



The Importance of Professional Knowledge in Translation

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Abstract

The purposes of this paper are firstly, to point out the importance of professional knowledge in translation; and secondly, to stimulus scholars for further research. The Professional theory of Translation is the current tendency for translators. The translators had better have professional knowledge and ability for the translation fields, such as Modern China, Laws and Politics, Finance and Economy, Mass Media, Science and Technology, Environment, and even Ballroom Dancing in each respect so as to be competent in translation. Professional translation is here meant by: translation as an academic discipline; translation as interdisciplinary; and translation as a profession. The development of Translation theories can be divided into four periods: 1) The Period of Literature theory of Translation, 2) The Period of Linguistics Theory of Translation, 3) The Period of Culture Theory of Translation, and 4) The Period of Professional Theory of Translation. During the Period of Literature theory of Translation, Translators paid special attention to the art and aesthetics of translation. During the Period of Linguistics theory of Translation, translators paid attention to the transfer of grammar, then to the language meaning, and finally to pragmatic linguistics. During the Period of Culture theory of Translation, translators paid special emphasis on the transfer of cultural messages with debates on authors-centered Domestication Translation strategy and readers-centered Foreignization Translation strategy with balance between them. And during the Period of Professional theory of Translation, translators paid special attention to the acquirement and application of professional knowledge and ability.

Keywords

Professional Translation, Translation Theories, Linguistic Theory, Academic Discipline

Subject Areas: Education, Linguistics, Literature

1. Introduction

Professional translation is here meant by: translation as an academic discipline; translation as interdisciplinary;

and translation as a profession.

There are two kinds of translation, professional translation and unprofessional translation. Professional translation pays attention to the implementation of multiple theories of translation from a variety of disciplines and discourses to better analyze the variety meanings and functions produced, and also pays attention to academic training as well as vocational training in a variety of departments of translation studies for under-graduate and post-graduate students, just like Mona Baker has said: “There are two main types of training that a profession can provide for its members: vocational training and academic training. Vocational courses provide training in practical skills but do not include a strong theoretical component... an academic course always includes a strong theoretical component” [1].

Unprofessional translation here is meant by seeing translation as tools for learning languages in foreigner language institutions in spite of other points of view seeing unprofessional as lower standard, lazy, or unethical. After a period of disfavor, translation has made a strong comeback as a component of foreign language instruction, vindicated by a growing body of research that demonstrates its effectiveness in developing language skills.

Even in the foreign language courses, translation studies are regarded as important for the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communication. In an era of globalization, rapid development of science and technology, and the dominance of English, language identity and cultural preservation still cannot be neglected. For example, Guy Cook states his case in bold style in his book: *Translation in Language Teaching*: “I shall argue that for most contemporary language learners, translation should be a major aim and means of language learning, and a major measure of success” [2]. Maria Gonzalez-Davies pays special emphasis on teacher’s role appropriate either as communicators, final adjudicators or leaders appropriate for the students in the translation classes with diverse orientations of linguistic, cultural, cognitive, and functional approaches [3].

Professional translation is a current trend for translation. The purposes of this paper are firstly, to point out the importance of professional knowledge in translation; and secondly, to stimulus scholars for further research.

2. The Development of Translation Theories

Is translating simply the act of transferring the meaning of a text from one language into another or does it depend on some theory of similarities and contrasts between languages? In order to analyze and to direct such an activity, a number of specialists in translating have elaborated numerous theories: linguistic, sociolinguistic, communicative, free, literal, hermeneutic, semiotics, relevant, skopo, Marxist, transformational, and even gender—to mention only a few. But what seems even stranger is that for the most part of the best professional translators and interpreters has little or no use for the various theories of translation. They regarded them as largely a waste of time, especially since most professional translators regularly and consistently violate so many rules laid down by theorists [4].

There are lots of issues and debates in translation studies, including translation process and product; objectivity/subjectivity; literal versus free; faithfulness, expressiveness, and elegance; formal and dynamic equivalence; style and content; author-centred and reader centred; laws of translation, etc. Among which, accuracy of content is one of the most important issue. Accuracy of content should not be judged primarily in terms of “being true” to the author, but in not causing misunderstanding of the message by those for whom the translation is intended. What clients need and general demand is first and foremost accuracy. If a translated text can also be easy to read, that is indeed a plus factor, and if it can be culturally appropriate, the translation is obviously a success [4].

