

# TOWARDS A MORE SOCIO-CULTURAL APPROACH TO TEACHING CHINESE TRANSLATION CLASSES

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## Abstract

This study is based on the Baker's (2008) suggested processes of translation and together with her narrative and *framing* theory using *lexical priming* and *implicature* to show how a translated text can be re-framed by the translator from different perspectives. The main problem, generally, is that the translation process has traditionally been taught as mastering the mechanics of translation in terms of the linguistic elements. It is suggested that in addition to the linguistic aspect, the translation of a text should be set in its political, cultural and social context. This study uses a contemporary report--the 'Snowden Case', to illustrate how the addition of *narrative* and *framing theory* can shape and re-focus a translated text. It is felt that such an approach will be beneficial for English and Chinese foreign language learners to gain a better understanding about the teaching of translation in Chinese classrooms and indeed elsewhere.

**Key words:** translation class, narrative and framing, lexical priming, socio-cultural background.

## Introduction

Translation is a communicative activity implying a cultural context, and pursuing a certain purpose or goal. This purpose determines the translation method and strategies to be used in order to produce a functionally adequate translation. Moreover, translation takes place in a concrete, definable

situation which is limited in time and space and involves members of different cultures.

This study aims to illustrate how to improve the present translation classes in China through applying a methodology for translation together with narrative and framing theories outlined by Baker (2008), as well as Hoey's (2005) concept of 'lexical priming' and Grice's (1975) 'implicature' in order to help students move beyond the basic level of the traditional translation class.

### **Translation in the traditional Chinese classroom**

A typical translation class in China will often begin with an outline of the translation techniques to be employed and then applied to selected texts taken from for example *Selected Modern Chinese Prose Writing* (2002). The translation in the textbook is then given to students and they are asked to compare their own translation texts with the model translation. Finally the teacher gives some related suggestions and feedback to students and repeats and reinforces some crucial points Xu (2003).

Consequently for most teachers and students the focus is on the linguistic level of translation. If 'omission' is being discussed, as in the example: *The more he tried to hide his mistakes, the more he revealed them.* 他越是想要掩盖他的错误, 就越是容易暴露。The teacher will then explain that *he* appears twice in English, but is only required once in Chinese translation. The teacher would then show another example 请把那张旧画取下来扔掉 and emphasize that the pronoun is omitted in Chinese then the students would be asked to translate it themselves and then shown the translation in the textbook: *Please take off the old picture and throw it away.* Generally the teacher will give feedback based on how close the student's translation is to the translation in the textbook. The closer the translation is to the textbook, the higher the mark given. Many of the texts chosen by teachers for students to practice are from well known textbooks, articles, and other various other sources. There seems to be little discussion as to the background of these texts. Too often the translation class is more of a linguistic exercise without any functional purpose and the texts are either presented in total isolation from their context or with minimal context (Jingjue Shu, 2011).

### A brief overview of the main approaches to translation.

Translation is an intercultural transfer within which communicative verbal and nonverbal signs are transformed from one language to another. In order to accomplish this kind of transfer, a good knowledge of the source and target culture is needed and the translator, as a participant in intercultural communication, has to act as an intercultural expert. According to Nord (1997), translating means comparing cultures that is, interpreting source-culture phenomena in the light of the translator's own knowledge of that culture. Such cross-cultural translation studies are useful and necessary for the learners of a language as potential avenues as to how other people see the world.

Translation is a challenging activity and there are many difficulties that emerge throughout the translation process since every language portrays the world in diverse ways and has its own structure. For example, in Chinese there are virtually no words that can be described as exclusively as a *noun*, *verb*, or *adjective*. So *wo hua*, hua (I draw a picture) *hua* is both the verb *draw* and the noun *picture*. Moreover, the difficulty in translation lies in the fact that both the content and the style are already existent in the original and as a result, translators have to do their best to reshape them as they are in quite a different language.

What makes Baker's (2008, 2010) work interesting is that in addition to the linguistic aspects of translation, she draws on her approach to narrative theory by outlining some of the strengths of this approach compared with other current approaches against a backdrop of the specific context and the situation involved. Narrative theory allows students and the general reader to consider the immediate narrative elaborated in the text being translated and the larger narratives in which the text is embedded. This allows us to see translation choice not merely as linguistic challenges but as contributing directly to the narratives that shape our world. As can be illustrated in the following example: *The Tiananmen Massacre* can be translated as *The Tiananmen Incident* or the *Tiananmen Protests*.

