

A Metatranslatology Perspective on the Translation Appreciation and Criticism—A Case Study of Outlaws of the Marsh

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Abstract: Translation is a kind of language conversion, but also a kind of knowledge reproduction. Translation appreciation and criticism from the perspective of metatranslatology might become the focus of translation appreciation and criticism studies by translators all over the world in the future. *Outlaws of the Marsh* is a significant full-length novel writing in vernacular Chinese in China even all over the world, and it is a realistic and documentary literary work, so that there are quite a few knowledge cultural contents such as the title of the novel, material culture-loaded words, language culture-loaded words, and social culture-loaded words. Based on the theory of metatranslatology, this paper takes the English version of *Outlaws of the Marsh* by Sidney Shapiro as an example to make a pertinent and objective analysis, evaluation and reflection on the above four aspects. This paper makes translation criticism on the English version of this work, which is favourable for target-language readers to further understand the literary value in this work even the relevant Chinese works. More importantly, it also has a beneficial effect on intercultural communication.

Keywords: Translation criticism; metatranslatology; *Outlaws of the Marsh*; Sidney Shapiro

1. Introduction

Outlaws of the Marsh is one of the four great classical novels of China. It occupies an important position in the field of Chinese literature with its profound ideological connotation, rich cultural core and high aesthetic value. It is one of the earliest narrated-in-chapters novels written in vernacular Chinese in Chinese history, and also one of the epic works in Chinese language and literature. *Outlaws of the Marsh* is a significant full-length novel writing in vernacular Chinese in China even all over the world, and it is a realistic and documentary literary work, so that there are quite a few knowledge cultural contents such as the title of the novel, material culture-loaded words, language culture-loaded words, and social culture-loaded words. Focus on the four knowledge cultural aspects, and based on the theory of metatranslatology, this paper takes the English version of *Outlaws of the Marsh* by Sidney Shapiro as an example to make a pertinent and objective analysis, evaluation and reflection. Translation is not only about the conversion of different languages, but also about translation criticism and translator behavior in social practice. The development of translation criticism should be based on relevant translation theories and translation practice. Metatranslatology is a kind of translation study between the localization of knowledge and the globalization of translation, by using truth, goodness and beauty to solve problems. From the perspective of metatranslatology, studying the translation strategies of Chinese literary works in English can promote the development of translation, spread Chinese culture, enrich Chinese stories and convey Chinese voices.

2. The Theoretical Framework of Metatranslatology

Nowadays, the breadth of translation studies continues to expand, and various “translatology” comes one after another, resulting in a sudden increase in knowledge output.^[1] Paradoxically, translation studies have become a hot topic in the field of translation, with little influence outside the field. It is very much like talking about literature and Taoism behind closed doors in professional circles. The boundaries of translation studies are blurred, and the decentralization of the research target objects is confusing. It is branching out under the name of “transactionology”, and produced a series of translation theories such as Principles of knowledge translation, History of knowledge Translation, Criticism of knowledge Translation, Ethics of knowledge translation, aesthetics of knowledge translation, management and technology of knowledge translation, education of knowledge translation,

communication of knowledge translation, which actually can be regarded as the foundation of the theoretical framework of metatranslatology.^[5]

The idea of metatranslatology provides a new way of thinking for the study of novel translation criticism. Metatranslatology --A new translation theory proposed by Professor Yang Feng (2021) from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China, believes that translation is a cultural behavior and social practice of knowledge processing, reconstruction and re-transmission across languages (Yang Feng 2021:2). The study of metatranslatology focuses on a production transition, which is embodied in the process of changing from local knowledge to global knowledge, and puts translation into the historical perspective and pattern of different knowledge communities. Thus, it scientifically analyzes the practice and experience of different languages in the face of different knowledge selection, processing and transformation, as well as the cultural background, social conditions and political environment of knowledge production and dissemination such as language conversion and concept generation.

This metatranslatology is applied to the study of translation criticism in *Outlaws of the Marsh*. According to the metatranslatology, a translated semantic unit has two parts, one is the original meaning, namely various types of knowledge, and the other components are the cultural components produced by ideological manipulation. In the past, it was said in general terms that culture and words must be cultural, but in fact the original part of culture involved in translation is still knowledge. Our current translation analysis theories and methods ignore this point.^[3] However, metatranslatology has its advantage, which is, it can be used as the theoretical support for the appreciation and analysis of the translation criticism of *Outlaws of the Marsh*. Our current translation analysis theories and methods ignore this point, and the topics of translation papers are often based on the theory of purpose, the theory of conformity, the theory of association, and so on. However, the metatranslatology theories can reflect the cultural communication and based on the differences between two cultures. It not only focus on the transmission and reception of translated texts, but also pay attention to the purpose of translation, which is essentially for knowledge transmission. Knowledge translation drives cultural communication and optimizes its own cultural connotation. Therefore, the metatranslatology analysis can embody the inherent and core knowledge aspects of *Outlaws of the Marsh*. From the translation analysis of the title of the novel, material culture-loaded words, language culture-loaded words, and social culture-loaded words, we can more clearly understand the intrinsic significance of metatranslatology, and in fact, culture is just a world in which individuals participate. Also, after the whole analysis, the relationship between knowledge and culture can be comprehended.^[4]

Using metatranslatology to appreciate and criticize the different literary genres can enhance our understanding of the ways in which different lexical items, graphological forms, deviations in syntax, rhetorical devices are employed in different literary works. Therefore it can help us to understand and appreciate literary works more profoundly from the special manipulation of language and the relationship between the skillful use of language and the meaning it conveys.