Scholars have different points of view on different orientations in regard of translation theories, for example, Edwin Gentzler has traced five approaches: North American translation workshop, translation science, early translation studies, poly-system, and deconstruction [5]; Mary Snell-Hornby has talked about translation as an independent discipline, pragmatic turn, cultural turn, interdisciplinary, empiricism, globalization, and sociology turn [6]; Eugene Nida has traced theories based on philological insights, theories based on linguistic insights, and theories based on socio-semiotics [4]; and Anthony Pym has traced a plurality of paradigms including equivalence, purpose, description, uncertainty, localization, and cultural translations [7].

In this paper, I will discuss the four period of the development of translation theories based on whether professional translation has been emphasised. There are: The Period of Literature theory of Translation; The Period of Linguistics Theory of Translation; The Period of Culture Theory of Translation; and The Period of Professional Theory of Translation.

2.1. The Period of Literary Theory of Translation

During this period of literary translation, scholars pay attention to the aesthetics of the translation, and treat translation as art. Philology, the study and evaluation of written texts, including their authenticity, form, meaning, and cultural influence, has for more than 2000 years been the primary basis for discussion translation theories and practice. In general such texts have been literary productions because they seemed to be the only texts that warranted being translated into other languages [4]. The shortcoming of this period is to pay attention too much to literature translation and neglect other fields.

2.2. The Period of Linguistic Theory of Translation

Earlier in this period, scholars see translation as science and pay attention to syntactic structure such as grammar and lexis; later, scholars pay attention to semantic meaning such as referential meaning and connotative meaning; and finally scholars pay attention to the pragmatic use of language and see translation as communicative process in the social context. The linguistic orientation in translating has been especially enlarged by work in sociolinguistics, in which the emphasis is not on language as a structure but on the role of language as used by speakers and writers. Sociolinguistics has called attention to the function of levels and registers in language, linguistics, the role of power and solidarity in language use and in the systematic character of what some linguists in the past have treated a mere accidental variation [4]. However, this period is still not to pay enough attention to interdisciplinary knowledge.

2.3. The Period of Cultural Theory of Translation

During this period, scholars pay special attention to culture; for example, Lawrence Venuti has talked about the translation strategies of foreignization and domestication. “Invisibility” is the term he has used to describe the translator’s situation and activity in contemporary Anglo-American culture. It refers to two mutually determining phenomena: one is an illusionistic effect of discourse, of the translator’s own manipulation of English; the other is the practice of reading and evaluating translations that has long prevailed in the United Kingdom and the United, among other cultures, both English and foreign languages. The appearance, in other words, the translation is not in fact a translation, but the “original”. The illusion of the transparency is an effect of fluent discourse, of the translators effort to insure easy readability by adhering to current usage, maintaining continuous syntax, fixing a precise meaning... What is so remarkable here is that this illusory effect conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator’s crucial intervention in the foreign text. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text [8]. Anthony Pym even has produced time-space maps of text transfers (the movements of goods, including cultural products like translations) and subject transfers (the movements of people), and he has described the person-to-person networks and negotiations of professional inter-cultures, such as formations of intermediaries, including translators, that develop in the overlaps of cultures [7].

This period has already paid some attention to interdisciplinary knowledge.

2.4. The Period of Professional Theory of Translation

During the period of professional theory of translation, as mentioned above, scholars pay special attention to translation as an independent academic discipline; translation as interdisciplinary; and translation as a profession. This period has paid enough attention to interdisciplinary knowledge.

2.4.1. Translation as an Academic Discipline

Translation was once upon a time a sub-discipline of language or comparative literature, but now is treated as an academic discipline. Jeremy Munday describes that translation studies is the new academic discipline related to the study of the theory and phenomena of translation. By its nature it is multilingual and also interdisciplinary, encompassing languages, linguistics, communication studies, philosophy and a range of types of cultural studies [9]. However, some scholars still doubt that “it is unclear whether translation studies are yet recognized as an independent academic discipline. The Ministry of Science and Technology in Taiwan has categorized it as a sub-discipline under linguistics. Increasing the quality, breadth and depth may help translation research into the multi-dimensional mental activity that may help translation studies become an accepted academic discipline [10].

Now, lots of departments of translation studies have been established in Taiwan and all over the world to deal with teaching, research and occupation training, and hence we can say that translation is already an independent academic discipline.

2.4.2. Translation as Interdisciplinary

Edwin Gentzler says that we are at the verge of an exciting new phase of research for the field, one that is forcing scholars to combine theories and resources from a variety of disciplines and which is leading to multiple new insights [5].