A focus on narrative also allows us to move beyond the longstanding preoccupation in translation studies with examining regular patterns of choices, in the translation. Such an approach is what is termed 'norm theory'

(Toury, 1995). Toury saw norms as performance instructions for translators and distinguished different kinds of norms operating at different stages of the translation process. Preliminary norms govern the choice of what to translate in the first place; the initial norm steers the translator either toward preserving as much as possible of the original or toward producing a well-formed new text. Various operational norms guide decision making during the actual business of translating, with a matrix of norms regulating the macrostructure of the text and textual linguistic norms affecting microstructures. The relevance of norms in this outlook is that the sum of the choices made by the translator determines the shape of the end product and hence not just the nature of the relation between the translation and its proto-text but also the way the translation is likely to be perceived by the audience for which it is intended (Hermans 2013).

Another popular approach to translation is the work of Venuti (1993) who made a distinction between ‘foreignising’ (an English text reading like a Chinese text) and ‘domesticating’ (making a Chinese text sound very English). This has the effect of obscuring the intricate way in which translators shift positions within the same text as translators negotiate their way around various priorities and challenges (Baker 2010).

In Baker’s own theoretical framework, the notion of ‘framing’ is closely connected to the concept of narrative. “Frame” overlaps with but is sufficiently distinct from that of *narrative* to be helpful as a complementary tool of analysis—especially in terms of demonstrating how the ‘same’ narrative may be framed in very different ways by different narrators. But frames also double up as narratives in their own right; we might think of the interaction between frames and narratives in term of a set of nested or recursive relations. What narrative theory requires us to do instead is to think of individual choices of the translator as part of a larger picture that is embedded in and contributes to the elaboration of concrete political reality (Baker, 2010). So translators and interpreters working in Chinese and English would be aware that the 1997 events in Hong Kong can be referred to as either *The Handover of Sovereignty*, the standard reference in English, or (literally) as *The Return of the Motherland*, the standard reference in Chinese.

## Methodology

### The Linguistic Framework

As indicated the model used in this study is based on Baker (2008) in terms of the linguistic elements involved as well as the ‘narrative’ context and the ensuing ‘frame’ in which the texts are embedded.

The first stage is *equivalence at word level* involving for example: the lexical meaning, non-equivalence, semantic field and loan words. The second is *equivalence above word level* in terms of collocations, idioms and fixed expressions. The third concerns *grammatical equivalence*. This part includes the structure of words, and the grammatical structure of group, clauses, and sentences. The fourth is about *textual equivalence in thematic and information structures* that the translator should organize to help order the information, and control the information flow so as to make the text accessible in the target language. The fifth concerns *cohesion in the target texts*. Cohesion refers to the relation between the lexical and the grammatical aspects which provide links between the various parts of the text. Finally *pragmatic equivalence* is a study of the language in use. It is a study of meaning, not generated by the linguistic system but conveyed and manipulated by the participants in a communicative situation involving both cohesion and coherence.

### Applying Baker’s concept of ‘narrative’, ‘framing’ and ‘lexical priming’.

For Baker, the tension between dominance and resistance in translated texts is often played out discursively, and the interplay between the two can produce a range of choices that are difficult to reduce into specific types of strategies. In the real world, especially in situations of conflict or potential conflict, translators vary their strategies often in order to pursue specific goals rather than adhere to abstract principles or textual formats. The term ‘narrative’ as used here relates more to strands of social and communicative theory. ‘Narrative’ is used interchangeably with ‘story’: that is narratives are stories we tell ourselves and others about the world in which we live, and it is belief in these stories that guides actions in the real world. Thus Baker makes use of the concept of “framing” to show the ‘same’ narrative can be framed in different ways by different narrators.

Looking at the recent media reports of the ‘Snowden Case’ offers a good example to illustrate the point that translation is not simply a word for word process, or sentence by sentence, but a channel to present a view of the world through another language. The ‘Snowden Case’ will be used in this study to illustrate how different countries perceive this issue from quite different points of view based on their own benefits and interests. The point being that with regards to the teaching of translation in the classroom, a simple linguistic explanation of what is involved may not be enough. It will be argued that the narrative setting and the framing in the context of culture and situation need to be fore-grounded partly through as ‘lexical priming’ or the way in which a word or phrase becomes accumulatively loaded within the context. Added to this is ‘implicature’ which can be seen as part of lexical priming in so far as it refers to the underlying meaning that carries the message.

