intention. In the second, the translation of this dialogue is in agreement with the coherence principle. And, the source text and the target text are harmonized together with the target text user by the communicative intention. Thirdly, the information selected must be based on the source text. In agreement with the fidelity principle, the initiator, the translator, the source text producer and target text receiver are harmonized together by the common communicative purpose of enjoyment.

3.5 Harmonious Unity of Translator, Texts, Source Text Producer and Target Text Receiver

In agreement with the Skopos principle, the translator should get in rut with the initiator's communicative intention. And according to the coherence principle, the translation should be acceptable in that it is coherent with the target text receiver's situation. And again, the fidelity principle stipulates that intertextual coherence exist between source and target text. This principle implies the coherence between source text and the target text receiver. For example,

TT1: There are ways but the way is uncharted;
There are names but not nature in words;
Nameless indeed is the source of creation
But things have a mother and she has a name. (tr. by R. B. Blackney)

TT2: The way that can be spoken of is not the constant way;
The name that can be named is not the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures. (tr. by D. C. Lau)

TT3: Tao can be defined as "Tao",
But it is not the eternal Tao;
Names can be used for its name,
But they do not give the eternal name.
The nameless Tao is the origin of all things;
The named Tao is the mother of all things. (tr. by Wang Rongpei)

For western translators' historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their understanding of "Tao", it can be summarized as "way" which, in terms of Chinese connotation, seems too simple for translators deep rooted in Chinese culture. Furthermore, the "way" in English has connotations of "method, habit, or principle", which bears some similarities to "Tao" in Chinese.[7] In fact, no English word available at the moment can generalize the whole connotation of "Tao", a complicated culture-specific concept with manifold cultural and philosophical meanings hidden it. Then their translation strategy is to "let 'Tao' be 'Tao', and leave the understanding to readers after they read the whole passage." [8] But the three English translators intended to harmonize the fiction in the source text world with the target text world, to harmonize the source text world with the religious belief in the target text world. To fulfill this translation brief, they accommodate Chinese Tao to Christian Way.

But the three foreign translators' translation only meets the needs of the target text and target text receiver. They carry out the translating action applying with the Skopos principle and coherence principle but going astray from the fidelity principle. Comparatively speaking, Wang Rongpei's literal translation of 'Tao' harmonizes the translator, source text and source text producer in accordance with the Skopos principle. In order to publicize Chinese traditional culture, the translator faithfully reflects the source text and the source text producer's subjective creativity,

harmonizes the target text and the target text receiver together by utilizing traditional Chinese cultural conception Tao. In accordance with the fidelity principle, the target text is coherent with the source text and source text producer. So, the translator, the source text and the source text producer are harmonized together with the intention to publicizing traditional Chinese culture.

4 Conclusion

Functionalists, esp Vermeer, adopts Gohring's definition of culture as their starting point in studying translation, which goes like that "culture is whatever one has to know, master or feel in order to judge whether or not a particular form of behavior shown by members of a community in their various roles conforms to general expectations". From the analysis of a number of translating examples, this paper explores in depth the validity of the three principles — Skopos principle, coherence principle and fidelity principle — in harmonizing subjective and objective factors in translation. The strategies, which are put forward in this paper for harmonizing subjective and objective factors in translation under the direction of the three basic principles, are proved not only applicable but also exercisable.

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