3. The Translation Appreciation and Criticism of *Outlaws of the Marsh*

3.1. The knowledge background of the title

There are four translations of the original novel *Outlaws of the Marsh* into English. First, the translation is translated by American writer Pearl S. Buck, which was published in 1933 and republished many times later, the English name is *All Men Are Brothers*, that means "All men are brothers in the Four lands", which originated from the *Analects of Confucius*: "Within the four seas, all brothers also." The second is the translation translated by J.H. Jackson, a British scholar, published in 1937. It has been republished many times since then. It is called *The Water Margin* in English, that means, "The story happening at the edge of water". The third, a translation by Chinese-American translator Sidney Shapiro, was published in 1980 and has since been republished several times as *Outlaws of the Marsh*, which is exactly the translation this paper talked. The fourth translation was published in 1994 to 2002, at the Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, co-translated by John Dent Young and Alex Dent Young, is currently the only English version of *Outlaws of the Marsh* of the hundred and twenty chapters. Later, it was republished many times under the English title of *The Marshes of Mount Liang*, namely "the story of the marshes of Mount Liang."

The title translation of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, originated from the Cultural Revolution period, there is an international friend, named Sidney Shapiro, who has lived in China for many years, is very proficient in Chinese, and is particularly fond of "Outlaws of the Marsh". At that time, the Gang of

Four forced Shapiro to translate the *Outlaws of the Marsh* in English in order to “promote” overseas benefit. And then Shapiro reluctantly agreed. When the translation was complete, Shapiro handed it over to the Gang of Four. But when the four first read the title of the English translation, they expressed their attitude of dissatisfaction. The English title is *Heroes of the Marsh*. The Gang of Four said that Song Jiang had been recruited by the emperor and that he was a traitor, and that a considerable number of Liangshanpo’s followers, who had no “class consciousness”, were also traitors. If you are a bunch of traitors, how can you use the word heroes? So the translation error here is fundamental, a matter of position. The Gang of Four had some ideas, and they thought that since it was a “world opening” type “introduction”, they should consciously guide non-native readers through translation strategies, so that they could see the real problems of historical figures, especially the metaphorical relationship between historical figures and contemporary figures, so as to understand the “deep side” of some Chinese figures during the Cultural Revolution. The gang of Four said it should use the English equivalent of the Chinese word for “gangster” and asked Shapiro to find the English word exactly. The Gang of Four pointed out that the Liangshanpo characters were “rebels” at the beginning and traitors later. If the two were connected together, there would be a worse plot than traitors, and the word “gangster” could not reveal its essence. Shapiro then realized that the gang of four had a knack for translation and agreed to find words. Finally, the English title became *Outlaws of the Marsh*. *Outlaws* does mean “gangsters” in Chinese, and that’s mostly what it means. After reading, the four felt “cool” and announced that the translation was “done”. But Shapiro chuckles to himself and, after the downfall of the Gang of Four, says proudly that *outlaws* also means “good men” in Chinese. From the translation of the book, English readers must believe that the title refers to “good men”. Shapiro seems to be “throwing the punch when it’s time”, using the double undertone of the *outlaws* as a covert campaign of verbal resistance -- he sympathizes with those the Gang of Four dislikes.

3.2. *Material culture-loaded words*

Language is one of the important carriers of culture, and each nation has its own culture. Both English and Chinese have many words with cultural characteristics, which are generally called culture-loaded words. “Culture-loaded” refers to words, phrases and idioms that mark something unique in a culture. These words reflect the unique ways in which certain ethnic groups have accumulated over the long course of history, which are different from other ethnic groups. Eugene Nida, an American translation theorist, divided culture into five parts which are “ecological culture, material culture, social culture, religious culture, language culture”. Therefore, culture-loaded words can be divided into ecological culture-loaded words, material culture-loaded words, social culture-loaded words, religious culture-loaded words and language culture-loaded words. Eco-culture-loaded words are those related to animals, plants and geographical environment. Material culture-loaded words are related to people’s clothing, food, housing and transportation. Social culture-loaded words include social etiquette, traditional customs and so on. Religious culture-loaded words refer to expressions of faith, ritual and other words. And language and culture-loaded words refer to the unique language words of a country or a nation, such as idioms, allusions, etc.

Example 1: About Wu Song’s “ao”.

Shapiro’s version: Wu Song was wearing a new red silk robe and a broad-brimmed hat of white felt. He shouldered his pack, took up his staff, and bid his friends good-bye.