## The ‘Snowden Case’

### The background

The 2013 global surveillance disclosures refer to numerous media reports beginning in June 2013 which revealed operational details of the US National Security Agency (NSA) and its international partners’ [mass surveillance](#) of foreign nationals as well as US citizens. The series of reports emanated from a cache of top secret documents leaked by ex-NSA contractor Edward Snowden. On 6 June 2013, the first set of documents was published simultaneously by *The Washington Post* and *The Guardian* UK, attracting considerable public attention.

Snowden gave a cache of documents to two journalists: Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras. Greenwald later estimated that the cache contains 15,000 – 20,000 documents, some very large and very detailed, and some very small. In over two subsequent months of the released of the publications, it became clear that the NSA had operated a complex web of spying programs which allowed it to intercept internet and telephone conversations from over a billion users from dozens of countries around the world. Specific revelations were made about China, the European Union, Latin America, Iran and Pakistan, and Australia and New Zealand. However the published

documentation revealed that many of the programs indiscriminately collected bulk information directly from central servers and the internet.

So for example part of the text from, *The New York Times*, reporting on the Snowden Case read as follows:

Mr. McConnell said in an interview last year that the United States was not using its full capabilities to address threats from foreign cyber attacks because of privacy concerns. “If you harness all the capabilities of our nation, you could have a better understanding of foreign threats,” he said. “But what makes it hard is that everyone has an opinion. There’s very little appreciation for the threat, and there are so many special interests, particularly civil liberty groups with privacy concerns. That mix keeps us from getting to the crux of the national issue.”

The text from *China Daily* (translated by the researcher):

Every country makes decisions in accordance with their respective national interests and capacity. We rarely comment on the United States moral evaluation, but the United States has always liked to accuse others placed the moral high ground. The exposure of “Prism” is the evidence of the double standards. For the United States, whether it is “hard power”, “soft power” or “smart power”; whether it is so-called human rights, democracy output, or “network freedom”, what is behind the frequent changes are merely two words: American expediency.

Comparing the texts about Snowden Case, it can be seen that the wording they chose and the attitudes they have are quite different according to their standpoints. The tone and wording in *China Daily* are relatively negative and judgmental and focuses on the nature of politics and diplomatic policies through the affair of Snowden to criticize the behavior of the United States. From the perspective of the U.S government, Snowden is regarded as someone who has exploited his position for his own private concerns because of his lack of real understanding about what is needed to protect the people and the country at large. Narratives are basically stories that we come to subscribe to and therefore shape our behavior towards other people and events in which we are embedded. What we have here is a list of happenings:

they are stories that are temporally and causally constituted in such a way as to allow us to be aware of the different perspectives that can be taken in the real world.

### Examining the issue further.

The example used here is from the *China Jiefang Daily* but in the original research articles were also taken from *China Daily* and *Renmin Daily* (Zhong 2014). The focus of this part of the research was to see how the Chinese press presented the Snowden Case and how the discourse of the texts was used to present a particular point of view.

### Text I

2013年6月18日 稿件来源：解放日报

白宫，请给个靠谱的说法

美国“棱镜门”的外溢效应正不断扩大。16日,英国《卫报》公开斯诺登提供的机密文件显示,英国2009年主办G20时,偷偷把“听筒”伸向了俄罗斯,土耳其和南非,监听监控这些国家首脑的电话记录和邮件信息。另一方面,美国的所作所为,也引发欧盟国家不满,德国总理默克尔公开要求奥巴马“澄清此事”。

全世界都等着美国给个说法,华盛顿方面倒也并非完全无动于衷。继连日来抛出“不针对国民论”,“反恐必要论”之后,又有部分美国政要展开了天马行空的想象力,描述起“阴谋论”,称斯诺登可能与中国政府“合作”,可能是“中国间谍”。美国是个法治国家,断案论事通常都是要讲证据的遗憾的是,一到事关所谓“国家安全”,法治精神往往被抛诸脑后,“有罪推定”却大行其道。“中国间谍”的论调其实并不陌生,当年喧嚣一时的“李文和案”,后来又是如何收场的?



