

Study on the Translation Chain of *The Scholars* from the Perspective of Eco-translatology

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Received: 5 September 2022; Accepted: 1 October 2022; Published: 12 October 2022

Abstract:

Ever since Bassnett and Lefevere proposed “cultural turn”, studies on translators’ subjectivity have launched a hot discussion. Chinese scholar Hu Gengshen put forward that translation is no more than translator’s adaptive selection under the circumstance of translational eco-environment. Meanwhile, translators play a guiding role in the process of translation activity. However, the majority of studies placed more attention on the translated texts and their dissemination, ignoring the influence of the whole translation ecological environment. This paper employs some basic notions in the eco-translatology towards the approaches to translation as adaptation and selection theory as well as translation syllogism. This paper will divide the translation activity into three phrases: pre-translation, during-translation and post-translation. It is to be talked about the translator’s adaptation and selection in different stages to see how the translator makes appropriate choices in words, phrases and sentences to adapt to the whole translation ecosystem and realize the harmony of the whole translation ecosystem.

Keywords:

Syllogism, Translation Chain, Eco-translatology, Subjectivity, Adaptation and Selection

1. Introduction

The Scholars is written by Wu Jingzi, a novelist of Qing dynasty. It is a classic work composed of 56 chapters. Each chapter is an independent story and they all share a purpose of presenting the spiritual outlook of various types of scholars, who are obsessed with profit, hypocritical and greedy. *The Scholars* is honored as the classics of ancient Chinese satirical novels, for commenting on current affairs and showing the literati’s mood. It is well-known for its reality and irony [1]. The famous translator Yang Xianyi and his wife Gladys B. Taylor jointed to translate the whole book into English in 1957, which was published by Foreign Language Publishing House shortly after that. This is the only full version of translation in China at present and it is also recognized by the academia as the one closest to the original text. The

translation quality is commendable as well [2]. Up to now, there has been abundant literatures on the English translation of *The Scholars*, most of which are text analysis from the perspective of linguistics and discourse analysis, or focus on translation skills and strategies [3]. Both Wen and Wang proposed three points for improve the dissemination of the English translation of *The Scholars*. First, it is necessary to broaden the research platforms and communication channels. Secondly, research methods are relatively traditional. Therefore, they suggested innovate the research methods. Finally, we are supposed to establish specialized translatology to broaden horizon and contribute to develop the translation and dissemination of classics. Generally speaking, present studies pay little attention to the translator subjectivity and translation ecological environment. For this reason, with the guiding of syllogism in eco-translatology, this article is going to expound translator's adaptation and selection in different stages of the translation development respectively.

2. Syllogism in Eco-Translatology

Translation Syllogism refers to the translation chain in the process of translation activities, which is elaborated as a series of interrelated and interactive links of "before translation (translation preparation)", "during translation (translation behavior)" and "after translation (translation effect)" [4]. No matter it is the activity of "before" or "after" the translation, the translation chain of the translation activity is always inseparable from translator's adaptation and selection. In the adaptation stage, in order to "survive", the translator must be a good reader --- accurately understand the original text; be a good "judge"--- appropriately measure the translation ecological environment; be a good "partner" --- give consideration to all parts cooperatively, such as authors, readers, publishers, sponsors, consignors and translation critics etc. On the other hand, selection stage refers to the stage in which translator selects the translation on the basis of translation ecological environment. From that, a proper translation comes into being. In another word, translation is the product of translator's adaptation and selection, without which, there will be no translation. Humans need to make choices in quite a few aspects, as the only one element with subjective initiative in the circle of "man-text-environment". The translator should make appropriate judgments and choices in domestication or alienation, literal translation or free translation, even the choice of words, the arrangement of discourse structure, the reproduction of the original information, the restoration of the original scene and so on. As the cultural turn sweep the translation circle in full swing, Luo Dijiang (2018) presented that translator-centered theory is the cornerstone of constructing the "people-oriented" translation perspective and called for humanistic care in translation. There is no doubt that it is a good way to promote translators to move from backstage to the screen [5].

