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A Study on Translation Methods in Yu Bufan's Version of *Sherlock Holmes Series* From the Perspective of Skopos Theory: A Case Study of *A Study in Scarlet*

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Abstract

Sherlock Holmes Series as a prominent detective novel has many Chinese translation editions. Among the numerous versions, Yu Bufan's version is the first single-translator-finished translation of complete works of *Sherlock Holmes Series* in the history of the Chinese *Sherlock Holmes Series*' translation. He states that this version pursues the beauty of words. By studying the first volume *A Study in Scarlet*, this paper analyzes the four translation methods applied in this translation version including imitation, free translation, literal translation and idiomatic translation. And this paper is focused on deducing the intention and the effect of using these translation methods under the guidance of three rules of skopos theory. The conclusion is drawn that skopos theory can guide translators' translation activities. By choosing different translation methods, the translation is full of language beauty and can be well-accepted by its target readers.

Key words: Skopos theory; Translation methods; *Sherlock Holmes Series*; Yu Bufan

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INTRODUCTION

Sherlock Homes Series is one of the most famous detective novels written by English novelist, Conan Doyle. It has won popularity by worldwide readers for its plots with twists and turns, inferences full of logic and distinct personalities of the characters. Since the novel was first introduced into China in 1896, it has been a marvelous miracle in the field of translation literature with its numerous editions, fast translation speed, large circulation and high popularity. (Mao, 2010) After China's reform and opening up, people's interest on Sherlock Holmes reached an unprecedented height. Among many translations editions, Yu Bufan's version is the first complete translation of *Sherlock Holmes Series* that is translated all by one translator. Skopos theory is the basic theory of functional theories of translation which is defined as "producing a text at target setting for a target purpose and a target address in target circumstances". (Nord, 2001) Hans J. Vermeer regards the skopos rule as the primary principle guiding the translation activity. By taking *A Study in Scarlet* as a case, this paper aims at discussing the translation methods applied in Yu Bufan's version and analyzing the intention of adopting these methods from the perspective of the skopos theory.

1. THEORY OF SKOPOS THEORY

1.1 Skopos Theory

German translation scholar Katharina Reiss first proposed that the functional perspective should be taken into consideration in translation criticism. (Katharina, 1971) On the basis of this, her student Vermeer gets rid of the impression that the translation should be equal to the original and the limitations of Nida's functional equivalence. The skopos theory was presented in his work *General Foundations of Translation Theory*. The Greek word "skopos" means "aims" "purpose" and "goal". Reiss

and Vermeer formulate this principle into two skopos rules: "an interaction is determined by (or is a function of) its purpose", and "the skopos can be said to vary according to the recipient". (Mark, 2004) In short, the skopos theory puts an emphasis on the interactional and pragmatic function, that is to say, the aim of translation. It stresses translators' subjectivity that he chooses different translation strategies or methods under different skopos. Hence, the translation version may be diversified because of different skopos set by different translators.

1.2 Three Rules in Skopos Theory

The skopos rule, the coherence rule and the fidelity rule are the three rules under the Skopos theory. As the primary principle, the skopos rule means that during the target text producing process, the skopos of the translating process determines the translation methods. In the field of translation, there is one kind of purpose that can be achieved by employing a particular translation strategy or procedure. (Nord, 2001) The coherence rule requires the intra-textual coherence. The translation should be fluent enough for the readers to comprehend it and provide sufficient culture background information for its readers. The fidelity rule means that there should be inter-textual coherence between source and target text.

2. INTRODUCTION OF YU BUFAN'S VERSION OF SHERLOCK HOLMES SERIES AND A STUDY IN SCARLET

2.1 Brief Introduction of Yu Bufan and His Version of *Sherlock Holmes Series*

Yu Bufan is a Chinese well-known translator. He is from Haiyan, Zhejiang Province. Yu Bufan is proficient at Lexicography. As the senior editor in Shanghai Translation Publishing House, he engaged himself in dictionaries editing for years. Therefore Yu Bufan has profound bilingual foundation. Additionally, he also possesses a remarkable translating skill.

The year of 1998 witnessed the peak of detective novel publication in China, roughly, about 140 fictions coming out. The amount of *Sherlock Holmes Series*'s different versions began to surge at the beginning of 21st century, at least 20 editions. (Zheng, 2012) However, most of the translators who searched for quick profits and quick success produced unsatisfactory texts by merely making some modifications of the predecessors' version. Yu Bufan's first edition of *Sherlock Holmes Series* translation was published in 2000 by Yilin Press, which aroused a heated discussion among the general public. And nearly 10 versions were revised after that. This paper mainly studies on the 2012 version.

