Annotating for Different Purposes—a Case Study on the Annotated Translation of Literary Theory: an Introduction

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Abstract. Annotations in translated texts serve as compensating tools for different forms of default and facilitate a better understanding of the source text. This paper selects Dr. Wu Xiaoming’s translation of *Literary Theory: an Introduction* (by Terry Eagleton), classifies the annotated translations and conducts an analysis in light of Kawame Anthony Appiah’s theory of “Thick Translation”. After a detailed analysis, the author summarizes the different annotating purposes and corresponding annotating principles.

Introduction

In 1993, the American philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah proposed the notion of “thick translation” which refers to translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text into a rich cultural and linguistic context. Kwame Anthony Appiah states that “A thick description of the context of literary production, a translation that draws on and creates that sort of understanding, meets the need to challenge ourselves and our students to go further, to undertake the harder project of a genuinely informed respect for others. Until we face up to difference, we cannot see what price tolerance is demanding of us.”[1] His statements justify the existence of annotations, especially in the form of footnotes.

Disagreeing with Venuti’s statement about translation “It is an attempt to find ways of saying in one language something that means the same as what has been said in another”[2], he proposed the points below that are worthy of greater attention: 1) the intention. Appiah regards utterance as the product of action, with a certain intention from the speaker. Generally speaking, discourse/utterance has conventional meanings with itself, which are the conventions that both the listener and the speaker observe to achieve a common understanding. And he further explains “Each utterance of a sentence will be surrounded and motivated by more than its literal intentions.”[3] If some intentions can be conventionally expressed in one language yet unable in another, then a literal translation cannot be produced, and footnotes will come into play. 2) the context. The practice of trick translation should be context dependent, where the specific type of targeted readers should be focused and contextualization can be realized through annotations. 3) the difference (between self and the other). Translation should be based on the awareness of cultural awareness of the other, and enable the TT readers to understand the culture of the other.

To further justify his points, Nida has proposed his standards regarding the quality of translation. He stated that translators should at least aim to produce an understandable translation, one of "minimal functional equivalence", which refers to "the extent where the reader can understand and appreciate the source text through a translated target text."[4] The highest degree is "maximal functional equivalence", which refers to the effect that “The readers of a translated text should be able to understand and appreciate it in essentially the same manner as the original readers did.” “The maximal definition implies a high degree of language-culture correspondence between the source and target languages and an unusually effective translation so as to produce in receptors the capacity for a response very close to what the original readers experienced. This maximal level of equivalence is rarely, if ever, achieved, except for texts having little or no aesthetic value and involving only routine information.”[5] In order to produce a text that achieves these standards,
annotations can play a significant part. The broad definition of annotation may include any content that provides supplementary information for the text, including preface, postscript, appendix, etc. The annotations in the TT of Literary Theory: an Introduction [6] mainly takes the form of footnotes, which will be analysed in detail below.

**Literary Theory: an Introduction: Annotations Classified and Re-examined**

20th century Literary Theory (2007) (Er Shi Shiji Xi Fang Wen Xue Lilun) translated by Dr. Wu Xiaoming, is a translation of Terry Eagleton's Literary Theory: an Introduction. What feature this translated version is its abundant annotations, which assisted in clarifying the author’s intentions, aided the readers to seek further references and helped to explain the translator’s intentions and strategies.

Altogether, the translator has made 164 footnotes, which can be further classified into three categories:

1) Footnotes for readers to seek further references (88 cases)
2) Footnotes to clarify the ST author’s intentions: (59 cases)
   This category includes footnotes that traced the origins of certain lexicon and footnotes that provided the language, cultural and literary background for a certain term:
3) Footnotes to explain the translator’s intentions and strategies (17 cases)
   For the latter two categories, the translator have marked “translator’s note” in each footnote that he made.

Below will be an analysis of all the three types of footnotes that the translator had made.

1. **Footnotes for readers to seek further references:**

   1) In 1915 T. S. Eliot had come to London, son of an 'aristocratic' St Louis family whose traditional role of cultural leadership was being eroded by the industrial middle class of their own nation.(p.44) Speaking of the rise of British Literature, T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) is a figure that cannot be overlooked. This essayist, publisher, playwright, literary and social critic is “one of the 20th century’s major poets” and was naturalised from a US citizen to British in 1927 at the age of 39.