3. Translation Chain of the Scholars

The Scholars is known as the peak of satirical novel, carrying classical cultural gene. It is our responsibility to convey all the cultural information into another culture environment. Having sorted the reference, we have found that most research focus on the translation process and the dissemination effect from traditional theories like Skopos Theory, Relevance Theory, Reception Aesthetics and so on. There is no doubt that these studies are in favor of the dissemination of *The Scholars* in the English-speaking world. However, the extent of studies dominantly fails to notice the influence of the elements before and after the translation. According to the Eco-

translatology, translation ecological environment is an intersected wholeness. Therefore, no matter it is in the pre-translation, during-translation or post-translation, each of them is worthy of attention. All of them jointly promote the emergence of the translation product.

3.1. Pre-translation: Adaptive Selection of the Ecological Environment of Source Language

Translation ecological environment refers to the world presented by several parts as source text, target text and target language. In other words, it is represented as a whole of language, communication, culture, society as well as the interaction of authors, readers and clients [6]. The restriction and guidance of translation ecological environment are external, prerequisite and hidden. During the communication between intralingual translation and interlingual translation, the status and thoughts of both sides of the dialogue will affect the choice and recreation of the source text.

The translation of *The Scholars* by Yang and his wife was born in the 1950s, which was also the peak of their translation output. Yang Xianyi and his wife, together with the famous translator Epstein, served as translation experts at the Chinese Foreign Affairs Bureau. One of the main tasks of the bureau is to make an overall plan for the publication of foreign language books and periodicals, and undertake the “active output” of Chinese literature [7]. As a translator of government agencies, Yang Xianyi's magazine "Chinese Literature" is subject to many restrictions in the selection of source texts.

Moreover, as we trace back the history of translation, it can be noticed that at the inception of *The Scholars*, Yan Fu's translation principle “faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance” prevailed in Chinese translation circle, emphasizing the “faithfulness” of the source work. Yang Xianyi stressed in the interview that we must be very faithful to the original text and endeavor to make the meaning of the translation close to the original text as much as possible [8]. His view inherits the understanding of Yan Fu's principle, which is not only a matter of translating Chinese cultural heritage, but also involves faithfully conveying Chinese cultural values and soul. The main task of the Chinese Foreign Language and Culture Bureau, where Yang and his wife belong to, is to publicize Chinese literary and artistic achievements, both ancient and modern, to the outside world and spread Chinese literature to foreign countries with its original flavor. Therefore, under the influence of this “active output” ideology, the outward translation of local literature adopts the foreignization strategy as much as possible and retains the Chinese characteristics of the original work to the greatest extent.

As mentioned above, before the emergence of the translation performance, translators are inclined to be influenced by the translation ecological environment, including the prevailing translation theory, editing and social value orientation. It is worth mentioning that the Yangs are committed to the English translation of Chinese literature and have successively translated many Chinese classics such as *Li Sao*, *A Dream of Red Mansions* and so on. The translator himself has extremely high literary attainments and enthusiasm for the source language culture [9]. Therefore, in the translation of Chinese culture, the translator's literary accomplishment and translation ability also play a significant role.

3.2. During-translation: the Translator's Selective Adaptation of “Three-Dimensional” Translation

Professor Hu divides the process of producing a translation into two stages: natural selection and human selection. Li Yashu and Huang Zhonglian [10] believe that the "adaptation" means that the translator adapts to the "world" presented by the source text, the source language and the target language in the process of translation; "Choice" refers to the translator's understanding of the original text and the final expression of the translation. It can be seen that the translator is constantly making a series of adaptive choices in the translation ecological environment, and his own cultural identity and cultural orientation will inevitably be reflected in his translation choices and translation methods [11]. Meanwhile, the translation ecological environment is composed of multi-dimensional and multi-element elements. The translator's active adaptation and selection in the translation process is also multi-dimensional and multi-level interaction. The translator should not only carry out language conversion, but also take into account the cultural connotation, communicative intention, aesthetic pursuit, psychological implication and other dimensions [12], so as to achieve the "optimal integration adaptation and selection", and realize the "survival" of the translator and the long-term "survival" of the translated products.

The Scholars has always been considered as the "model of vernacular literature", and its language is very distinctive. A single word can even create an image. There are many characters and complex plots in the work and the emotional color of language is changing with each word [13]. In order to reproduce its language style and super high satirical art, Yang and his wife gave full play to their subjective initiative and creativity. They adopt the translation method of "multi-dimensional" transformation to balance the ecological environment and maintain the ecological "balance" between the translation and the original text, for a sake of achieving permanent "survival" of the translation product. The following is a study of the translator's "adaptation" and "choice" towards the ecological environment of translation and the final expression of the translation from the specific operational levels of the three-dimensional transformation of eco-translatology: language dimension, culture dimension and communication dimension [14].

