

On the Identity of Translator Under the Impact of Deconstructionism and Intertextuality

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ABSTRACT

From the perspective of deconstructionism, this article explores the application of intertextuality theory in the field of translation research and practice, advocating the idea of reader subjectivity, and points out that translation is a transformation process of meaning between texts, a recreation activity through which the life of the original text can be prolonged and regenerated. The translator is endowed a triple identity in the process of intertextual conversion: reader-interpreter-author. Moreover, this thesis explores in detail how the translator recognizes his identities and fulfills his responsibilities at different levels in the translation activities, with the aim of achieving textual interaction and cultural transmission.

Keywords: *Deconstructionism, Intertextuality, Identity of translator*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1960s, deconstructionism has caused a wave of translation in the West. It has broken through the inherent thinking and subverted the traditional Western philosophy. It has had a deep impact on the concept of translation, proposing that the original text depends on the target text and cannot develop without the target text. Among them, the French thinker Jacques Derrida, as one of the representatives, has had a significant influence on contemporary Chinese translation theories and translation studies. Inland deconstruction criticism prevails in China, but because deconstruction theory itself is not a complete ideological system, theoretical ideas are insufficient to assist the achievement of translation goals.

This article attempts to carry out the research based on the deconstruction theory, and aims to explore the application of intertextuality in translation studies in order to guide translation practice. Intertextuality is the essential attribute of the text, and the theory of intertextuality is established following the point of view of deconstruction. It regards translation as an intertextual dialogue activity. The original text and the target text are interdependent, rather than equivalent or subordinated, which allows the translation an independent identity.^[1] The translator will no longer be restricted by the original author or original text in any translation activities. This requires translators to recognize and determine their own identity and status in the translation process, and use intertextual means to stimulate intertextual associations among target readers, such as by using intertextual interpretation and intertextual reference, attaining the purpose of overcoming language and cultural barriers and realizing the creative construction of translations.

2. THE POWERFUL IMPACT OF DECONSTRUCTIONISM

Deconstructionism emerged in France in the 1960s, and its influence expanded in the 1990s. Since then it had brought a huge impact on traditional translation theories. Deconstructionism is characterized by questioning and decomposition. It is re-established in the reflection and breakthrough of the structuralist linguistics. Deconstruction, represented by Derrida, opposes the so-called solid structure theory. Derrida believes that everything is formed in the constant delay of differences, and everything is regenerated in endless additions, substitutions and supplements.^[1] Therefore, Derrida replaces the widely accepted concept of structure with “chain of meaning”, which has neither origin nor end; there is neither center nor totality; it is both spatial and temporal. Derrida also coined the term “différance”, which refers to not only distinction, but also postponement. The appearance of this term shows that the constituent elements of any language signs are not self-sufficient, and must be related to the elements of other signs, contain the imprints of other signs, and manifest their own unique values while forming differences from each other.^[1]

Based on the above concept when it came to texts composed of symbols, Derrida proposed that the ultimate unchanging meaning of works did not exist. The text is always in an “unfinished” state, and its meaning is the inheritance of the past meaning and needs to be further extended.^[1] In other words, after the text is completed, due to the multi-level and multi-dimensional interaction and connection between the language symbols, the original author can no longer fix the meaning of the text. The connotations of the text that constantly flow between the language signs enable the readers to interpret various meanings in the process of reading.

Since traditional translation theories center on the structuralist linguistic view, the author and the translator, the original work and translated work are always in a binary opposition relationship. Keeping the principle of being “servant”, the translator must strive to reproduce the original intention of the author. Under the impact of deconstructionism, Roland Barthes declared that “the author is dead”. He believed once the text was completed, only language signs were “inherited”, through which readers realized the interpretation of the text meaning.^[2] Deconstructionism resists the ontology of works with the theory of reader subjectivity, and advocates that readers are the masters of the text and have the right to explain and criticize all texts. The translator who is the first reader of the text has the same authority as the author and is regarded as the dominant role and “first person” during the process of text recreation.

Deconstructionism makes the text open, liberated, and renewal. The translation view of deconstruction liberates us from the traditional inertial thinking of binary opposition and makes the translation research step into a more diverse and extensive world.

3. INTERTEXTUALITY AND ITS ESSENCE

Intertextuality, comes from the Latin word “intertexto”, which means intertwining and overlapping. It was originally proposed by the semiotician Julia Kristeva, who defines intertextuality as the interchange of symbol systems. Intertextuality can be divided into passive intertextuality (intra-language intertextuality) and active intertextuality (external language intertextuality). Passive intertextuality refers to the relationship within discourse contexts, while active intertextuality refers to the intertextual relations between different texts, and the latter remains the focus of our attention, although in the process of text comprehension, active and passive intertextuality are usually intertwined.^[2] In the text composed of connection of the elements in the language system, there are always imprints left or formed by other texts. “Intertextuality” is proposed to emphasize the mutual contact, induction, penetration and transfer between diverse texts.^[2] This “intertextuality” concept is a typical embodiment of the essence of deconstruction.