仔细观之,“棱镜门”事发一周有余,美国政府始终以如簧巧舌,扮演着“解释者”的形象——它论泄密之危害,辩反恐之实效,泼别国以脏水,转天下之视线,而唯独对自身网络霸权讳莫如深,对侵犯人权遮遮掩掩,对核心问题不加触及.而且值得注意的是,美国似乎只热衷于解本国人民之疑虑,再三强调“棱镜”并不针对其隐私,而对侵犯国际社会公民权益这一劣迹,却祭出“反恐”“安全”的大旗加以掩饰,迟迟不愿拿出个说法.如果任由这种卸责而非内省的解释继续下去,“棱镜”恐怕只会愈擦愈黑;越描越亮的,是美国“网络侵略者”的形象。

所幸的是,美英的一些主流媒体对“棱镜”事件已经有所反思.英国《经济学人》最新一期刊发封面文章指出,政府负有保护公民安全的责任,谍报行动原本无可厚非,但谍报行动应以“知情同意”而不是绝对“委托信任”为基础.政府应适时公布并接受公开监督,以避免官员以保守秘密为幌子滥用职权.美国《纽约时报》社论同样指出,公众需要一个解释:一个滥权的情报界是如何把公众信任推到悬崖边缘的。

的确,是时候需要一种规制,来对游走于权力制高点的信息霸权加以约束和监督.这种规制应该在联合国范围运作,被国际社会所共同认可.更为重要的是,必须认清网络世界是一个“命运共同体”,需要的是开放包容与合作,唯有摒弃冷战思维,才可能实现信息安全与共享,才可能最大限度保障公民自由和权利不受侵犯.美国要做到这点,恐怕困难犹存.美《外交杂志》近日称,美国安局旗下“定制入口行动办公室”入侵中国网络长达15年,美国政府面对媒体求证始终拒绝公开置评.彭博社15日援引消息人士的话说,上千家科技,金融,制造业公司正与美国国家安全部门合作,向其提供敏感信息,同时获得机密情报,这些项目的参与者被称为“可信合作伙伴”,范围远超“棱镜”计划.美国的明火执仗,一意孤行,最终只会给国际社会带来不安,甚至引发“第五空间”的军备竞赛,勿谓言之不预。

**The English version** (*translated by the researcher*).

*The underlined sections of the text are examples of **lexical priming** and **implicature**.*

*June 18, 2013. Published by Jiefang Daily*

White House, Please Give us a Reasonable Explanation

The spillover effect of American (PRISM) is expanding. In 16<sup>th</sup> June, *the Guardian*, a British newspaper, showed the secret files offered by Snowden, that when the G20 Summit was held in Britain in 2009, the “listening devices” had been used widely to monitor the telephone records and E-mail messages of the heads of the states in Russia, Turkey and South Africa. On the other hand, some EU countries are not satisfied with the behavior of America. Angela Merkel, the prime minister of Germany, publicly demanded Obama’s clarification of the matter. America was not completely indifferent to this matter because so many countries were waiting for an explanation. After the so-called “Not For Nationals” “Antiterrorism”, some American politicians even came up with ridiculous idea of “Conspiracy”, that Snowden may cooperate with Chinese government and act as a Chinese spy. America should be a country ruled by law, so evidence should be taken into consideration for settling lawsuits with facts. However, the pity is that the spirit of rule of law has been left behind and “Presumption of guilty” is always been propagated on a large scale when so-called “national security” is concerned. In fact, the remarks of “Chinese Spy” are similar to “the case of Li Wenhe” which had been controversial for a time, but finally what happened to the end?

America kept a very plausible tongue all along even although PRISM occurred more than one week ago there was still evidence of a defensive attitude with the danger of breach of confidence, emphasizing the effect of antiterrorism, slandering other countries and diverting peoples’ attention from America’s own faults. In contrast, it carefully concealed mentioning its own internet hegemony, covered up violation of human rights and never touched core problems. What also should be mentioned is that it seemed that America was only keen on reassuring its own nationals and repeatedly emphasized that PRISM never aimed at the privacy of nationals. They resorted to “terrorism”, “security” to cover the misdeed of violations of international civil rights and were not reluctant to come up with an

explanation for this behavior. American (PRISM) will become more and more suspicious if America keeps passing the buck instead of self-examination, in the contrast, what will become much clearer is the image of Network invader

Fortunately, for “Prism”, some mainstream media of the United States and Britain are re-thinking the situation. The cover of the latest published article in “The Economist” of Britain pointed out the government’s responsibility is to protect the security of citizens, so the espionage action is reasonable to some extent, but it should be on the “informed consent” base rather on the “absolute delegation trust”. The Government should make timely announcements and accept publicly supervision in order to avoid abuse of power under the guise of keeping national secrets. The United States, “New York Times” editorial also pointed out that the public needs an explanation: how the intelligence community filled with abuse of power pushed the public trust to the edge.

