

On Translation Strategies of Biographies Under Translator Behavior Criticism

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Abstract: The biography of Party history is a valuable asset of Chinese culture. And as an important step for Chinese culture to go global, its translation has expanded the influence of Chinese literature. The translator analyzes the translation strategy of *Biography of Yang Song* on the “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum, describes the translation phenomenon and translator behavior, and thus explores the process of translators’ participation in society, aiming to promote the translation study of Party history through the analysis of its translation.

Keywords: Biography, Translator Behavior Criticism, Translation methods.

1. Introduction

“The history of the Party is the most vivid and convincing textbook,” General Secretary Xi once pointed out. The history of the Communist Party of China is the most epic chapter in the history of modern China. Strengthening the study of history is a compulsory course for adhering to and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics and continuing to push forward the cause of the Party and the country. Enhancing the translation of Party history documents can help overseas readers correctly understand the history of the Party and understand the original intention and mission of the Communist Party of China. Therefore, external publicity work is extremely important. Choosing to publicize the Party history is undoubtedly an important step to take Chinese culture to the global stage and contribute to world culture. It also reflects the responsibility and mission of the times of “making good use of red resources, carrying forward the red tradition and inheriting the red gene.” Thus, this paper uses “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum to analyze the translation strategies of *Biography of Yang Song* and evaluate whether the translator has reached the balance between “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining”.

2. Translator Behavior Criticism

Translator Behavior Criticism, pioneered by Zhou Lingshun, is a “human-centered” research field. In his book “A Review of A Theoretical Framework for Translator Behavior Criticism”, he describes that translator behavior criticism is in the third stage of the paradigm shift of translation critical research, which is a sociological study of translation combined with translation inside and outside. It evaluates the relationship between the translator’s linguistic and social role behavior and the translated text, and investigates the translator’s role in the process of translation socialization and the general behavioral characteristics of the translator’s action on the text. This theory divides the field of translation research into two dimensions: “intra-translation” and “extra-translation”. The “intra-translation” refers to the internal factors of translation and their research, mainly about code-switching and meaning reproduction, so it can also be called “intra-linguistic”. However, “extra-translation” refers to the external factors of translation and their research, mainly

about the influence of society and environment on translation, so it can also be called “extra-linguistic” (Zhou Lingshun, 2014:12).

The core of this theory is the “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum of translator behavior, which is constructed for descriptive evaluation of translator behavior (Huang Qin, Yu Guo, 2017:31). “Truth-seeking” refers to the translator’s act of seeking the truth of the meaning loaded in the original language in whole or in part in order to achieve the goal for the reader or the society; while “utility-attaining” refers to the translator’s attitude and method to meet the needs based on the truthfulness of all or part of the meaning loaded in the original language (Zhou Lingshun, 2010:95). “Truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining” are integrated but different from each other. They are two endpoints on the translator’s behavior continuum, and there are inevitably gradual changes in the middle. The former shows its linguistic features and points to the meaning of the original text; the latter shows its social characteristics, pointing to the needs of readers and society, and translation activities will be affected by social factors. In other words, when the translation conveys the cultural connotation at the linguistic level and retains the linguistic form of the original, the translator’s behavior of “truth-seeking” is stronger, but the reader may be hindered in reading it; conversely, the translator’s behavior of “utility-attaining” is stronger, but even though the translation is more acceptable to the reader, the intended cultural message is lost.

3. Literature Review of Biography Translation

Under the influence of globalization, the cultures of various countries are colliding with each other, and as an important part of contemporary literature, the study of the translation of biography gradually comes into the public view. Domestic research on biography translation is in the development stage, and there are not many related discussions at present. In CNKI, 45 academic journals and 304 dissertations can be retrieved by using “biography translation” as the keyword, among which 6 are core journals of Peking University and 6 are CSSCI periodicals. When the keywords “biographies of Party history figures” were used to explore the literature, 67 academic journals and 3 dissertations could be retrieved,

including 6 papers from core journals of Peking University and 3 papers from CSSCI. However, the search for “the translation of biographies of party history” has no search results. It can be seen that there are few studies on the biography of party history, and the studies related to the translation of biographies of party history figures are even more scarce.