Based on deconstructionism and intertextuality theories, any text is produced by following the imprints or memories of its previous texts, or is formed in the absorption and transformation of other texts. Various styles of texts in different time and space are connected with each other, forming a huge text family, and building a network of textual meaning that realizes interactive reference. In the field of language activities, texts are intertwined with others while referring to themselves. There is no clear definition between a specific work and its surrounding works. The works spread and blend like countless ripples, being in the eternal movement of mutual effect, crossing, overlapping, and conversion.

The deconstructionist trend of thought and intertextual theory provide a grand theoretical perspective for re-understanding the role of text transformation in translation practice. The dominant status of the original text has been subverted, and the translated work has been raised and valued. Derrida believes that it is the translation that gives life to the original text and makes its life prolonged.^[1] Therefore, each translation practice is a regeneration process for the original text.

4. IDENTITY OF TRANSLATOR UNDER THE DECONSTRUCTIONISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY

4.1. The Roles of Translators

Based on Kristeva’s intertextuality, Hatim and Mason drew the following diagram of the intertextual relationship between the previous text, the original text, and the target language to form an intertextual chain ^[1]:

PRETEXT — (Cited in) — SL TEXT — (Replaced by) — TL

As shown from the drawing, the texts keep the relationship of intersecting with each other. The target language under the intertextuality is composed of the source language text and the related texts before the original text, and the translator is the mediator of the original text (previous text) and the translated text (generated text). The translator has a triple identity: reader—interpreter—author. Intertextuality is reflected in the translator’s roles: 1. As the reader’s understanding of the text. 2. As the interpreter’s explanation of the text. 3. As the author’s rewriting of the text. It is the triple identity of the translator that embodies the translator’s subjectivity in literary translation.

4.2. The First Level of Identity as Readers

The first level of identity of the translator is reader. As “the first” reader, the translator must read the original text before translating, and then while reading, he must be influenced by his own background, including society, times, cultural background, and his own experience. Different interpretations and expressions of the same text show that different translators have diverse understandings of the same text.

Accurate understanding of the original text makes a good preparation for interpretation and rewriting process. In order to achieve a deep understanding of the original text, the translator should perform a critical reading activity, not only from the linguistic level, but also from the cultural connotation level, which requires the translator to undertake more tasks while reading, for example the stylistic features of omission or parallel structure, the

implied meanings of allusions or idioms, or the taboos brought by religious factors, etc. In a word, reading will be the origin of all the other translation activities.

4.3. The Second Level of Identity as Interpreters

The correct understanding and interpretation of the text mainly lie in the second level identity of the translator: the interpreter, which is actually realized simultaneously with the role of reader. The theory of intertextuality requires the interpreter to grasp the text at a higher level, that is, the reading performed by the translator goes from a critical perspective. In this process, the interpreter must explore the surrounding texts related to the original one with the help of the literary and historical factors within the text. At the same time, he can also seek external materials outside of literature that can help clarify the text and deepen the understanding.^[3]

This kind of interpretation can be raised to a kind of literary criticism. Its central activity is to understand the essence of literary language and connect literary texts with other external interfering elements: the writer's life, times, literary history, etc. The most crucial factor among them is to grasp the overall structure of the literary text itself with the aim of comprehension from a macro perspective to identify its tone of expression. Therefore, in the stage of being the interpreter, the subjectivity of the translator is brought into play at a higher level than that of the reader.

4.4. The Third Level of Identity as Authors

Only after fulfilling the identity of reader and interpreter, the translator can practice his third identity: author. In this process, the translator expresses the original text in another language, fulfills a conscious rewriting, and embodies a direct intertextual relationship. Translator Andrey Livewell pointed out that "not only can the translator regenerate the original text he is translating, but they can also decide to endow the original text with what kind of life and how to integrate it into the target language culture." He believes that "a translator is a creative artist. The first thing the translator needs to do is to determine whether he can create a text similar to the original in his own culture. Whether he can recreate the original to satisfy readers' needs depends on the craftsmanship as an artist."^[3]

The following is an excerpt from two translated versions of the same text in "Liao Zhai Zhi Yi" for comparison, which can show us and illustrate the important role of the translator as an author in the process of text re-creation. The underlined part is the intertextual mark.