Different countries have different things, even if there is the same thing, but the language is different, people will have different associations. “ao” has two basic meanings, lined Chinese style coat and plain jacket. The first meaning of “ao” can be divided into three categories: a side of one or two layers of lined jacket, padded jacket with cotton wool inside, and also fur jacket made of animal skin. “ao” is divided into long jacket and short jacket. In the Song Dynasty, the “ao” was shorter than the big one and longer than the horse one. Shapiro took the general meaning of “ao” and translated it as “robe”. Although it did not embody the characteristics of “ao”, it conveys the basic content correctly and can reduce the reading burden of readers. To some extent, it can introduce the differences of “ao” in China to readers. In other words, the “ao” in this paragraph is the “robe” with Chinese characteristics. Metatranslatology holds that: “Any knowledge is essentially local knowledge generated by human experience, experiment and practice activities. There is no history of scientific knowledge that is universal from the beginning. The so-called universality of knowledge is only the worldwide understanding, transmission, use and defense of knowledge, so it determines the construction functions of knowledge cognition, evaluation, change and interpretation”. This view is enough to be reflected in the translation process of material culture-loaded words.

3.3. *Language culture-loaded words*

Example 2: About one word of Song Jiang, which contains “Jianghu”.

Shapiro’s version: “I’ve heard his name many times in the gallant fraternity. I never thought I’d run into him today. How fortunate!”

According to metatranslatology, language is inseparable from culture and is one of the carriers of culture, which can reflect the grammar and form of a language. “Jianghu”, in the old days, refers to the wanderers who make a living by busking, selling medicine and divination. Also refers to the kind of business the person is engaged in. Like “Walking in the Jianghu.” It also means “folk” or “everywhere in four directions”. Shapiro translated it as “the gallant fraternity.” The word “gallant” is “gallant,” and the word “fraternity” is “a group of the same faith.” It reflects the unique cultural-loaded of the word Jianghu in this context. Besides, Shapiro has mentioned that “Wu Song is the second in the family”, so it is directly treated as “him” here, which can not only make the translation coherent, faithful to the original content, but also reduce the reading burden of readers.

3.4. *Social culture-loaded words*

Example 3: About the translation of “Zhuang Ke”.

Shapiro’s version: But he often got drunk, and he had a bad temper. When he didn’t like the service, he would beat the vassals. None of them had a good word to say for him.

Metatranslatology holds that different historical developments, customs, cultures and social systems will affect a nation’s cultural vocabulary, which in turn reflects the nation’s cultural characteristics. “Zhuang Ke” means “servants employed by a large family in the countryside”. Zhuang Ke and his family belong to his master’s manor and cannot leave their respective estates at will. “vassal” refers to “a vassal who is loyal to the king or other dignities in the Middle Ages”, which is basically the same as “Zhuangke”. Therefore, Shapiro’s translation can be faithful to the original text, and the communication effect is basically the same with the original text, which shows that knowledge is not only the whole existence of translation, but also the integrant existence of translation. Knowledge of social culture is the part of both the theory and the method of translation. There is no translation that is not knowledge. Behaviorally, the history of human translation is the history of knowledge translation, and only knowledge drives every element in all translation practices. As the most basic power, translation becomes the home of human knowledge as the mother of knowledge.

4. Conclusions

Compatible with logic of knowledge, ethics of knowledge and aesthetics of knowledge, metatranslatology takes three internal elements of knowledge, language and translator, three scientific methods of truth, goodness and beauty, and three historical dimensions of culture, society and politics as its “famous device”. It dominates the translation world from micro to subtle, from hidden to explicit. Knowledge is a social convention, and culture is a belief in life. Knowledge is reality, culture is transcendence. Knowledge itself is a material and spiritual culture, and culture belongs to knowledge in essence because of the accumulation and purpose of knowledge.

Indeed, translation is the weaving of one language, but the object of translation is not language.^[2] As we know, although a table is made of wood, wood is not a table. Language is the “child” of linguistics. In addition to the tangled relationship between translation and the body or the different use of language, culture has long occupied the nest of fame in the translation world. If language is the sea to translation, then culture is the sky. Metatranslatology can help us to use proper words in proper places so as to make our language more idiomatic; it can help us to understand the “norm” and the “deviation” of different varieties of language so that we can use them more skillfully; it can help us to do translation work more successfully so as to achieve fidelity, fluency and elegance. More importantly, it can also help us to be better equipped in literary appreciation and criticism.

With the advent of modern language technologies such as Chat GPT, academics may once again be submerged in a uniform procedural production, and it will be more difficult to maintain a theoretical attitude, realistic spirit and critical consciousness in knowledge production. After the criticism and appreciation of the English translation of *Outlaws of the Marsh*, we should learn to use the theory of metatranslatology, to convey the voice of the author with language, to say the essence of things with

language. I believe that language, after testing and thinking, can express original thoughts; And to communicate what the original author of a literary work wanted to convey to the reader.

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