Through summarizing and analyzing the literature related to the translation of biographical literature at home and abroad, the research directions of scholars can be divided into the following three categories:

The first category is the study of the translator’s role in biographical works, on which different scholars have different ideas. Sun Jian’guang proposed that the translator should deal with the relationship between “documentary”, “literariness” and “creativity” in the process of text translation, so as to realize the “harmony” principle of biographical literature translation (Sun Jianguang, 2009:33). In her study of children’s literature biography, Yolisa Madolo pointed out that “the quality of biography translation depends on the translator’s ability to create children’s images. In the process of translation, it is necessary to take into account the implied readers - children who can read fluently or adults who read for children”. Arthur Waley believed that “the real work of translators begins with aesthetic research” (Ivan Morris, 1970:158). As the soul of the translation process, the role played by the translator directly affects the quality of the translation, so it is important to explore the role of the translator in the translation of biographical literature to improve the science of the study.

The second category is the research on the guiding theory of biographical translation. Zhang Mei argued that “reception aesthetics emphasizes the centrality of the reader” and enabled the translator to integrate with the original biography to meet the reader’s level of acceptance and aesthetic needs (Zhang Mei, 2012:144). In her study of the Chinese version of Steve Jobs’ biography, Liu Chunyuan confirmed the implicit manipulative power of patrons from both positive and negative aspects, and also proved the urgency and necessity of “establishing a correct concept of biographical literature translation” (Liu Chunyuan, 2013:117). Koliswa Moropa chose to translate using descriptive translation theory, which he believed took into account factors such as political, social, cultural and literary norms and conventions that influenced the translation process (Koliswa Moropa, 2018:247).

The third category is biographical translation techniques and strategies. This type of research is more active and has always been a research hotspot. When scholars study this direction, they tend to analyze it from both word and sentence aspects. Aiming at the lexical aspect, Zhang Kun discussed the translation of personal names, place names and nicknames from the perspectives of literal translation and free translation. He pointed out that “translators should choose words and sentences that are as accurate and relevant as possible to express the meaning and linguistic features of the original text when translating, and use translation strategies flexibly to achieve the best translation effect” (Zhang Kun, 2015:31). When Florence Ayscough wrote her biography of Du Fu, she believed that the history of the country could be read in Du Fu’s poems, so she reconstructed his Autobiography as much as possible and let Du Fu’s poems tell his story, and in the process of translation she chose to use “word splitting” to reflect the Chinese cultural connotation for the imagery vocabulary (Florence Ayscough, 1929:24).

To sum up, biography translation research is still on the rise, and new works and research are constantly being developed around the above three aspects, which have been flourishing in academic journals and papers, and are constantly moving from theory to practice. This development situation will make biography translation gradually mature, but at present, there are few studies on the translation of biographies by using the theory of translator behavior criticism. An in-depth study of new theories can enrich the diversity of foreign mission research and contribute to the spread of Chinese culture abroad.

4. Biography of Yang Song

Biography of Yang Song was written by Chen Xueliang. The biography was published in the *Biography of the CPC’s History of Mudanjiang* (Volume I) in 2015, which included 64 biographies of the CPC’s history of Mudanjiang. Among them are the pioneers of the early revolution of the Communist Party of China, heroes during the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression and the War of Liberation, and models at the early stage of the construction of the Republic. Although they are different in gender, nationality, origin and age, they have a common firm belief in communism and great feelings of patriotism. As the second biography of the book, *Biography of Yang Song* presents the legendary revolutionary career of Yang Song, a martyr of the Northeast Resistance, and tells the whole process of Yang Song from his birth to his participation in the revolution and even his final sacrifice. He worked hard to promote the development and unification of the Northeast United Resistance Army in eastern Jilin, wrote a large number of political theoretical works, and devoted his life to the cause of liberation of the people and journalism by working hard to run Liberation Daily in Yan’an.

5. Exploring the Translation Strategy of Biography of Yang Song Under Translator Behavior Criticism

Based on the theory of translator behavior criticism, this paper describes the translation phenomenon and translator behavior from the perspective of lexical translation and sentence translation. “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum is used to analyze and describe translation strategies and translators’ behaviors, and to explore the process of translators’ participation in society, aiming to promote the translation research of party history and outreach culture through the analysis of their translations.

5.1. Analysis of the translator’s behavior of lexical translation

The translator plays the main role in the translation process, so the quality of the translation can be evaluated by examining the reasonableness of the translator’s behavior. *Biography of the CPC Mudanjiang Party History* is published by the CPC Party History Publishing House and prepared by the Party History Research Office of the CPC Mudanjiang Municipal Committee. Zhou Lingshun and Zhou Yike have pointed out that if the text types are divided according to the degree of seriousness or classicism of the text, they can be roughly arranged from high to low: archaeology > religion > science and technology > public documents > philosophy > culture > literature > propaganda > entertainment (Zhou Lingshun,

Zhou Yike, 2020:114). The first six can be broadly classified as cultural, while the last three belong to the literary category. The higher the seriousness of the text, the less it is influenced by other factors, so the stronger the “truth-seeking” is, and vice versa, the more it tends to be “utility-attaining”, which constitutes the “culture-literature” continuum.