3.2.1. Transformation of Language Dimension

The transformation of language dimension refers to the translator's adaptive choice and transformation of language forms in the process of translation. There are great differences in language expression between English and Chinese. Chinese is a language with parataxis and it pays more attention to semantic connection. It is a high-context language. However, English is a language based on hypotaxis, which requires higher morphological changes and accuracy of expression. Therefore, the translator needs to make corresponding choices in the aspects of part of speech selection, parataxis and hypotaxis transformation, and language structure adjustment to ensure the original meaning is accurately conveyed to the target language readers. For example:

1. 三十年河东，三十年河西，莫欺少年穷。（第四十六回）

For thirty years people east of the river prosper, then for the thirty years those on the west.
(杨译)

We mainly analyze the adaptation and choice of translators from the perspective of narrative language strategies.

According to historical records, in ancient time, due to the high riverbed of the Yellow River, people are plagued by disasters as serious sediment deposition, unstable river course and frequent flooding. Therefore, the Yellow River often changed its course, and the place originally in the east of the river may have changed to the west of the river. This sentence is often used to describe the ups and downs of personnel. The Yu family in the original book was once a prominent family in Wuhe County. However, though Yu Huaxuan was full of knowledge, instead of concentrating on the imperial examination, he always complained that he was born in this vulgar place and did not want to make progress. Yu, described by the author, is despicable and vengeful and plays tricked on Cheng for twice.

The original work is good at using implicit language to euphemistically express the true meaning of author, and adding dialect slang to highlight the ironic and humorous effect. The translator tries to echo the language structure of the original text and choose similar syntactic forms. At the same time, in order to take care of the habits of target language readers, the verb "prosper" is added and pronoun word "those" is employed to replace "people". The translation technique of "literal translation + interpretation" is adopted to show the metaphorical reference to the target language readers, so that the readers can quickly grasp the deep meaning of the original text through the lines.

There are also similar expressions in the target language culture, such as "ill-gotten goods never prosper", which means that "unjust acts make a fortune". However, if the original text is translated as "don't bull a poor boy", although it can be seen at a glance, it deprives the target language readers of the pleasure of "decoding" the text information. Therefore, the translator tries to retain the writing skills of the source language in the language dimension, so that the target language readers can get the same experience as the source language readers do.

2. 须臾，浓云密布，一阵大雨过了。那黑云边上，镶著白云，渐渐散去，透出一派日光来，照耀得满湖通红。（第一回）

Suddenly, dense clouds gathered, and there was a heavy shower of rain. Then the black storm clouds fringed with fleecy white drifted apart, and the sun shone through, bathing the whole lake in crimson light. (杨译)

The original Chinese text is written in one go with four verbs used in succession to vividly depict the distinctive scenery of sunny days after rain. However, in English, the expression habit is just the opposite. There can only be one predicate verb in a complete sentence, and it must conform to the grammatical rules. Thus, the translator added "then", "with", "and", used "fringed" and "shone" as the main predicate verbs. Other verbs were converted into past participles and non-restrictive attributive clauses. This is more conform to the habit of more nouns and fewer verbs in English. Consequently, the organic combination of the original text and the translated text is realized, so that the translated text is in accord with the expression habits of the target language and the adaptive choice is realized from the semantic, syntactic structure, style and other language levels.

The Scholars is a typical chapter novel, which has created hundreds of characters with distinctive personality. There are few fixed protagonists running through it, which manifest the characteristics of "scattered form but not scattered spirit". Such a huge structure and artistic features are difficult for ordinary readers in the English world to understand. In the process of language conversion, the translator should not only follow the narrative mode of the source language as much as possible, but also

take into account the language expression of the target language readers, so as to find a balance between the two language structures. The essence of adaptive selection at the syntactic level in the process of literary translation is to explicitly deal with the implicit logical relations, such as number, case, aspect, form, tense, etc. Sentence pattern conversion, tense and voice compensation, noun and plural are all adaptive choices at the syntactic level.

3.2.2. Transformation of Cultural Dimension

Different from the linguistic dimension, the cultural dimension pays more attention to the adaptability of the cultural connotation of the source language, which means that the translator must have a sound cultural background in the translation to overcome the obstacles caused by cultural differences and ensure the smooth realization of information exchange.