Susan Bassnett indicates that what we can see from both cultural studies and translation studies today is that the moment of the isolated academic sitting in an ivory tower is over, and indeed in these multifaceted inter-disciplines, isolation is counterproductive. Translation is, after all, dialogic in its very nature, involving as it does more than one voice. The study of translation, like the study of culture, needs a plurality of voices. And, similarly, the study of culture always involves an examination of the processes of encoding and decoding that comprise translation [11]; And she indicates that “Once seen as a sub-branch of linguistics, translation today is perceived as an interdisciplinary field of study... Translation Studies is more comfortable with itself, better to engage in borrowing from and lending techniques and methods to other disciplines” [12].

Mary Snell-Hornby states that one of the features of our “inter-discipline” during the 1990s is that it did not only “import” from outside, but integrated and coordinated the various new strands of knowledge from within. One invariable factor is the reader [6].

Eugene Nida expresses that a more useful approach to the study of the diversity of translation theories is to group together variously related theories on the basis of the disciplines that have served as the basic points of reference for some of the primary insights: philology, although often spoken of as “literary criticism” or “literary analysis”; linguistics, and especially sociolinguistics (language used in communication); and semiotics, particularly socio-semiotics, the study of sign systems used in human communication. This order of disciplines reflects a somewhat historical development, but each of these orientations in translating is endorsed and favored by a number of present day scholars. At the same time it is important to recognize some of the important contributions being made to translation by other related disciplines, for example, psychology, information theory, informatics, and sociology [4].

Susan Sarceive, after analyzing the profile of the legal translator in the past, present and future, her paper emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary programs that provide special training in legal translation. She suggests translation schools should be encouraged to offer interdisciplinary programs that combine translation skills with in-depth legal knowledge” [13].

2.4.3. Translation as a Profession

Scholars around all the worlds see translation as a vocational field of study, for example, graduate programs in Taiwan are concerned about how resolve the problem of translation practice and instruction. In Australia, in order to meet the demands of translation due to multiculturalism, National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpretation has been established to maintain the quality of professional & para-professional translation. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters Ltd (trading as NAATI) is incorporated in Australia under the Corporations Act 2001. The company is owned jointly by the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments and is governed by a board of directors, who are appointed by the owners. NAATI’s main business activities are providing accreditation and other credentialing services for translators and interpreters and related activities. NAATI services are available through offices in every State and Territory of Australia and in New Zealand. The National Office is in Canberra. NAATI accreditation by testing is available for the following: Advanced Translator, Professional Translator, Paraprofessional Translator, Professional Interpreter and Paraprofessional Interpreter [14].

3. Translation Methods

Scholars from all over the world in the past and now have suggested diverse translation methods and process, both in macro and micro dimensions, for example, the Macro, which includes: content accuracy attitude, function equivalence, equivalent effect, foreignization and domestication; the micro which includes syntactic structure (grammar, lexis). The translation process, which includes: analysis, transfer, recon-structuring, and testing [15].

However, the practice of professional translation must pay special attention to the interdisciplinary profes-

sional knowledge and ability in the practice of translation. For example, if you translate a legal document, you had better have sufficient knowledge of translation as well as laws; if you want to translate a ballroom dance document, you had better have sufficient knowledge of translation as well as ballroom dance; and if you want to translate a text on modern China, you had better have sufficient knowledge of translation as well as Modern China to cope with the translation practice. Here we have an example translating Chinese into English. The Chinese version is as the following:

“朕欽奉隆裕皇太后懿旨：

前因民軍起事，各省響應，九夏沸騰，生靈塗炭。特命袁世凱遣員與民軍代表討論大局，議開國會、公決政體。兩月以來，尚無確當辦法。南北睽隔，彼此相持。商輟於塗，士露於野。徒以國體一日不決，故民生一日不安。今全國人民心理，多傾向共和。南中各省既倡義於前，北方諸將亦主張於後。人心所向，天命可知。予亦何忍因一姓之尊榮，拂兆民之好惡。是用外觀大勢，內審輿情，特率皇帝將統治權公諸全國，定為共和立憲國體。近慰海內厭亂望治之心，遠協古聖天下為公之義。袁世凱前經資政院選舉為總理大臣，當茲新舊代謝之際，宜有南北統一之方。即由袁世凱以全權組織臨時共和政府，與民軍協商統一辦法。總期人民安堵，海宇乂安，仍合滿、漢、蒙、回、藏五族完全領土為一大中華民國。予與皇帝得以退處寬閑，優遊歲月，長受國民之優禮，親見郅治之告成，豈不懿歟！欽此” [16]。

The first stage of the translation process is the comprehension of original text, including the grammar, the lexis, the semantics, and the pragmatic dimension; The second stage of translation process is the transfer of the meaning of the original text accurately into the target language, English; And the last stage of the translation process is to express the message accurately, fluently and appropriately in English.

