

Translation changes everything: theory and practice,
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The book is a collection of articles written by Lawrence Venuti, Professor of English at Temple University, USA. The main body comprises fourteen articles (pp. 11-248) focusing on different aspects of translation studies. It also contains an introduction (pp.1-10) as well as an index (pp.261-271).

The introduction (pp.1-10) gives an overall view of the collection, presents the methodology of the collection and points out that translation changes the meaning, form and effects of the source text and illustrates the point mainly from the social and cultural perspective.

In the first article “Translation, community, utopia” (pp.11-31), the author focuses on the relationship of translation, communication and community. The article begins by revealing the contradiction in translation, which is, the initial purpose of translation is communication but not merely a communicative act. In order to communicate, translators tend to transfer a foreign community into what is acceptable in the target culture, thus shaping the receiving values and institutions, as is argued by the author from the descriptive perspective. The author further emphasizes that such communities not only exist between the source culture and the target culture, but also within the receiving culture. The utopia in translating is that the foreign community can be totally accepted by the domestic culture; however, such idealism cannot be fully attained because the foreign text cannot be utterly intelligible or interesting to the target readers and there are also asymmetry and hierarchy between different cultures. As a consequence, translators should inscribe and focus more on the receiving culture so as to achieve the aim of communication.

The second article is “The difference that translation makes: the translator’s

unconscious” (pp.32-56), it basically talks about one element that has been neglected in translation studies, which is the unconscious of the translator. It puts forward that the difference between the source text and target text outweighs the similarity and it is the former that triggers the unconscious of the translator. Such unconscious involves the omission of the source text, false cognates, translation strategies influenced by sound effects and political ideologies, as proposed by the author. It is highlighted that the unconscious is actually not symptomatic but cognitive because those translators can give appropriate explanations for their unconscious based on contextualization. A shortcoming of this article is put forward by the author afterwards, since his research and analysis are only based on male translators in limited quantity, the action and mental process of female counterparts are not taken in account. Finally, the author urges for more assumptions taken from the psychoanalysis to be investigated in translation studies.

The ensuing article “Translating Derrida on translation: relevance and disciplinary resistance” (pp.57-79) mainly deals with the relevance in translating Derrida from the author’s own experience and furthers perceives the relationship between cultural studies and translation studies. The author begins by posing the marginality of translation, pointing out that the amount of English works translated into other languages is considerably less than that of other works translated into English; the position of translation is relatively low and the translator should negotiate and be cautious for the copyright while translating. The main part of this article presents the disciplinary resistance between cultural studies and translation studies, namely, the cultural studies ignores the materiality while the translation studies ignores the social and philosophical effects. Due to the disparity between the two subjects, Venuti uses abusive fidelity in terms of translating Derrida with an interventionist approach that takes both the cultural and linguistic factors into account, not adopting the relevance in translating but imposes the foreign element on the translated text so that the foreignness of the source text can be retained and the target text readers can have their own interpretation of the source text.

The fourth article “Translating Jacopone da Todi: archaic poetries and modern resistance” (pp.80-95) puts forward Venuti’s opinion on the translation of archaic poetries to modern readers. The relationship between the two is first discussed and it is stressed that using analogue in the translation of archaic poems to modern readers may cause inappropriate reaction for target text readers and that imitation should not be easily used. A comparison of the

translation of Jacopone da Todi, an Italian poet, is made between Beck and Hughes so as to point out the limitation of their translation, namely, it only appeals to readers who have some background knowledge about the poet. At last, the author proposes his translation method of combing the archaic analogue and modern usage and testifies the applicability of the method in the target readers.

“Retranslation: the creation of value” (pp.96-108) is the fifth article, which presents the value of retranslation from three piers, agency, intertextuality and history. In terms of agency, the publishers focus on the readerships for profit while current translators focus on different values than previous translations; as for intertextuality, the retranslation has more intertextual relationship than previous translations concerning readerships; in regard to history, retranslation is closely connected with the historical background of the source text as well as the translations. It is concluded that translation is not a sheer process of communication so that the retranslation is not only related to the historical background, but also it gives a redefinition of the source text, culture and political conditions in different timeframes. By doing so, the foreign culture can be better incorporated into the translating culture.

The sixth article “How to read a translation” (pp.109-115) gives an account of five rules for reading a translation. The readers should appreciate a translation from five aspects: the translator’s preface; the formal features of the translation; the linguistic variations in the translation; the cultural connotations in the translation and the comparison of one translation with other translations. It is believed that reading a translation is a combined act of political resistance to the already rooted publishing practices and cultural resistance to institutions.

The title of next article is “Local contingencies: Translation and national identities” (pp. 116-140), which is all about how translation helps to establish national identity. It is pointed out that translation deals with the linguistic and cultural differences between two languages, so that when those differences are taken into the receiving culture, it will exert impact on the integrity of the targeting language and culture. Some translators may unconsciously impose the customs and institutions of the receiving culture on the source culture in the translating process, thus giving rise to the national identity of the former. Some other translators may consciously introduce foreign ideology in order to enhance the national identity in the receiving culture. No matter what translating strategies are resorted to, the translator’s goals are closely related with the historical background for the sake of establishing and promoting national

identity.