In his translation, Yu Bufan's evaluation of *Sherlock Holmes Series* has reached an unparalleled height

as he regards it as the pinnacle of detective fiction. He points out that each story contains profound and significant humanistic thoughts and each personality has a specified significance. Under the industrial revolution background in the 19th century, the social condition and the interpersonal relationship turn into modernization. Criminal cases were increasingly complicated. (Yu, 2002) Therefore, in his *Sherlock Holmes Series* translation process, Yu Bufan is not restricted to its genre of popular literature, but views it as elegant literature that has both ideological contents and artistic qualities.

2.2 Language Characteristics of Yu Bufan's Version of *Sherlock Holmes Series*

There is no sign indicating people passion on *Sherlock Holmes Series* has waned even after more than one hundred years since it first released. The novel owns a vast range of Chinese versions and a large circulation. Yu Bufan's version *Sherlock Holmes Series* has attracted by increasing number of readers and stands out from numerous previous versions because of its language with its own characteristics.

Instead of applying the tedious and awkward translationese, Yu Bufan diversifies the lingual style in the text. Both poetic expressions and humorous utterances can be found in this work. From the royal to the civilian, from the arrogant and haughty official to the duplicitous and cunning beggar, Yu Bufan displays their different discourse style accurately by selecting the words and the tones in their conversations. In addition, another feature in Yu Bufan's translation is using ancient Chinese to translate letters, telegrams and ancient books, which is quite appropriate. The ancient Chinese makes the context precise and concise without losing any of literary beauty.

On the basis of being faithful to the original's meaning, the translation full of fluent words is easy to be accepted by all classes of readers. Besides, four-character idioms and proverbs make the translation poetic. Their form is neat and balanced. Concise structures have rich and profound meanings. 2.3

2.3 Introduction of *A Study in Scarlet*

A Study in Scarlet is the first volume of *Sherlock Holmes series*, and it is also the most classic and well-known novel in *Sherlock Holmes series*. In this volume, the author creates an eccentric and brilliant detective Sherlock Holmes and establishes an important relationship between Sherlock and another protagonist, Doctor Watson.

Yu Bufan highly appraised the significance of *A Study in Scarlet* in his prefaces. As the first volume, *A Study in Scarlet* has laid the ideological foundation and set the artistic tone of the whole series. Its general idea is to support science and democracy, show humanity, advocating freedom, and oppose autocracy and terrorism. (Yu, 2014)

3. STUDY ON TRANSLATION METHODS IN YU BUFAN'S VERSION OF A STUDY IN SCARLET FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF SKOPOS THEORY

Scholars usually treat detective novels as the light literature, for it underlines the artful case design and meticulous logic reasoning, but lacks the poetic language. In the preface of translation, Yu Bufan states that: "the nine volumes we releases now are to pursue words accuracy and language beauty, and we add some necessary annotations." (Yu, 2012) To treat it as a literature work, Yu Bufan comprehends the aesthetic conception which the author tries to expound, and chooses the suitable translation methods to externalize it.

3.1 Imitation

The skopos rule indicates the skopos decides the translation process. As what has been mentioned above, translator can apply a particular translation strategy to achieve a certain goal. Obviously, Yu Bufan's goal is to create a poetic translation. By imitation, translators are not confined to the original words, forms sometimes even meanings, in which translators tend to make some adjustments by utilizing certain translation techniques, such as addition and omission. By addition, some vague expressions can be transmitted to the target readers precisely or vividly. And omission replaces the redundant words with the succinct ones. By applying imitation, Yu Bufan enhances the literariness in the target text.

Example 1

ST: You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done. (Doyle, 1998, p.37)

TT: 你聪明, 你能干, 可说到底, 姜还是老的辣, 猎狗还是老的本事大。(Yu, 2012, p48)

"The old hound is the best" in original expresses that the elder is better. Literal translation will cause misunderstanding for its target readers because people may take it as an insult to refer to someone as a "dog" which has some negative images in Chinese literature, like snobbish, degrading or timid. Under the guidance of skopos theory, the translator wants to produce an elegant target text. Here, the translator applies the imitation by adding Chinese slang "姜还是老的辣" as an explanation. This added idiomatic Chinese proverbs and the literal translation "猎狗还是老的本事大" are matched in both sound and sense perspectives. Imitation achieves the goal of producing a poetic translation for its readers.

