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Innovation in discourse analytic approaches to translation studies

Meifang Zhang and Jeremy Munday

Introduction

Since the 1st International Round Table Seminar on Discourse and Translation, which was held in 2012 at the University of Macau, scholars in this research field have continued to explore new ways to apply various discourse analytic approaches to translation studies. Of the numerous subsequent academic activities related to discourse and translation, two events have been especially significant: the 2nd International Round Table Seminar on Discourse and Translation, held at the University of Leeds in 2014, and Panel 16 on Innovation in Discourse Analytic Approaches to Translation Studies at the 5th IATIS conference in Belo Horizonte in 2015. The Macau Round Table brought together contributors to the special issue of *Target* (2015, 27:3) on *Discourse analysis in translation studies*, and the later events assembled additional scholars in the field, including the contributors to this special issue, to share their recent research results and discuss new approaches in the field.

Since the publication of Hatim and Mason's seminal work (1990, 1997), discourse analysis in translation studies has often drawn on Hallidayan systemic functional linguistics (SFL), and for analysis of political texts in relation to power and ideology it has often turned to theories of critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 1989/2001, 1992, 2003). While many efforts have been made to apply these theoretical models to the analysis of written translation, these have been limited to a relatively restricted number of languages. Also, because they have sometimes underplayed the role of discourse in enacting social identities, discourse analytic approaches have been somewhat marginalised by new directions in translation studies inspired by cognitive and sociological studies.

However, in their exploration of new discourse analytic approaches to translation studies, scholars have subsequently introduced more theoretical models in translation and interpreting analysis and broadened their research scope. For example, Munday (2010, 2012) and Zhang (2002, 2013) took the lead in introducing appraisal theory, developed by Martin and White (2005) from SFL, in the study of critical points of translator decision making and of subjectivity and/or ideology. Further studies applying appraisal theory have analysed not only written/verbal texts but also interpreting and visual materials (e.g. in this issue, the article by Binhua Wang & Dezheng Feng, and the article by Xi Chen).

Multimodality is indeed a particularly dynamic area in both translation practice and research. It refers to ‘the combination of different semiotic modes – for example, language and music – in a communicative artifact or event’ (van Leeuwen, 2005, p. 281) and its analysis entails employing relevant theories and approaches to investigating a full range of ‘communicational forms people use – image, gesture, gaze, posture, and so on – and the relationship between them’ (Jewitt, 2009, p.14). As an applied branch of social semiotics, multimodality research has achieved substantial developments since the 1990s, with approaches based on social semiotics, systemic functional grammar (SFG) and multimodal interactional analysis. On the whole, the foundations of social semiotic multimodal analysis and the central theoretical framework of the multimodal discourse analysis are Halliday’s (1978, 1994) theory of SFG. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/ 2006) employ the three ‘metafunctions’ of SFG and propose a ‘grammar of visual design’ to offer a descriptive framework for describing semiotic resources of images. The major elements in their model include representational resources, interactive resources, modality judgements, and compositional arrangements.

Other scholars, such as Painter, Martin, and Unsworth (2013), have investigated the realisation of the three metafunctions in children’s picture books with multimodal analysis. They proposed a framework for the intermodal that is complementary between image and verbiage in the picture books and which includes a series of visual meaning potentials and their corresponding visual realisations:

As a picture book is a text that instantiates meaning from the semiotic systems of both language and image, its interpretation from a social-semiotic perspective should be based on an account of visual meaning comparable to that available for verbal language. (Painter et al., 2013, p. 9)

In this special issue Xi Chen’s article draws on theories of multimodality in building an analytical framework to analyse visual materials in children’s picture books and translations of the Chinese classic *Mu Lan*.

Another innovative discourse analytic approach to translation studies has been the application of narrative accounts from social theory. Viewing narratives from a social and communicative perspective and defining them as ‘public and personal “stories” that we subscribe to and that guide our behaviour’, Baker (2006, p. 19) introduced four types or

dimensions of narratives distinguished by Somers and Gibson (1994): (1) ontological narratives, (2) public narratives, (3) conceptual (disciplinary) narratives, and (4) meta narratives. Baker's assertion is that 'translators and interpreters can and do resort to various strategies to strengthen or undermine particular aspects of the narratives they mediate, explicitly or implicitly' (Baker, 2006, p. 105). These strategies are components of the larger concept of 'framing', which is an active discursive construal of reality. Framing strategies include: temporal and spatial framing, selective appropriation, labelling, and positioning of participants. Although Baker herself does not specifically discuss the embedding of particular narratives into more general narratives as a framing strategy, her work has shown later researchers the feasibility of applying narrative theory to translation and of explaining translational choices in relation to wider social and political contexts. In this special issue, Binjian Qin and Meifang Zhang's article has employed Baker's suggested framing strategies in investigating the news stories of Edward Snowden's disclosures.

