

A Literary Translation in the Making: A Process-Oriented Perspective

Xinru Gao*

Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangdong, Guangzhou 510420, China

* Corresponding author: Xinru Gao (Email: eunicegaoxinru@163.com)

Abstract: Cognitive Translation Studies (CTS), or process-oriented research, is one of three research areas within descriptive branches of translation studies proposed by Holmes (1988: 72-73). In recent years, a wealth of empirical research in this field has emerged, but most focus on non-literary texts and are conducted under experimental conditions. Due to the shortcomings of the existing literature, Claudine Borg decided to write this book. It records how a literary translation was created and preserves the translator's actual work environment as far as possible to ensure ecological validity.

Keywords: Cognitive Translation Studies, Non-literary Texts, Literary Translation.

1. Introduction

The author, Claudine Borg, received her Ph.D. in Translation Studies from Aston University, UK, in 2017. She is a literary translator and a lecturer in translation studies at the University of Malta. Her primary areas of research interest are cognitive translation studies, translator studies, and literary translation.

Combining the fields of CTS with literary translation, Borg challenges long-held beliefs in CTS and elucidates the advantages of examining cognitive and social processes together in literary translation. This volume widens the scope of CTS research by focusing on the work of a single translator and exploring a range of materials, from rough drafts to the final product. Through this one-of-a-kind approach, we may learn more about how translators make choices, what drives them, and how they collaborate with others in the literary translation process.

2. The Structure of the Book and its Main Content

The book under review consists of 204 pages and six chapters, including an Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Context, Methods and Data, A Literary in the Making, From a Handwritten First Draft to the Published, Decision-Making and Underlying Motivations, and lastly, the Conclusion.

In the Introduction, Borg points out the problems of previous studies: literary translation studies are mostly product-oriented, and CTS is less used to analyze literary translation. That is followed by an explanation of the research's threefold goals: i) to study in detail how a translator goes about translating a literary text, ii) to look into the path of a literary translation from first draft to publication, and iii) to show the value of in-depth process studies for both CTS and literary translation, which will encourage more research in this area. The study uses think-aloud, draft versions, and video recordings from the CTS research paradigm alongside ethnographic techniques like observation and interviews with the translator to provide in-depth insights into the work of a professional literary translator. Six research questions are expected to be answered in this book: i) How does a literary translation come into being? ii) What happens after the first

draft of a translation is produced? iii) How does the translator in question approach the target text? iv) How does the translator come to his decisions? v) Which decisions and choices does the translator make during the post-drafting phase? What are the underlying motivations? vi) How does the revision process shape the translation? Besides, the novelty of the book lies in several key aspects, including i) its narrower focus on literary translation; (ii) its closer examination of a single translator at work on a book-length job; (iii) its consideration of both the translation and post-translation processes (including the publication phase), and (iv) its use of a much larger quantity of material (including all draft versions and 90 hours of fieldwork). At the end of this part, Borg briefly introduces the book's structure.

3. The Theoretical Basis for the Study

The theoretical basis for the study is presented in Chapter 1, along with a discussion of relevant topics and significant earlier CTS studies. It begins with an overview of Cognitive Translation Studies. Research in this area started in the mid-1980s, and with the deepening of study and technological progress, key-logging software like Translog and eye-tracking equipment have been developed. As with the research methods, the range of topics has also become more and more diverse, including decision-making, ergonomics, metaphors, revision, translator performance and so on. A great deal of research is still conducted in laboratory conditions. However, we can still see some researchers have ventured out of the laboratory in recent years and into translators' workplaces, a move that has reinstated the human, social and cultural dimensions of cognition and opened many research avenues (Martin, 2014: 67). The second part introduces the translation process. Researchers agree that the translation process can be divided into three stages despite the different terminology adopted. This study adopts Mossop's (2000: 40) terminology: Pre-drafting, drafting and post-drafting because the translation in question is still a draft version in the second phase and some revisions still need to be done in the third phase. "Decision" discussed in Part 3 is also an essential topic in the translation process. Borg redefines its concepts drawing on the effort by many researchers, and proposes the structure of decisions based on Wilss's (1996: 188) model.

The author in Part 4 mainly focuses on Alternative Translation Solutions (ATS) and distinguishes between self-revisions, verbal ATSs and written ATSs. Part 5 explains “revision”, and the author distinguishes between online self-revisions (OSRs) which are carried out in D1 (Draft 1), and self-revisions which are undertaken after D1. As Toury (1995) said, the socio-cultural environment within which translators work certainly influences and constrains their choices, so Part 6 talks about individual variation in translation process and emphasizes the importance of investigating translation process of larger units or longer texts. Parts 7 and 8 examine literary translation in CTS and studies of draft translations. It should be recognized that literary translations haven’t received much attention in CTS. The rest of the chapter introduces ethnographic approaches and case study and generalization in CTS. In short, Borg has done a thorough literature review in this chapter, making it easy for the reader to grasp the fundamental ideas of CTS.

