

SFL, an Empowering Tool for Translation Studies

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Discourse analysis has been adopted as a perspective or method in a number of studies in applied linguistics and translation studies (TS) since the 1970s (cf. Munday 2012, Chapter 6). One of the most influential linguistic theories used for discourse analysis is Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Munday points out that SFL has been the greatest influence in Translation Studies (cf. Munday 2012, Chapter 6) and Fairclough acknowledges that “major contributions to critical discourse analysis have developed out of SFL” (2003: 5) and explains the reasons:

In contrast with the more influential Chomskyan tradition within Linguistics, SFL is profoundly concerned with the relationship between language and other elements and aspects of social life, and its approach to the linguistic analysis of texts is always oriented to the social character of texts... This makes it a valuable resources for critical discourse analysis... (Fairclough 2003: 5)

The link between language and context made explicit in SFL can enable students to be aware of translation choices and make informed

decisions. For example, **Lee** has introduced register analysis to her undergraduate students taking a Korean into English translation course and discusses a number of pedagogical benefits of this approach using the data collected from students' study logs.

There are two other major reasons that explain why SFL has been increasingly adopted as a major theoretical framework in TS. One of them is that it sees meaning as a multi-dimensional phenomenon - experiential, logical, interpersonal and textual. Experiential meaning represents events that we experience internally (e.g. through thinking) or externally (e.g. through doing); logical meaning represents relations created between experiential meanings within a clause complex (sentence); interpersonal meaning represents relations negotiated among interactants or the speaker's positions or evaluation; and textual meaning represents how a text is organised as a coherent linear whole with experiential, logical and interpersonal meanings (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014, Thompson 2014, Martin et al 2010, Eggins 2003). This notion of the different metafunctional modes of meaning has been applied in translator education as a formative assessment tool and proven to be highly effective with both quantitative and qualitative data (Kim 2009). The other reason is that SFL provides analytical tools with which researchers can interpret the different modes of meaning on the basis of lexis and grammar. This is possible because languages are described as a system of choices from a paradigmatic point of view in SFL (cf. Martin 2013).

These features make SFL a powerful tool for researchers in TS as we can explore translation choices, which used to be argued relying on personal opinions or preferences, in each specific mode of meaning systemically based on hard evidence found in texts. This special issue of *The Journal of Translation Studies* is an excellent demonstration of how we can use SFL to understand available translation choices and

how they impact on meaning. **Kim, Heffernan and Jing** are mainly concerned with logical meaning at group level. They have examined how the translators translated embedded clauses that modify Head nouns in the French novel *Le Petit Prince* into Chinese, English and Korean. They present the translation choices of embedded clauses in a system network and discuss the impact these translation choices have on multi-dimensional meanings. **White**, using the multiple translations of the opening to Albert Camus' *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger* or *The Outsider*), demonstrates how the notions of instantiation, realisation and register (Halliday 1994) can be applied to understand the possibility of "a shift of register and hence a shift in the social situation being construed for each translation". He also suggests that the appraisal framework (Martin and White 2005) can be used to analyse "different attitudinal potentials" caused by variation of translation. **Yi and White** explore the mode of interpersonal meaning expressed through interjections in audio-visual translation. Drawing on the detailed analysis of seven different subtitlings of the English-language movie, *The Croods*, into Chinese, they discuss how interpersonal meaning has changed when interjections are omitted in the subtitlings. **Yu and Wu** have analysed the story of Huineng and its four different English translations from the experiential, interpersonal and textual perspectives and found that variation in meaning created by translation shifts leads to the recreation of different images of the same Chan master in different translations.

What is conspicuous in all these papers is that a) they employ specific analytical tools suggested to investigate for specific modes of meaning in SFL; b) they analyse data to understand variation in translation; and c) they interpret the variation in relation to different modes of meaning. This signifies a substantial advance in TS because the arguments put forward are not grounded on arbitrary reasoning

but on data-driven findings. In addition, the findings can be validated as the studies can be repeated with expanded data or different sets of data using the same methods clearly explained within the SFL framework. Even though it is always possible that findings may vary slightly depending on how ambiguous methodological issues have been dealt with in each study, they should be comparable as long as each study provides a clear description of how data have been analysed.

However, it is not always easy to apply SFL in TS due to its nature of complexity and the lack of SFL-based description of target languages. The nature of complexity results from the fact that it does not describe grammar at clause level only with artificially constructed examples that are hardly used in real life but engages in meaning at various ranks including phonology, lexico-grammar, meaning and context with authentic texts used in real life. Therefore, the nature of complexity is inevitable, but there are ways of applying SFL in a manageable and focused way as exemplified in a number of Theme studies (e.g. Kim and Matthiessen 2015). The lack of SFL-based description of target languages is a challenging issue indeed. However, it provides an opportunity to study languages from a new perspective and such typological studies will benefit not only researchers in TS but also those in other fields. For example, Korean was not studied from a functional perspective at all when I embarked on my translation research using SFL in 2003. So I started to describe Korean from an SFL perspective by myself (Kim 2007) and later with my PhD students (Park 2013 and Choi 2013). Now I am working with four other scholars to write a full description of systemic functional grammar of Korean (Kim et al forthcoming), which will be the first of its kind. This is perhaps a meaningful collaboration between the disciplines mutually benefiting each other.

I am grateful that Editor-in-chief Yeong-Houn Yi has taken this valuable initiative to dedicate a special issue for papers on SFL and TS and has collected a number of useful references for those who are interested in conducting translation research drawing on SFL. I hope that this issue inspires many TS researchers in Korea and in other countries so that we can understand the phenomenon called translation, which might be one of the most complicated human activities performed around the world every day.

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