召公上，谕曰：“河南缺一城隍，君称其职。”（《考城隍》）^[4]

Version 1: ...and calling Mr. Sung to come forward, said to him, "A Guardian Angel is wanted in Honan. Go you

and take up the appointment." (Footnote: The tutelary deity of every Chinese city.) (Translated by Zhai)^[5]

Version 2: Presently they called Song up to the dais and delivered the following judgment: "There is a City God vacancy in Henan Province. You are the preferred candidate for the position." (Annotation: City God: Every town and city had its Tutelary God (chenghuang), responsible for the town's welfare, peace and prosperity.) (Translated by Min)^[6]

“城隍”，originates from the ancient sacrificial offerings of Shui (隍) Yong (城), which is the god who guards the city in ancient mythology. Version one adopts the translation strategy of domestication to transform the cultural image of “城隍” into “Guardian Angel” that is more familiar to the westerners, so that readers can grasp the meaning through the intertextuality between texts. At the same time, the translator adds the footnote in the bracket in order to allow readers to experience the exotic culture of the original text, but only explains that “Guardian Angel” is the patron saint of Chinese cities, without specifying its responsibilities in Chinese culture. In contrast version two adopts the foreignization translation strategy, more faithfully retaining the intertextual symbols of the original text by translating “城隍” into “City God”, and the annotation is more detailed compared with version one, further explaining the status and role of “City God” in Chinese culture, and striving to preserve the connotations of the original text as much as possible.

As shown in the above example, there are many factors existing in the Eastern and Western literary works that reflect historical characteristics, regional features, or cultural connotations, including literary allusions, idioms, myths, and even religious elements, and all of them have become indispensable for literary works and are crucial to understanding the theme and core of the original work. Of course, it also brings great challenges to the translation research and practice. When performing their re-creation duties, translators must combine their own gains from reading and interpretation process, and adopt appropriate translation strategies to handle with caution. Another example is listed as follows:

生羸卧空斋，思莲香如望岁。（《莲香》）^[4]

Version 1: ... and Sang lay all emaciated as he was upon his bed in his solitary room longing for the return of Lian-hsiang. (Translated by Zhai)^[5]

Version 2: He lay there alone in his empty studio, emaciated, longing now for Lotus Fragrance's return with all his heart, just as a farmer longs for the time of his harvest. (Translated by Min)^[6]

The literary allusion “Wang Sui” comes from the history book “Zuo Zhuan • The Thirty-two Years of Zhao Gong”, “闵闵焉如农夫望岁，惧以待食。”“Sui” refers to a bumper harvest, which means being thirsty for a rich harvest of grain because of hunger. Pu Songling used this allusion to describe the image of male protagonist, Sang Sheng, who missed his beloved lady named “Lian Xiang” and wasted away gradually, as if a peasant looking forward to a good grain harvest. The use of this allusion in the original text provides readers with rich space of

intertextual association, which enables target readers to experience Sang Sheng's deep yearning for Lian Xiang. Version one omits the image implied by the original allusion. The translator only translates the literal meaning of "missing his lady", in this way the translated text loses the connotation of the allusion, and the translation cannot arouse the same feelings in the readers of the target language as the original readers. Version two adds the image of "Wang Sui", "just as a farmer longs for the time of his harvest". The translator successfully retains the intertextual features of the allusion in the translated language, and transfers the intertextual connotations between texts by using the method conforming to the structural characteristics of the target language.

In addition, the handling of person names, places or names of organizations in two translated versions are also totally different. Version one uses the "foreignization" translation method, directly using pinyin to translate woman's name. In contrast, the translator of version two embodies the name "莲香" by using the words "Lotus (莲) Fragrance (香)" in the target language, making the beautiful and pitiful female image unfold before the readers' eyes immediately. This "domesticated" translation strategy enables the literary works to realize a more accurate intertextual conversion in the process of being translated.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the theories of deconstructionism and intertextuality, meaning arises from the mutual reference, radiation and diffusion between different texts, which finally dispels the myth of the same attributes of meaning. As a translator, he must recognize his "triple" identity in the whole process of intertextual transformation: reader—interpreter—author. As a reader and interpreter, the task of the translator is how to interpret the previous text correctly, and as the author, his responsibility lies in how to achieve the appropriate and accurate exchange of texts. Therefore, while performing the translation practice, translators should pay attention to grasping their own identities from different levels, and to improving their self-cultivation and quality from different perspectives. Only the translator gradually fulfills his obligations of each level and realizes advancement step by step, can the subjective role of translator be better brought into play, making the fulfillment of the former identity of translator lay a solid foundation for the latter translation activity, presenting the intertextual relationship between the previous text and the generated text in a better way. In this way an increasing number of higher quality translated works can be achieved with "inheritance" and "pioneering" spirit.

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