Chapter 2 provides a context for the study in light of the significance of contextualization for case studies and particularly for the interpretation of the results. The context here is categorized into the broader context related to literary translators especially in Europe, and the specific context including Maltese, the book market and literary translation in Malta, the translator Anthony (Toni) Aquilina and the Source Text (ST) and its author. Aquilina is an experienced translator of French literature into Maltese and volunteers to participate in this research. The philosophical novella *Monsieur Ibrahim et les Fleurs du Coran* by Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, translated into Maltese by Aquilina, serves as the foundation of this study. The presence of spoken language, colloquialisms and humor makes it a challenge for translation.

For the sake of replicability, Chapter 3 includes a full overview of the research design, the data collection techniques, the data obtained, and the data analysis methodology. Aquilina finished the first complete draft of the Maltese translation in 2008 but didn’t continue the following work for various reasons. Through a combination of think-aloud, retrospection, observation and interview methods, the author obtained nine draft versions spanning from July 2013 to February 2014. Notably, this triangulation of the various research methods “mitigates some of the shortcomings of the individual methods and offers multiple benefits (p. 50)”. Borg also mentions that finding a balance between rigor and flexibility is extremely important, so she tried to interfere as little as possible during the observations to ensure ecological validity. Observing that not all written ATSs featured in the same way, she identified four types: horizontal, vertical, wavy and complex (composed of two or more of the above types). From the content point of view, the written ATSs can be categorized into a micro level (linguistic features such as lexical, syntactic, morphological, orthographic, informativity and other vague cases) and a macro one (that goes beyond linguistic categories like minor doubt, the accuracy of ST comprehension, TL rendering and consideration, strategy and preferences/poetics/ideology). In the end, to shed light on translatorial choices at two different points in the literary translation process, the author also examines the reason for the choice of ATSs in D2 and the self-revisions in D7 since one towards the beginning and the other towards the end. She explains how she analyzed and coded the Translation Process Protocols (TPPs) with NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software.

Chapter 4 analyses the data and presents the findings. Part

1 examines the initial semi-structured interview (ISSI) and concentrates on how the translator envisions his own translation process. Interestingly, the translator tends to leave some intervals while refining his draft translations because this allows him to approach the translations with fresh eyes (p. 72). Part 2 focuses on D1 and establishes the groundwork for the study, as this was the first piece of data created, collected, and analyzed. It includes a concise analysis of the first draft and online self-revisions (OSRs) that were made to it. Despite some missing punctuation marks and very obvious mistakes, like misspelled and unfinished words, D1 presents lexical variety and different translation strategies (explication, for example). When it comes to OSRs in D1, the author finds that of the 123 OSRs, 34.1% (42) become less literal than ST; 49.6% (61) move the TT closer to the ST, i.e., TT tends to be more literal; only 16.3% (20) are neutral, meaning the TT neither more literal or less so. The third and primary part thoroughly explains the translator’s approach to the material and how the translation evolved. Among the seven sections, the first five look at Phases 3 to 7 of Aquilina’s translation process, and the sixth is a look back at the translator’s involvement in this study. The publication phase is covered in the final section. Part 4 examines written ATSs in D1 and D2 separately. It is found that Aquilina’s choices and decisions as a translator were mostly based on loyalty to the ST/ST author, TL/TT considerations/requirements, personal preferences, ideology and poetics (p. 131).

Chapter 4 is mainly organized in order of the data produced and collected, while Chapters 5 and 6 analyze and elaborate on some of the key conclusions in the previous chapter’s presentation. These two chapters triangulate the results, examine the evidence, and establish connections with earlier TS findings by drawing primarily on CTS and literary translation literature. Chapter 5 focuses on the phases the translation went through as it evolved from first draft to published product as well as the translator’s approach to the task. According to the data collected, Borg describes Aquilina’s translation process as compartmentalized and incremental, and in fact, the translator himself agrees with this: “... the building is constructed step by step and everything at its proper time (p. 140)”. The author also questions the subdivision of the translation process into three fixed phases and proposes that since the case varies from translator to translator, it seems like a logical next step for CTS to investigate the translatorial behavior of specific translators thoroughly while taking into account individual variances. In post-translation process, Borg explores Aquilina’s relationship with the proofreader and publisher and reiterates the time-gaps feature through the translator’s translation process.

Chapter 6 centers on translatorial decision-making, in particular on alternative translation solutions and self-revisions, giving attention to the factors that inspire decision-making. Borg indicates that ATSs reflect translatorial doubts, problematic segments, and the translator’s competence and creativity. The number and timing of self-revisions are more likely to reflect the translator’s work methods rather than experience. According to her study’s findings, one of the effects of self-revision on this translation is to move it closer to the ST (p.161), which is actually against Chesterman’s (2011: 26) deliteralization hypothesis. As for the reasons underlying translatorial decisions and choices, Borg says the two leading factors are loyalty to the ST/ST author and TL/TT considerations/requirements (p. 163). At last, she delves into

Aquilina's self-concept and notices a mismatch between his description in Phase 3 and his actual behavior. All in all, this study once again proves that the combination of CTS and literary translation can yield exciting results that are highly meaningful to translation studies.