   General introduction of him as such, it is of great necessity to examine further into this person, and the author cited the book *Eliot: An American Use of Symbolism and Eliot in Perspective* as references. The translator maintained such information, and changed the original endnote to footnote placed at the bottom of the page.

   2) With the advent of structuralism, the world of the great aestheticians and humanist literary scholars of twentieth century Europe - the world of Croce, Curtius, Auerbach, Spitzer and Wellek — seemed one whose hour had passed.(p104)

   Eagleton has published over forty books, this book, Literary Theory: An Introduction (1983) remains best known and was sold over 750,000 copies. The work elucidated the emerging literary theory of the period. In this well-structured and tightly reasoned book, this book has worked out three streams in the trend of literary theory development, namely, from formalism to structuralism and further to post-structuralism, from phenomenology to hermeneutics and further to aesthetics, and psychoanalysis. The author has also probed into the origination, development, problems and limitations of each school of thought in literary theory. It can be regarded as a text book that systematically introduces and comments on the 20th century literary theory; meanwhile, it is a personal academic monograph of Terry Eagleton. The highly scholastic nature of this book necessitates further reference for a comprehensive understanding. Even for the ST readers, it can be difficult for those less scholastic ones without a literary background. In order to facilitate the readers in their comprehension of the book, the author had provided notes himself, in the form of “endnotes” that were presented at the back of the book, when he had finished writing all the chapters. In the Chinese version, the translator, Dr. Wu Xiaoming had maintained contents of the endnotes that served as references in the ST, yet changed them from endnotes to footnotes.

   Thus, with a change of annotation format, the translator facilitated the TT readers’ comprehension by saving them the trouble of having to refer to the back of the book from time to
time. Thus the readers' interest is maintained as they could access information at hand if they needed.

2. Footnotes to clarify the ST author's intentions:

1) Its ideological power lies in its capacity to 'materialize' beliefs as practices: religion is the sharing of the chalice and the blessing of the harvest, not just abstract argument about consubstantiation or hyperdulia.(P31)

2) The Great War, with its carnage of ruling-class rhetoric, put paid to some of the more strident forms of chauvinism on which English had previously thrived: there could be few more Walter Raleighs after Wilfred Owen.(P37)

3) Although we cannot be sure of the independent existence of things, Husserl argues, we can be certain of how they appear to us immediately in consciousness, whether the actual thing we are experiencing is an illusion or not. Objects can be regarded not as things in themselves but as things posited, or 'intended', by consciousness.(P59)

4) Little more than this is likely to be available to us: it would doubtless be impossible to recover exactly what Shakespeare meant by 'cream-fac'd loon', so we have to settle for what he might generally have had in mind.(P70)

5) Moreover, the structuralist method implicitly questioned literature's claim to be a unique form of discourse: since deep structures could be dug out of Mickey Spillane as well as Sir Philip Sidney, and no doubt the same ones at that, it was no longer easy to assign literature an ontologically privileged status.(P104)

6) If language was ever 'born', Levi-Strauss speculates, it must have been born 'at a stroke'.(P109)

In the above cases of annotation as translation compensation, the translator made compensations for religious (case 1), literary (case 2,5) and philosophical terms (case 3) linguistic terms (case 4, 6) alien to Chinese readers. With providing such footnotes, the translator was cautious that he only provides the most pertinent information, and he kept his notes with a certain word limit. Thus we sense his caution in preserving the original style of the book and not invading too much into it; the ability to locate the information most needed also demonstrates the translator’s awareness and translation skill. To better perceive the translator, Dr. Wu Xiaoming’s writing and translating style, the researcher had referred to several books that he composed, including Between the Texts[8], as well as A Single Thread Runs through All My Doctrines: Rereading Confucius[9], where in the some chapters of the article, he has added footnotes that took up 1/2 of the entire page. Compared with the translator’s habitus of providing footnotes2, we can claim that he has broken away from his general annotating habits and took the author’s original intention into full consideration.

3. Footnotes to explain the translator’s intentions and strategies

1) As one American behaviorist psychologist remarked in conversation: 'The trouble with Freud's work is that it just isn't testicle.'(P150)

This is a case where the translator’s subjectivity is most obviously demonstrated. It has explained the rhetoric device of pun employed in the ST, as testicle and testable share similar pronunciation. It further probes into Freud’s psychoanalysis and explains another layer of meaning, which is intended or not yet intended by the author. The translator’s reasonable interpretation provides the ST readers a chance to approach deeper into Freud and his theories; the etymological investigation of the word ‘testicle’ provides evidential support for the translator’s interpretation of the author’s (hidden) intentions.