Literary works are the epitome of an era and society. Many cultural characteristic words are missing in the target language culture. Therefore, during the translation, we should fix attention on the accurate transmission of the deep-rooted cultural thoughts of cultural characteristic words to the readers. Eco-translatology holds that "translation is no more than text transplantation" [15]. While the text in one language ecosystem is transplanted into another language ecosystem, the survival status in the target language ecological environment and whether it can achieve "regeneration" are also worthy of attention. For example:

3. 又一会，一个问道：“可是李清照？”有一个问道：“可是苏若兰？”又一个拍手道：“原来真是朱淑真！”马二先生道：“这些甚么人？料是不管功名的了，我不如去罢。”（第十四回）

“Is it Li Qingzhao?” asked one.

“Is it Su Ruolan?” asked another.

“No!” cried a third, and clapped his hands. “It is Zhu Shuzhen.”

“Whoever these spirits may be.” thought Ma Chunshang, “I doubt if they determined official careers. I had better be going.” (杨译)

Li Qingzhao", "Su Ruolan" and "Zhu Shuzhen" in the original text all are names that familiar to Chinese readers, but they are quite unfamiliar to the target readers who lack of "cultural commonality". If transliteration is directly adopted, it will only be some symbols for the target readers, and they do not know what it means. Therefore, the translator adopts the method of "transliteration + endnote", which eliminates the reading obstacles of the target readers and offer them better understandings of the text, for the sake of realizing the "regeneration" of the original text in the target language ecology.

Due to the drastic differences between Chinese and English culture, address terms vary greatly. In Chinese, the appellations are complex and rich, including kinship appellation, special appellation and social appellation which reflects the relationship between people in social life. According to Chinese custom, people are often called by the way of surname plus number to show kindness. In the original work, Mr. Ma Er's original name is Ma Chunshang. When translating appellations, according to the habits of target language, the translator is inclined to change the expression to reduce uncomfortable feelings of target readers. Thus, the translator chooses to conform with western way of address, using his full name.

4. 王冕擗踊哀号，哭得那邻舍之人，无不落泪。又亏秦老一力帮衬，制备衣衾棺槨。王冕负土成坟，三年苦块，不必细说。（第二回）

Wang Mian mourned and swept so bitterly that all the neighbors shed tears. Old Qin helped him prepare burial cloth and coffin, while he himself carried earth to make the grave. For three years he mourned. (杨译)

The original text describes the funeral rites and customs after the death of Wang Mian's mother. With the help of old Qin, Wang Mian bought a shroud and coffin for his mother. In China, relatives should take off dead people's old clothes and help them wear new clothes before they die, which is also named as "longevity clothes". According to the traditional Chinese culture, the deceased can walk the last journey in the "shroud". Otherwise, they will be considered to left the world in naked. Thus, their relatives and friends will feel sorry and guilty. Burying the earth to build a grave is regarded as an act of filial piety. It is recorded in a book of the later Han Dynasty, the chapter of Heng Rong. Wang Mian, a filial son carried earth to build the grave for three years after his mother's death. He slept with straw as a mat and earth as a pillow.

In the original text, the author quoted the story of Hengrong from the classics. When it comes to what Wang Mian had done, the source language readers are able to associate with the classics, sensing his filial piety through simple words. However, for readers of target language, who are short of background knowledge, they may not grasp the cultural connotation beyond the text. Therefore, when dealing with these social and folk information, Yang Xianyi adopted free translation to present the funeral scene in plain language in order to avoid "acclimatization" of the original text in the target language culture.

3.2.3. Transformation of Communication Dimension

Communicative intention plays an important role in cultural communication. In addition to the transformation of linguistic information and the transmission of cultural connotation, the translator should also pay attention to the communicative level and whether the communicative intention of the original text is reflected in the translation. *The Scholars* is the peak of modern Chinese satirical novels. It deeply exposes and criticizes the current social situation and the fate of contemporary scholars through a large number of comparisons, exaggerations and detailed descriptions. Lu Xun's evaluation towards *the Scholars* is "upholding impartiality and criticizing the shortcomings of the era" [16]. Communicative dimension refers to the choice and adaptation at the pragmatic level, which involves the question of whether the language environment and the way of expression are appropriate.