Example 2

ST: Even then it was no easy matter to keep to the right track, for the moon had not yet risen, and the high cliffs on either side made the obscurity more profound. (Doyle, 1998, p.96)

TT: 这很难保证再不会出错, 还是要小心翼翼, 不可心虚

乱闯。月亮还没有升起, 两边挡着矗立的绝壁, 四周更加漆黑, 伸手不见五指, 脚下不知高低。

(Yu, 2012, p144)

Here is a description of the dangerous conditions near the cliffs in the midnight. A few words are used in the original. Yu Bufan chooses imitation, adding the clause "还是要小心翼翼, 不可心急乱闯" and "伸手不见五指, 脚下不知高低" to emphasize the perilous journey from the mental and physiological level. Under the guidance of skopos theory, the translator produces the symmetrical language beauty.

3.2 Free Translation

The coherence rule means that the translation should be fluent and well-accepted by its target readers. In order to make his target text readable, Yu Bufan adopts free translation method. Free translation requires the translator to well transfer the content to its readers instead of the form. That is to say, the form in the source text is sacrificed for the sake of intelligibility and fluency of target text. Free translation reproduces the matter without the manner, or the content without the form of the original. (Newmark, 2001)

Example 3

ST: There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. (Doyle 1998, p30)

TT: 昨夜布里斯克斯顿路附近劳力斯顿花园区3号发生命案。(Yu, 2012, p30)

In order not to mention the unpleasant homicides case directly, the author uses "a bad business" as a euphemism. However, its literal meaning "坏事" may hinder the target readers' comprehension process. The subjective adjective "坏" will detract readers attention, and they may put extra effort into cracking what the code, bad business refers to. Thus, the translator doesn't preserve the literal meaning, abandons its euphemistic function and points out the referent by free translation in order to ensure a smooth reading process and the intra-textual coherence.

Example 4

ST: "'Rache,' is the German for 'revenge'; so don't lose your time looking for Miss Rachel." With which Parthian shot he walk away, leaving the two rivals open mouthed behind him. (Doyle, 1998, p.39)

TT: "rache, 是德文, 意思是'复仇', 这就不要白费时间去找蕾切尔小姐了。"丢下这句赠言, 他扬长而去, 任两位邀功争宠的对手在那里目瞪口呆。

(Yu, 2012, p.44)

Parthian kingdom was an empire in the east of Rome. Parthian military strategy is quite familiar to most Westerners: Parthian archers run at full speed on horseback and turn their bodies around to shoot at the enemy. Later, people use it to refer to a remark made as one is leaving, so that it has a stronger effect. Because of the culture difference, the target readers may find it hard to understand the strange images. In Chinese, "赠

言” represents words or advice that one gives before he leaves. In this example, for the purpose of coherence, Yu Bufan discards its literal meaning “帕提亚回马箭” and explicitly uses “赠言” as the explanation of this metaphor.

Example 5

ST: ...I mediated upon the many-sidedness of the human mind.

(Doyle, 1998, p.45)

TT: 我在默默在想:人的心智啊, 善恶无所不能。(Yu 2012, p.55)

Paraphrase is a specific type of free translation. Here, the translator explains the abstract noun “many-sidedness of the human mind” as a concrete sentence “人的心智啊, 善恶无所不能” by using paraphrase because the “many-sidedness of the human mind” might be abstract, elusive and sophisticated. The translator deconstructs “many-sidedness” from two perspectives, “善恶” and “无所不能”, which can be easily understood and makes the text coherent for its target readers.

3.3 Literal Translation

The Skopos theory requires that the translator not only puts an eye on his own translation skopos, but also makes the translation faithful to the original text and the author, to convey the original information to the greatest extent, that is, to achieve the inter-textual coherence between the translation and the original text. In the detective novels translation, due to its large amount and complexity of information and its logical strictness, some mistranslations and errors will cause confusion for the readers. Therefore translators need pay much more attention on fidelity rule. Literal translation retains the meaning of words and adjusts the word order of sentence structure so that the original text's idea can be accurately and fluently conveyed to the target readers. Sometimes the literal translation is for the purpose of spreading the foreign culture.

Example 6

ST: Read it up-you really should. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before.