The Conclusion assesses the contributions and limits of the research as well as the significance of the findings for CTS and literary translation. Additionally, it emphasizes the advantages of thorough process analyses for TS and suggests lines of inquiry for future study. Among the seven research implications summarized by Borg, I think the most important ones are unearthing little-known aspects of translator behavior and translatorial decisions. The limitations are also pointed out as follows. Since the study focuses on one literary work, one translator and one language pair, the finding, as a result, is hard to be generalized. Another drawback could be that not all phases of the translation were thoroughly studied due to the varying types and quantities of data available. Besides, the first draft had already been finished before the study, which may lead to lower reliability of the interview data in Phase one. What's more, Borg recognizes she inevitably interfered with the translation process. But there is currently no way around the so-called "Observer's Paradox (Labov, 1972: 61)". But it is undeniable that this book is the first that thoroughly studies the process of a translator's translation of a literary text, and thus provides important insights into translation studies, the translation industry (especially the publishing industry), and translation teaching.

4. Conclusion

First of all, the idea of the marriage of cognitive translation study and literary translation is fascinating and valuable. Previous studies, usually focusing on non-literary texts with limited length, can undoubtedly provide meaningful findings but have many limitations. Based on the theoretical framework of CTS and the features of literary translation, this book zooms in on only one translator and one literary text, thus making a thorough and detailed case study. It is noteworthy that the French source text *Monsieur Ibrahim et les Fleurs du Coran* is nearly 11,000 words, which might be considered a short work in the literary world, yet it is a very long text for a process study (p. 45). The longer ST and the nine translations created by the translator give ample evidence for this study, lending credence to the study's result and casting doubt on certain aspects of CTS. In spite of the immensely rich data obtained, this research all along revolves around the six research questions mentioned in the Introduction part. As Borg said, keeping research questions in mind "was an effective strategy to remain focused and to 'tame' the abundant data (p. 67)".

The second point that impressed me is the transparent and easy-to-follow manner of the entire content, in which it is arranged and signposted throughout with helpful sectional summaries and in-chapter subheadings. Borg gives a detailed introduction to her data collection, from the translator's consent to include his name in the study to the researcher's position at the time of observation. Lincoln and Guba (2000: 40) expressed that thick descriptions enhance the transferability of a study, as they enable readers to decide whether and to what extent findings are transferable to other

contexts. Obviously, Borg has made it at this point. Students and new researchers can also benefit from the book's clear structure and logical analysis as they craft their own research papers.

Last but not least, what also interests me is how Borg started his research and how she managed to put it into practice. What lay before her at the very beginning was "only a first draft of a literary translation and the translator's intention to self-revise the text in order to publish it (p. 47)". In my view, one of the most important factors for her to complete the research is that Anthony Aquilina, as an active and experienced translator, is willing to participate and cooperate actively throughout the whole process, which is particularly valuable and always challenging for empirical studies. When it comes to the data process during the fieldwork, the author says, "This whole procedure was extremely laborious, lasting on average four times longer than the fieldwork session itself (p. 56)", and despite this, "... data collection, data preparation and data analysis were carried out with rigor and systematicity (p. 53)". In addition, it can be seen that the author has tried to get access to all the available literature relevant to her research and cited them whenever needed to support her point of view. Therefore, the translator's voluntariness and the author's research ability are indispensable factors for the publication of this book.

Compared with other research fields on translation, the literature on process-oriented research is not enough. What's more, as mentioned before, most empirical studies are based on short non-literary texts and are still to be deepened. This book, therefore, can provide a good reference for researchers interested in this area. Students majoring in translation are also highly recommended to read it to learn how to conduct empirical and interdisciplinary research.

References

- [1] Chesterman, A. Reflections on the literal translation hypothesis[A]. In Alvstad, C. et al. (eds.). *Methods and Strategies of Process Research: Integrative Approaches*[C]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011: 23-35.
- [2] Holmes, J. S. *Translated! Papers on Literary Translation and Translation Studies*[M]. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988.
- [3] Labov, W. *Sociolinguistic Patterns*[M]. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1972.
- [4] Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. The only generalization is: There is no generalization[A]. In Gomm, R. et al. (eds.). *Case Study Method*[C]. London: SAGE Publications, 2000: 27-44.
- [5] Martín, R. M. A blurred snapshot of advances in translation process research[A]. In Martín, R. M. (ed.). *MonTI Special Issue 1: Minding Translation*[C]. Alicante: University of Valencia, 2014: 49-84.
- [6] Mossop, B. The workplace procedures of professional translators[A]. In Chesterman, A. et al. (eds.). *Translation in Context: Selected papers from the EST Congress, Granada 1998*[C]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2000: 39-48.
- [7] Toury, G. *Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*[M]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1995.
- [8] Wilss, W. *Knowledge and Skills in Translator Behavior*[M]. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1996.