The biography of party history conveys real history, so its seriousness is high. The translation as a whole needs to be “truth-seeking”, so the translator’s behavior in the translation process is generally biased towards “truth-seeking”. Within the “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum, the translator himself combines linguistic and social aspects. *Biography of the CPC Mudanjiang Party History* is published by the CPC Party History Publishing House, which directly belongs to the Party History Research Office of the CPC Central Committee and its publication is highly authoritative. Therefore, the translator essentially plays the role of a “publicist” with a high degree of politics and rigor (Huang Liming, Shi Jiaqi, 2021:73), and is subject to the overall arrangement of the national foreign publicity department, and his translation process also follows the national ideology and political philosophy. In the face of the majority of Western readers, translators should tell Chinese stories well and spread Chinese voices. Therefore, in addition to conveying the connotation of the original text, translators also need to play the role of publicists. Therefore, appropriate changes can be made on the basis of expressing the original meaning to increase readers’ acceptance.

Example 1: 孙广英还亲自到哈尔滨中共满洲省委, 经研究, 中共满洲省委同意成立吉东局。

Translation: Sun also personally went to Harbin CPC Manchuria Provincial Committee, which agreed to establish the Jidong Bureau after the study.

Analysis: The Manchurian Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China is an exclusive political term, and its content is straightforward. The translator chooses the method of literal translation, which directly conveys the content of the original text to the readers and keeps the original text and the translated text equivalent in both form and meaning, which is the translator’s act of “seeking truth”.

Example 2: 当时, 日军采取了封锁政策, 强迫山区人民大迁移, 实行“归大屯”、十家连坐的保甲制, 以断绝我抗日武装与老百姓的联系。

Translation: At that time, the Japanese adopted a blockade policy, forcing the people of the mountains to move, and they implemented the “Group Tribes” and the Baojia system, which will apply the system of Lianzuo for ten families to cut off the connection between counter-Japanese forces and the people.

Analysis: “归大屯” is also commonly known as “归屯并户”, which means that the Japanese imperialists forced the people of small villages to leave the land where they had lived for generations and move to the designated tribes, and implemented the policy of burning, killing and looting all the original villages. The puppet Manchukuo built “group tribes” through “归屯并户” and cut off the connection between the people and the Resistance, so “归大屯” and “group tribes” belong to two stages in the same process, and can be replaced in the translation. The term “group tribe” often appears in party histories, so it is not only consistent with the semantics of the original text, but also more easily understood and accepted by foreign readers. Although the degree of truth-seeking is slightly reduced, it is in line with the usage habits

of the target language.

Example 3: 10月5日, 会议发出了《给东北抗日联军杨靖宇司令转东北抗联全体官兵的电文》, 表达了中共中央对战斗在白山黑水间的东北优秀儿女的深切慰问与崇高敬意。

Translation: On October 5, the meeting issued a telegram to Commander Yang Jingyu of the Northeast United Resistance Army conveying the message to all officers and soldiers, expressing the CPC Central Committee’s deep condolences and high respect for the outstanding northerners who fought in the White Mountains and Black Water—Northeast China.

Analysis: The term “白山黑水” in this sentence has a deep cultural background. In the Modern Chinese Dictionary, the term “白山” refers to “Changbai Mountains” and “黑水” refers to “Heilongjiang”, and “白山黑水” is the combined name of Changbai Mountains and Heilongjiang, which refers to the northeast region of China.

In order to preserve the writing style of the original text and to take into account the receptiveness of the readers of the translation, the translator chooses to use literal translation with notes, which not only maintains the unique exoticism of the work, but also enables the readers to appreciate the cultural information contained in the work. Although the degree of “truth-seeking” is slightly lacking and the linguistic form of the original text is changed, it is actually an act of “utility-attaining” by the translator for external communication, which preserves and correctly conveys the core connotation and reflects the social role of the translator.

5.2. Analysis of translator’s behavior of sentence translation

Essays are built up through sentences. Sentences are made up of words and phrases, which are the basic units of language use and can express the complete meaning of a paragraph. Through the analysis of the translation, we can appreciate the linguistic and social attributes of the translator’s behavior in the translation practice, and whether the translator has maintained a balance between “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining”.