(Doyle, 1998, p.35)

TT: 再去读一读——重温一遍, 很有必要。同一阳光下, 没有新鲜事, 都是前人做过的。(Yu Bufan, 2012, p37)

In this example, Sherlock admonished two ignorant and arrogant detectives to study the former cases. Yu Bufan translates “There is nothing new under the sun” into “同一阳光下, 没有新鲜事”. The sentence structure is changed due to different customs of two language expressions. But there is no big change on the semantics or the rhetoric level. As the matter of fact, the original sentence originates from *Ecclesiastes*, a book of the Jewish Bible, trying to persuade people to believe everything in this world is vacant and repetitious. By applying literal translation, Yu Bufan accurately delivers the information and the sarcastic tone that Sherlock expressed. Besides maintaining the image, the

foreign proverb “There is nothing new under the sun” is successfully absorbed by the target readers.

Example 7

ST: A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with masonic device. Gold pin-bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. Russian leather cardcase, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. (Doyle, 1998, p.35)

TT: 一只金表, 表号97163, 伦敦白劳德表店制; 阿尔伯特金链, 又重又粗; 金戒指, 刻着同济会标记; 花饰金别针——狗头形, 狗眼是两颗红宝石; 俄罗斯皮名片夹, 有名片, 是‘伊诺克·J.德雷伯, 克利夫兰’, 同衬衣上的E.J.D.三个字母相符。(Yu, 2012, p.38)

This is a list of relevant material evidences in the scene of accident. In detective novels, readers may use these clues to guess who is the criminal by themselves. By applying the literal translation, Yu Bufan doesn't alter the content and completely transmits the information to the target readers. Under the guidance of fidelity rule, the literal translation ensures the key information faithfully expressed.

3.4 Idiomatic Translation

In this translation version, skopos rule underlines the language beauty. Idiomatic translation highlights the aesthetic value of languages. When translating some idioms or some unique phrases in the source text, translators tend to match them with some proverbs that already exist in the target text as an interpretation. The two idioms expressions can be equivalent in four aspects, the implication, the form, the usage and being idiomatic. (Zhang, 1980)

Example 8

ST: I seem to have dropped into a sort of council of war. (Doyle, 1998, p.60)

TT: 我真是掉进了五里雾中。(Yu, 2012, p81)

“Council” represents a formal meeting to discuss what action to take in a particular situation. “Council of war” holds in the middle of a battle, whose participators need to analyze various intricate conditions and plan a strategy. Here, it is a metaphor indicating confusing chaos according to the context. The translator substitutes it with an ancient Chinese idioms “五里雾” subtly. “五里雾” means one is surrounded by heavy fog with a range of 5 miles, which refers that one is in a state of bewilderment. “五里雾” and “the council of war” have different forms, but their implications and their usages are the same. For the skopos of aesthetics, the translator turns the original metaphor “council of war” into an idiomatic expression “五里雾”.

Example 9

ST: He and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. (Doyle, 1998, p.31)

TT: 他, 还有莱斯特雷德, 都是矮子里拔出来的长子。(Yu, 2012, p.31)

Here, the two idioms in the source text and the target text are matched. First, “the pick of a bad lot” and “矮子里拔出来的长子” express the same implication, selecting the better one among a bunch of unqualified candidates. What’s more, the two idioms are both served as a noun phrase. Besides, they are two idioms applying two different images, “矮子” and “a bad lot”. However if the translator merely pursues the same form by translating “a bad lot” into “坏家伙”, it will cause damage to the content and expression habits, and no language artistic sense exists.

CONCLUSION

Under the guidance of skopos theory, translators should always clarify their own translation purpose and rank it at the top instead of blindly pursuing the equivalence of the original and the translation. In his version of *Sherlock Holmes Series*, Yu Bufan sets a clear goal of enhancing translation literariness. Skopos theory is regarded as a guiding principle in Yu Bufan’s translation process. Through analyzing translation methods with examples, it is found that the translator employs various methods under the guidance of different rules. By using imitation and idiomatic translation, he adds the poetic and idiomatic proverbs or idioms to increase literariness. Adopting free translation eliminates the strange expressions for the readers, which guarantees a coherent comprehension process. The information can be faithfully transmitted by adopting literal translation. This paper can draw a conclusion that skopos theory guides Yu Bufan’s translation activity and his purpose of pursuing the language beauty is fully achieved.

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