Last but not least, corpus-based research has become an increasingly important phenomenon. Baker (1993, 1995, 2001) was instrumental in introducing early corpus linguistics to translation studies and using electronic corpora to investigate the style of translators. This approach was advanced by scholars such as Laviosa (2002), Olohan (2004) and Kruger, Wallmach, and Munday (2011). Corpus-based translation studies is now firmly recognised as a major paradigm that has transformed analysis within the discipline. In this issue, four out of nine articles use a corpus-based or corpus-driven approach to translation or interpreting research. Themis Kaniklidou and Juliane House use a multilingual corpus of selected English children's books translated into German, Greek, Korean, Spanish and Arabic in their explanation of how ideological manipulation of originals leads to shifts in the translations in different languages. María Calzada Pérez conducts analysis on the European Comparable and Parallel Corpus, compiled at the Universitat Jaume I, Spain, to investigate the impact of the European Parliament's decision to stop publishing written translations of its proceedings. Binhua Wang and Dezheng Feng use a parallel bilingual corpus comprising 15 transcribed press conferences of two Premiers of the Chinese government interpreted by seven institutional interpreters to explore stance-taking in interpreted political discourse in contemporary China. Binjian Qin and Meifang Zhang use a small self-built electronic corpus of news translation of the Edward Snowden disclosure incident to examine how translated news stories are reframed for target readers.

[This special issue](#)

To a large extent, therefore, the articles in this special issue reflect these developments in translation practice and new interdisciplinary theories and models, broadening the very role of discourse analysis in translation studies. The first article, by **Chenguang Chang**, draws on the insights from SFL with an attempt to model translation as a process of re-instantiation. Regarding language as system and language as text, the author argues that, since a text can be read in different ways depending on the social subjectivity of readers, any source text can itself actually be represented as a meaning potential and the different translated versions as re-instantiations of that meaning potential. Using the novel *Pride and Prejudice* and its various translated versions as data, the article explores how the source text has been differently re-instantiated in the target texts, focusing in particular on the different degrees of commitment – the amount of meaning potential activated in the process of instantiation. Modelling translation as re-instantiation helps us to better understand the nature of translation as well as the micro-strategies involved in the translation process.

Jeremy Munday was one of the first scholars to introduce Martin and White's (2005) appraisal theory to translation studies. In this issue he continues to explore the potential of this theory by replicating his earlier study of the 2009 Obama inaugural speech using President Trump's 2017 inauguration speech and five live simultaneous interpretations into Spanish. Such multiple target texts in the same language offer unusual insights for research. This new study supports the earlier one in finding that core attitudinal realisations do not shift in interpreting, but raises the question of how more subtle markers in high-profile communications are influenced by the speed of delivery and type of speech.

Qianhua Ouyang's article challenges the general assumption that transferring meaning is the priority task of interpreting. She argues that the conception of meaning within the pedagogical field of consecutive interpreting (CI) is diverse and mainly impressionistic. Her study attempts to bring SFL-based intertextual analysis into the assessment of meaning transfer in classroom CI performance. An assessment model is constructed to investigate meaning transfer through both contextual-level register analysis and textual-level lexicogrammatical analysis by associating principal interpreting quality assessment criteria with respective meaning strands of SFL: accuracy with ideational meaning, appropriateness with interpersonal meaning and coherence with textual meaning. To test its applicability and effectiveness, the proposed model was applied to assess 10 students' interpretations between Chinese and English, randomly selected out of a corpus of interpretations collected in two quasi-exam sessions. The implementation of the

assessment model shows it broadens the conception of meaning in assessment and indicates different sources of interpreting problems.

Xi Chen borrows theoretical concepts of multimodality from related research areas in the study of language and image in the Chinese classic *Mulan*. Mulan is a Chinese maiden who impersonates a man and takes her father's place in a war to counter a fictitious Hun invasion. With different adaptations and translations, the legend of Mulan is not only an important classic in Chinese literature, but also gradually becomes a significant cultural text in the West, fusing western elements and Chinese cultural factors. Chen's article examines different translations of *Mulan* through verbal and visual materials in picture books, via the application of theories of multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996/2006; O'Toole, 1994; Painter et al., 2013) and of Jakobson's (1959) concept of inter-semiotic translation as the basis for analysis and discussion. The data under examination is collected from two bilingual picture books: *Song of Mulan* (2010) and *Mulan* (2012). With an analytical framework built from the above-mentioned theories, a textual analysis is firstly conducted on the Chinese texts and translations; then, the visual materials in picture books are examined with multimodal discourse analysis; finally, the intersemiotic translation between the verbal and visual materials is discussed. This is a pioneering attempt to incorporate multimodality in translation studies which is a pointer for future research.