5. 严贡生骂掌舵的道：“放你的狗屁！你这奴才！猪八戒吃人参果，全不知滋味！说得好容易！是云片糕！你这奴才，害我不浅！”（第六回）

"You dog!" roared Yan, "you had no business touching it, you scoundrel! Walnut wafers, indeed! You've played me a dirty trick, you dog!" (杨译)

Yan Gongsheng in the source text is a fake scholar who is greedy for fame. His academic degree was bought with a large amount of money. When he learned that the boatman had eaten his own yunpian cake, he pretended to find medicine which was made of precious medical materials. He boasted that he had spent a lot of money on it and threatened to send boatman to the official. The boatman was very frightened. In fact, Yan Gongsheng employed this method to escape the boat money on purpose. It can be seen that although Yan Gongsheng has the name of a Confucian scholar, he is

a real villain. Therefore, the translator chose "You dog!", "You score!" and "Walnut wafers" to translate the original text. The language structure is short and powerful, which not only conforms to Yan Gongsheng's status of being ignorant and unskilled, but also highlights his mood of desperation. Through a few short phrases, the readers of the target language have felt the strong feelings expressed by him, and realized the adaptation of the translation to the ecological environment of the target language translation in the communication dimension.

3.3. *Post-translation: Coexist and Survives*

The Scholars is the classic of Chinese ancient satirical novels. Domestic scholars have discussed Yang's translation from the aspects of language, translation strategy and cultural information. However, the English translation has not attracted corresponding attention in the English World [17]. In addition to the full translation of Mr. and Mrs. Yang, there are also partial versions. *The Scholars* was first ushered into the English world in 1940. Professor Ge Chuanmin translated the first chapter into English, which was published in the English magazine by the University of Chicago. The following decades were important periods for the development of translation and introduction. The second scholar contributing to the translation and dissemination of *The Scholars* was Xu Zhenping. He translated the fifty-fifth chapter, which was published in the English magazine *T'ien Hsia Monthly* in 1940. Until 1957, the first full translation was officially published by the foreign language press, C T. Hsia (1968) [18] and Iihor Pidhainy (1993) [19] successively reviewed the book and gave high comments on its cultural connotation and writing skills. However, according to relevant statistics, since the reprint of the American press in the 1970s, no other press has reprinted or reprinted it.

The Yang's version of *the Scholars* is mainly stored in the libraries of British and American universities, and the publication and circulation are very small [20]. We searched the most authoritative CNKI and related online platforms such as Amazon and Goodreads, and found that the readers and comments of the translation are very small. Thus, we can draw the conclusion that it has not really made an impact on the English-speaking world. The translation of classical literature has always attracted quite a few translators, but it has never formed a real Chinese discourse system. Therefore, the existing translation studies and the exploration of dissemination effects will be conducive for us to understand how to meet the needs of Western readers.

Natural ecology advocates "coexistence and survival of the fittest". When it comes to translation, the classics are indelible. However, if the classics are to be perpetuated, it requires the persistence of generation by generation in another cultural background. Therefore, which works need to be retranslated and how to retranslate need to be studied from the perspective of ecological translation to make classics last forever.

4. Conclusions

Based on the "ecological chain" perspective of ecological translation, we need to recognize that literary works are the epitome of national culture and the life of the times. We need to think about which works need to go out and what translation strategies should be adopted. In the practice based on adaptive selection, in order to better convey the artistic situation of the original work and give consideration to the aesthetic experience of the readers, the translator needs to consider the differences in

cultural habits, language forms and structures between languages, so as to ensure that the translation is smooth and the cultural transmission is in place.

Since it comes into being, *The Scholars* by Mr. Yang Xianyi has carried the mission and responsibility of Chinese culture to go out. Foreign readers can explore the Chinese Modern Satirical Art and traditional culture through its translation. Language is changing over time and new items emerged. Therefore, the translation also needs to be updated to adapt to the readers in the new era.

Eco-translatology is an interdisciplinary product. Based on this theory, this paper evaluates the English translation of *The Scholars* from three stages of translation: pre-translation, during-translation and post-translation. Through the analysis, we can find that the best translation is the result of the translator's multi-dimensional adaptation and adaptive selection to the translation ecological environment. The whole translation ecosystem is an interconnected and interactive wholeness, and each subsystem is intertwined and difficult to be separated. In particular, the translation of Chinese literary classics is aimed at telling the Chinese story and transmitting the Chinese voice. In the specific translation process, ignoring the translator's multiple adaptation choices in the translation ecological environment may break the balance of the translation system and fail to achieve the "regeneration" and "prosperity" of the translated works in the target language environment.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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