Indeed, it is time to make regulations to constrain and supervise the information hegemony which outmatches the commanding heights of power. These regulations should be run within the scope of the United Nations and be recognized by the international society. More importantly, it should be recognized that the online world is a “community of destiny”, so openness, tolerance and cooperation will be the basis. Only to abandon the Cold War mentality, it may achieve information security and sharing in order to maximize the protection of civil liberties and rights. If America wants to follow that concept, the difficulties still remain. United States’ diplomatic magazines recently showed that Specific Access Operations under the United States National Security Bureau’s has invaded Chinese network for 15 years, however, the U.S. government refused to face the media comments publicly. Bloomberg said that thousands of technologies, finance, manufacturing companies were working with the U.S. national security sectors to provide sensitive information, and get confidential information. The participants in these projects are called “trusted partners”. The impact is far beyond the scope of “prism” program. America’s blatant and bent behavior will eventually bring unrest to the international community, and even lead to the space arms race.

### **How lexical priming shapes the ‘framing’ of the text in the ‘narrative’ process.**

As indicated, to merely focus of the linguistic level of translation is insufficient. Narrative theory as applied in this example shows how certain ‘prime’ words or phrases shape the way the Chinese text would be translated into English.

The choice of ‘wordings’ such as Hoey’s (2005) *lexical priming* and Grice’s (1975) *implicature* means that certain words/phrases become cumulatively loaded in the context in which they are encountered. The repetition and underlying meaning of such words/phrases such as: *indifferent, ridiculous, conspiracy, to cover the misdeeds of violations, invader, Cold War mentality, invaded, blatant and bent* are but a few examples of the prosody that is built up like waves passing through the discourse to present a very negative view of, in this case, and the general dissatisfaction from China’s point of view of the United States justification of the PRISM program.

### **Pedagogical implications**

This example of the analysis of the Snowden Case gives an additional perspective on process of translation than the more traditional linguistic focused one commonly used in Chinese classrooms. Translation, it is argued, is not merely a linguistic process, but can also involve political and social impact on diplomacy strategies, international relations as well as in several other aspects of the socio-cultural environment in which we live. Indeed, it is through translation that learners will eventually be able to become acquainted with the a wider world of economics, politics, science and technology in a comprehensive way. The translation of language allows learners to open the doors to a different cultural and linguistic world. For example translation can shed light on the culture, politics, and religion as reflected in the language within a given context. In such an approach to the process of learning how to translate from one language to another becomes not only linguistic but socio-cultural, in that it allows the learners to think beyond the text and see what can be implied in the reframing of the discourse through the re-‘wording’ of the text.

### To summarize

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Lexico-grammatical level    | <i>Context of texts from historical, cultural and political aspects</i>   |
|                             | Equivalence at word level   |
|                             | Equivalence above word level  |
|                             | Grammatical equivalence   |
|                             | Textual equivalence   |
|                             | Pragmatic equivalence   |
| Narrative and framing level | How the translation is shaped from the translator's perspective and how it can be re-framed from other perspectives from different focuses. |

### Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to propose Baker's translation theory as a 'model' for what might be possible in a Chinese translation class. This involves an analysis from two levels: the traditional grammatical level, which is widely used in translation classes in universities but often lacks an introduction and understanding of contexts such as cultural, political and social factors. Secondly, the narrative and framing level, which this study focused on as possible re-contextualization or re-framing of the text. Point made here is that translation is not only beneficial to learners because it enriches their linguistic knowledge but also makes them aware of how texts can be re-shaped when the translated text is seen from another narrative and framing point of view depending on the focus of the translator. Since language is a vehicle to communicate ideas and choices are made by the translator, the language itself reflects the often underlying ideologies being used. For example the use of expressions, wording selection (*implicature*), and repetitive use of same word such as *hegemony*, *so-called* reinforces the readers' perception and perspectives as portrayed by the translators. Such an awareness of how translation is and can be used is important to move beyond the purely linguistic level. It is hoped, therefore, that the steps and methods outlined in this study can make a positive contribution to translation as part of the process of teaching and learning in the classroom.

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