2) Meaning was not something which all men and women everywhere intuitively shared, and then articulated in their various tongues and scripts: what meaning you were able to articulate depended on what script or speech you shared in the first place.(P104)

This is a footnote typified by the translator’s reference with Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher. Without a switch in his research focus to the re-interpretation of Chinese philosophical thoughts from the perspective of Western philosophy, such a footnote would not be possible.

3) The psychotic, in other words, has lost contact with reality at key points, as in paranoia and
schizophrenia: if the neurotic may develop a paralyzed arm, the psychotic may believe that his arm has turned into an elephant's trunk. (P149)

This is a case that reflects the meticulous translation attitude of the translator. Rather than simply provide an explanation for the word, the translator sought to trace the root of it. By locating the Greek and Latin origins of its root and suffixes (appendixes), the translator has managed to make his finding authentic and his analysis authoritative.

To conclude, the translator has made annotations for different purposes. And consciously or unconsciously, he has made himself visible with these annotations provided. In the first category of annotations he has made, he has endeavored to preserve the original endnotes at the back of the book, which was provided by the author, but shifted the position of these annotations and changed them into footnotes, thus saving the TT readers the trouble of having to flip the entire book for reference. If the translator’s subjectivity has primarily emerged in the first category, then in the second category, the translator is more visible with his added footnotes to clarify the author’s intentions. The vast amount of information provided in the aspects of literature, language, culture, religion have compensated for the cultural default inherent in the TT readers, and has demonstrated the translator’s serious translation attitudes as well as abundance of knowledge. In the third category, the translator’s subjectivity is demonstrated to the largest extent, where he has elaborated over the reasons behind his translation practice. Thus he creates a chance for him to explain the certain strategies that he has applied in his translation, as well as the difficulties that he had encountered in his attempt to produce a satisfactory translation. By referring to these notes, the ST readers not only communicate with the author, but also the translator himself. The distance between the ST reader and TT author as well the translator is shortened.

Theo Hermes ever discussed in detail in his "cross-cultural translation as thick translation" regarding how Erasmus’ New Testament could serve as a typical example of “translation as a translation, engulfed as it is by footnotes, annotations, explications and digressions.” [10] With the abundant footnotes provided by Dr. Wu Xiaoming in his translation, the translator also managed to conduct “thick translation” which aided the target readers in their understanding of the culturally loaded terms in the source text.

**Summary: Principles for Providing Annotations**

1) When adding annotations, the translator should narrow down his target readers to a particular group in order to produce reader-specific annotations.

   The body of reader can be diverse, with all different types of tastes and expectations. It is virtually impossible to cater to the tastes of all types of readers, and without a certain group of target readers in mind, the translator may become bewildered. Once the translator has a clear idea of whom the target text is for, he will be endowed with the capability of selecting from a huge body of possible annotations. This is especially true in the annotations added for texts which belong to the category of children’s literature, where their domain of language contrasts sharply with that of adults.

2) He should bear in mind that the annotations should preserve the core of the source text, and be close and objective.

   Since different readers have different tastes towards the text, and that it’s sometimes impossible to determine who the target readers may be, it’s therefore necessary to produce target texts that cater to the needs of most readers. No matter how diversified their tastes may be, the essentials should be preserved, the parts that most reflect the author’s intentions should be maintained. Objectivity is a goal that can be really hard to achieve. As has been discussed before, different translators have different knowledge structures, different capabilities and different comprehension of the text. And even the same translator may produce different versions of translation as his temperament and state of mind changes. And Nida has further stipulated that if difficulties exist for a literal rendering alone, footnotes are able to help to realize functional equivalence by explaining the likely misunderstanding in meaning, or by clarifying the total obscure expressions, or by reducing the
semantic and syntactical difficulty in translated text, or by compensating the significant loss in a proper appreciate for the stylistic values of the source text, etc.

3) If additional annotations are to be made, the translator needs to make sure that they are provided with caution.

With different translating purposes and the translator’s varied attitudes and temperament, sometimes there are footnotes made with more information than is necessary. In this case, such information must be provided with caution, and the entire context of the source text needs to be taken into consideration. Otherwise, it could become the translator’s own interpretation of the text, which may impede the TT readers’ understanding.

References