Example 4: 从此, 杨松再也没有见过家人, 这次与父母的分别竟然是永别。

Translation: Since then, Yang Song had never seen his family again, not knowing that they were never to meet again.

Analysis: The original text describes that after Yang Song left home in 1927, he struggled outside and never saw his parents again until his parents died. The word “竟然” in the original text is the key to emotional transformation, showing Yang Song’s surprise at the events that occurred later and the regret that he was not able to accompany his parents when they died. English emphasizes hypotaxis, while Chinese emphasizes parataxis. The logical relationship between sentences in the original text is hidden. In translation, the translator chooses to use the translation method of amplification to show the logical relationship within the sentence, focusing on Yang Song’s unexpected feelings, so as to realize the author’s intention and establish empathy with readers.

Example 5: “五卅”惨案发生后, 杨松组织学生罢课和游行示威, 声援上海工人和学生的反帝爱国斗争, 并

被推选为湖北省学联代表，出席在上海召开的全国学生代表大会。

Translation: After the May 30th Massacre, **he organized student strikes and demonstrations** in solidarity with the anti-imperialist and patriotic struggles of workers and students in Shanghai, and he was elected as a representative of the Hubei Provincial Federation of Students to attend the National Student's Congress in Shanghai.

Analysis: This sentence tells a series of activities taken by Yang Song after the May 30th Massacre. Verbs are used more frequently in Chinese, while nouns are used more frequently in English. Therefore, in order to make the translation have the best communicative effect, the translator chooses to translate the words “罢课” and “游行示威” as nouns, instead of translating them as infinitive structures for the purpose. The New Chinese-English Dictionary translates the word “罢课” as “student strike” and “游行示威” as “demonstration”. This is in line with the habit of English expression. On the basis of retaining the framework of the original text, local fine-tuning is made to avoid mechanical translation, so that the translation is smooth, authentic, concise and easy to understand, so as to achieve the truth of the original text and attain the utility of foreign publicity.

Example 6: 祖父是清朝秀才。父亲吴德秀早年毕业于武汉师范学校并留校任教，后放弃优越的生活回乡办学。

Translation: His grandfather was a scholar in Qing Dynasty, and his father Wu Dexiu graduated from **Wuhan Normal University (today's Hubei University)** in his early years where he stayed for teaching.

Analysis: The sentence describes the family background of Yang Song, who later embarked on the path of the Resistance and was inseparably influenced by the family atmosphere. Wuhan Normal College refers to Hubei University today, and the translator chooses to add a note to it so that foreign readers who do not know Wuhan Normal College can have a certain impression of the school's status at that time, which corresponds to Yang Song's birth in the literary family mentioned later. In this translation, the need for truth-seeking is to realize the intention of the original text and emphasize the social information of the time, while the need for utility-attaining is to make the target language readers better understand the connotation of the original text and feel the background of the time. The translation serves the original text well, with truth-seeking as the main objective and utility-attaining as the secondary objective.

6. Conclusion

This paper analyzed the translation strategies of the words and phrases in *Biography of Yang Song* under translator behavior criticism, using the “Truth-seeking-Utility-attaining” evaluative model of continuum. The study found that the translator strives to maintain a balance between “truth-seeking” and “utility-attaining” in the translation process, and aims to achieve the social function of the translation on the basis of accurately conveying the connotation of the original text. The biography has a high degree of seriousness, so it generally tends to be “truth-seeking”. However, since the text is used for foreign promotion, the translator, as a “publicist”, should make appropriate adjustments in the direction of “Utility-attaining”, taking the target readers and social needs

as the guide. This paper provides a new research direction for the study of the translation of Party history texts for foreign publicity, which has a certain reference value.

7. Funding Projects

1. Foreign Language Education Reform and Innovation Project of Heilongjiang Province Universities: A study on Foreign Language Education and International Talent Cultivation under Curriculum Ideology and Politics (HWX2022019-B)
2. Mudanjiang Normal University Humanities and Social Sciences Research Project: A Study on the Translation of Mudanjiang History of the CPC(YB2021011)
3. Educational Science Planning Project of Heilongjiang Province in 2021: Research on Innovative MTI Talents Training Model Based on Serving Border Economic Development (GJB1421367)
4. Graduate Science and Technology Innovation Project of Mudanjiang Normal University in 2023: A Practical Study on the C-E Translation of the CPC Biography "YANG SONG"

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