The eighth article “Translation, simulacra, resistance” (pp.141-157) discusses how culture can be utilized to influence political economy through translation. Many translators try to replicate the image of the source text in the translating text or culture, thus imposing the cultural or economic ideology on the readers but the latter may resist such act due to different values among the readership. However, it is argued that such reception is somewhat predictable because readers share the same cultural institution to some extent and readers can be guided to appreciate a translation via different means.

“Translations on the book market” (pp.158-164) probes into the reception of a translation on the selling market and reveals the reason behind the phenomenon. The translation oftentimes cannot arouse the same effect in the translating culture since readers tend to judge one translation based on their own institutions and values, which may be utterly different from the source culture. It is then urged by the author that more foreign works should be translated into English so as to realize the commercial purpose (help the publisher make a profit) and the cultural purpose (make the foreign culture significant in its own right).

“Teaching in translation” (pp.165-172) is the tenth article of this collection, which talks about how translation can be applied in teaching literature rather than how to teach translation well. Equivalence can be perceived as the criterion to judge a translation when translation is used as a means of teaching in the classroom, whether a translation is equivalent should not be emphasized. One source text can be rendered into different pieces because translation is not merely the replication of the source text since translators reproduce it with various personal interpretations, which should be made clear to the readers.

The next article “The poet’s version; or, an ethics of translation” (pp.173-192) concentrates on whether a translation should either be equivalent to the source text or should take the readers into consideration. The analysis is based on the poetry translation and it is pointed out by the author that compared with other literary genres, poetry has been in the peripheral position in terms of translation in many countries. The poet’s translation is often not equivalent to the source text because poets have different cultural background, poetic ideologies and understanding of the source text. Thus, translation is not only de-contextualization but also re-contextualization and it is inevitable that translators impose their own interpretations on the translated work, so that the so-called “dynamic equivalence” cannot be utterly realized. A comparison

between two translations is made and the conclusion is reached: it is not about the ethics of translation – whether the translation should be equivalent to the source text, but whether the translation is considered accepted or successful by the readers.

The twelfth article of this book is titled “Translation studies and world literature” (pp.193-208), it focuses on the relationship between translation and world literature. Since few people can understand more than two languages, the spread of foreign literature depends on translation. However, the canon of the foreign literature is actually determined by translation so that what is deemed to be the canon in the receiving culture may not be the real canon in the foreign culture. It is argued that translation exists in its own right to a large extent since translators exert different inscriptions in the translating process. As a consequence, readers should grasp the acute awareness of understanding both the canon and the way translators interpret it so as to better facilitate their way of appreciating translations.

“Translation trebles: Ernest Farres’s Edward Hopper in English” (pp.209-230) is the thirteenth article, which talks about translating visual signs into verbal texts and cites the example of translating a painting work into an ekphrasis. It is pointed out that, in this sense, translation can be divided into three tiers: the painter interprets his perspective through his own psychology and generates the painting; the author of the source text interprets the idea through the painting and generates the source text while the translator interprets the idea through the source text and generates the translation. Under these circumstances, the judging criterion of translation by readers, commentators or other groups should be changed from seeking equivalence into finding and understanding different interpretive meanings.

The final article of this book is “Towards a translation culture” (pp.231-248), it starts from the standards that editors accept and publish translations and they believe that practice prevails theory. Then this phenomenon is illustrated from two aspects: first, many people believe that translation is belletristic so that theory is often of no use; second, in translation workshop, translation theory is often neglected. It is argued that no matter what translation strategies are adopted in the translating process, they definitely reflect the translator’s theory to a certain degree. The author points out that translator often deviates from the source text and culture and constructs its own values and beliefs in the translation, thus broad knowledge, language competence and so on are required. Finally, the definition of translation culture is put forward, namely,

translation should be done with elegance and subtlety so that it is distinct from the source text, and corresponds to the receiving culture as well.

The features, merits and critiques of this collection are summarized as follows:

Firstly, this book fully illustrates Lawrence Venuti's view on translation. As a translation theorist and practitioner, Venuti believes that translation should be read on its own right and retain the foreign flavor in the meanwhile. The fourteen articles talk about translation from different aspects, such as culture, ideology, equivalence, translation teaching, sales of translation and so on but focuses on the ensuing main arguments: translation is not to seek equivalence between the source text and the target text since translating is an interpretive act, the translators would often impose their own understanding, ideology and cultural awareness on the translated texts; how the translator translate is not influenced by the source culture but the receiving culture.

Secondly, this collection is of high persuasiveness and criticalness. It can be found that most of the examples cited for analysis are based on the author's personal translating experience and project, which makes the argument convincing and critical. Furthermore, some personal email and letter communications between the author and the figures involved in the discussion are also used to back up the author's points.

Thirdly, this collection highly promotes the combination and integration of translation theory with translation practice. According to Gentzler (2011:1), "translation theory is and is not a new field; though it has existed only since 1983 as a separate entry in the *Modern Language Association International Bibliography*, it is as old as the tower of Babel. Some literary scholars claim never to have heard of it as a subject in and of itself; others, who may themselves translate, claim to know all that they need to know", it seems that theory and practice have long been separated from each other. Nevertheless, the author argues that no matter what strategies or methods are used, the translator would impose certain theories on their practice though most of the time, they cannot recognize this on their own. It is highly suggested that theory and practice be analyzed as a whole in translation studies and this collection is a perfect example of doing so.

Last but not least, it can be seen that all the analyses and discussions are based on the translation between English and other western languages, while no examples about translation between English and Chinese or other oriental languages are found, thus limiting the scope and value of the book.

References

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