During the process of translation, however, professional knowledge on modern China is the most important. You had better know that firstly, the abdication decree was far from an unconditional surrender to Nanking. It did not even recognize the existence of provisional government, instead referring to revolutionaries as the Army of the People. It instructed Yuan, Shih-k'ai to organize a provisional republican government in order to unify the north and the south. Yuan himself inserted the phrase “with full power so to do”. So it was Yuan rather than the Nanking government who inherited the Will of Heaven [17]. And secondly, indeed, the Ch'ing emperor was forced to give up his throne, not voluntarily, but this decree says that it is the willingness of the emperor to give his power to a more suitable person, and this is compatible to Chinese traditional political culture of abdication, and of “saving face”.

And you had better know that the conditions for the abdication were three: 1) Favorable treatment was to be extended to the emperor after abdication in that he would retain his original title of emperor, would be cordially treated by the Republic as the ruler of a foreign country, would be supported in his annual expenses, amounting to four million dollars, by the Republic of China, would continue to live in the palace, be allowed to keep his guards, and be assured of protection for his ancestral temples and the property of the imperial family. 2) Favorable treatment would be extended to the members of the royal family, who could continue to enjoy their hereditary titles, the same privileges as Chinese citizens, protection of their private properties, and exemption from military service. 3) The Manchus, Mongolians, Mohammedans, and the Tibetans were all to have equal rights with the Chinese, to receive protection of their original private property, to enjoy their hereditary titles, and to receive subsidies for the poor. In addition, all of these peoples were to enjoy freedom of worship. All these articles were listed in official documents the contents of which were made known to the foreign ministers in Peking [18].

After these professional scholarship considerations, and this text can be translated accurately, fluently and adequately into English as follows:

We have received from the Empress Dowager Lung-yu an edict as the following:

Because of the uprising by the Army of the People, with the cooperation of the people of the provinces, the one answering the other like an echo, the whole empire is in turmoil and the people have endured much tribulation. I therefore specially appointed Yuan, Shih-k'ai to instruct commissioners to confer with the representatives of the Army of the people about convening a national assembly, at which the future of the government should be decided. For the past two months, there has been a wide divergence of opinion between the north and the south, each strongly maintaining its own view; the general results have been the stagnation of trade and the deployment of troop. As long as the form of government remains undecided, unrest will continue in the country. It is clear that the majority of the people favor the establishment of a republican form of state; the southern and central provinces first held this view, and lately the officers in the north have adopted the same sentiments. This universal

desire clearly expresses the will of Heaven, and it is not for us to oppose the desires and incur the disapproval of millions of the people merely for the sake of the privileges and powers of a single house. It is right that the general situation should be considered and due deference given to the opinion of the people. With the Emperor at my side, I hereby hand over the sovereignty to the people as a whole and declare that the constitution shall henceforth be republican, wishing to satisfy the demands of those within the confines of the country, hating disorder and desiring peace, and anxious to follow the teaching of the sages, according to which the country is the possession of the people. Yuan, Shih-k'ai, having been elected Prime Minister some time ago by the Political Consultative Council, is able at this time of change to unite the north and the south. Let him then, with full power to do so, organize a provisional republican government, conferring therein with the representatives of the army of the people, and that peace may be assured to the people, and that the complete integrity of the territories of the five races- Hans, Manchus, Mongols, Muhammandans, and Tibetans- is the same time maintained in a great state under the title of the Republic of China. The Emperor and I, will retire into a life of leisure, free from public duties, spending our years pleasantly, enjoying the courteous treatment accorded to us by the people, and watching with satisfaction the glorious establishment and consummation of the perfect government [19].

4. Conclusions

As the above you can see, the professional knowledge is very important in translation.

The translators had better have professional knowledge and ability for the translation fields, such as Modern China, Laws and Politics, Finance and Economy, Mass Media, Science and Technology, Environment, and even Ballroom Dancing in each respect so as to be competent in translation. During the process of translation, the interdisciplinary professional knowledge and ability are the most important.

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