Kaniklidou and House investigate discourse and ideology in children's literature and translation. The genre in translation has long remained sidelined and a rather under-researched domain. More recently, however, it has attracted increased attention as many researchers today agree that it plays an important role in children's socialisation (Frank, 2007; Sidiropoulou, 2012). This article examines how ideological manipulation of originals leads to shifts in translation. The analysis uses a specially compiled multilingual corpus of selected English children's books translated into German, Greek, Korean, Spanish and Arabic. German and Greek translations are discussed intensively with some space given to translations into the other languages. This comparative study investigates the surprising liberties taken by translators in their covert translations (House, 2015). Preliminary findings reveal a number of shifts that highlight: (1) underlying cross-cultural discourse preferences that are reflected in the translations through massive 'cultural filtering'; (2) ideological leanings of translators who tacitly guide reader assumptions; and (3) educational adjustments to stock societal assumptions and 'official' ideas. This article contributes to highlighting the translation of children's literature as a firm component of sociolinguistically interesting and culturally rich processes which reveal sociocultural similarities and differences

between languages and cultural systems.

Binhua Wang and **Dezheng Feng**'s article, based on a parallel bilingual corpus of interpreted political discourse from China, examines how the values and ideology of the Chinese government are interpreted and re-contextualised from Chinese to English. The parallel bilingual corpus comprises 15 transcribed press conferences of two Premiers of the Chinese government between 1998 and 2012 that were interpreted by seven institutional interpreters. Some high-frequency attitudinal and ideology-laden words are identified and patterns of their translations are analysed with corpus tools. 'Critical points' of decision-making in interpreting are elucidated using the framework of stance-taking, revealing the way that Chinese ideology is re-contextualised. The authors find that the interpreters' lexical choices reflect the government's stance and attitude on different issues. They argue that the investigation of the lexical choices provides valuable insight into a nation's stance, which cannot be achieved by looking at the source texts or the translated texts alone. The study may also have implications for the exploration of empirical approaches to critical translation studies, which integrates the methodological strengths of critical discourse analysis and descriptive, corpus-based studies.

Binjian Qin and **Meifang Zhang**'s article investigates how news reports are reframed in translated news for target readers. The study employs the framing strategies raised by Baker (2006) in the examination of Chinese and English versions of news reports on the U.S. whistleblower Edward Snowden disclosure incident, with a bilingual corpus of 47 pairs of news items. The English data are collected from ECNS.cn, the English website of China News Service run by the Chinese government, and the Chinese texts are also from Chinese state-owned news agencies. The research results show that, even though the news agency producing the translated news shares the same ideology with those providing the Chinese news, the translated narratives of the incident are often reframed and the news stance often deviates from the original texts. The authors argue that possible factors behind these shifts include the target readership, the political situation and the political position of the news agency. They also propose that the application of narrative theory may help to better explore stance variation in sensitive news translation.

María Calzada Pérez conducts a macro-level examination of original and translated European Parliament debates from 2005, 2008 and 2010. Her article adopts what she terms a '(modern diachronic) corpus-assisted discourse analysis study' (MD-CADS) of the data by drawing on the discourse-historical approach (DHA)

and corpus linguistics (CL) tools. Along DHA lines, the article proceeds from texture through strategies to content by focusing on CL key keywords. It performs analysis upon the European Comparable and Parallel Corpus (ECPC), compiled at the Universitat Jaume I (Spain). The results show that, even without formal written translation, much of the texture, strategies and content delivered at the Euro-Chamber is nonetheless retained. However, at the same time, certain nuances, such as indirectness and hedging, may be lost. As far as methodology is concerned, the study is also important in showing that MD-CADS is a potential source of data for triangulation with other more qualitative approaches.

This special issue builds on past work, while feeding on developments in translation practice and on new interdisciplinary theories and models, to question current methods and to broaden the very role of discourse analysis in translation studies. We hope that they will provide inspiration for other scholars; however, needless to say, there is much room for future research in this area. For example, we are in the early stages of examining the translation of new genres and modes of communication such as social media, tweets and collaborative translation; we also have to explore discourse analytic approaches to the cognitive process of the translator's understanding of the source text and interpretation in the target text.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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