



A Study of Translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng From the Perspective of Ecological Translation

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Abstract

Death of a Salesman, a masterwork by renowned American playwright Arthur Miller, has been hailed as “an extraordinary landmark work, which can be deservedly called the best American drama since the Second World War”. Among the Chinese translations of *Death of a Salesman*, Ying Ruocheng’s translation is one of the more famous ones, which can be called a model of domestic drama translation. It contains many ingenious treatments, which are worthy of serious study. With the ecological theory becoming a global development craze, translation research based on ecology has gradually entered the public’s view. This paper takes the translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng as the object of study, applies the guiding principles of ecological translation theory, and analyzes the translation strategies of naturalization, amplification, paraphrasing, and set translation adopted by the translator in the translation process from the three aspects of linguistic dimension, communication dimension, and cultural dimension; In addition to expounding the guiding significance of ecological translation theory to the translation of drama texts, it also provides ideas for future drama translation and attract people’s attention to the linguistic characteristics of drama translation.

Key words: *Death of a Salesman*; Ecological translation theory; Translation strategies; Drama

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INTRODUCTION

Drama is a special form of literature, both readable and performable, and because of its dual characteristics of “literature” and “performance”, drama has become one of the most problematic and easily neglected fields in translation studies. This also puts the translators of dramas in a dilemma: whether to emphasize the “literary” or “performative” character of the translated texts. With the deepening development of international communication and the improvement of the status of domestic drama, the attention of translation field to drama translation has gradually increased in the last few years. Among the studies on the translation of drama texts, there are numerous articles on the translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng as an example. They are roughly divided into two categories: one is the study of translation based on translation strategies, which discusses the role and application of translation strategies for drama translation, and the other is the discussion of specific issues about the drama text embodied in the translation. For example, Wu Manli (2022) takes the English translation of *Death of a Salesman* as an example and analyzes the drama translation strategy under the guidance of Skopos theory; Zhang Lei (2017) takes the English translation as an example and analyzes the application of manipulation theory in drama translation. As well as Liu Benli (2007) studied the linguistic characteristics of drama translation in the English translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng. Based on a new theory, this paper analyzes the translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng as an example from the perspective of three-dimensional transformation of ecological translation theory, to explore the subtleties of its information transfer techniques, as well as to provide new ideas for future drama translation.

1. ECOLOGICAL TRANSLATION

Prof. Hu Gengshen integrated Darwinian's biological evolution principle "natural selection, survival of the fittest" into his translation research, and formed the "Adaptive Selection Theory of Translation", i.e., translation is a translator's natural selection adapted to the ecology of language. This theory has been developed and perfected to become the first original translation theory in China - "Eco-translatology". Eco-translatology draws on the essence of the fusion and intersection of "ecology" and "translatology", represents the in-depth expansion of translation theories by contemporary Chinese scholars, and combines the essence of Western scientific theories and ancient Chinese philosophical thoughts.

1.1 Brief Introduction of Eco-translatology

Eco-translatology is a relatively systematic theory, which involves nine major research focuses and theoretical perspectives. Firstly, eco-translatology positions its translation theory "paradigm" and illustrates a "correlation sequence chain" that extends the cognitive field of view from translation to the natural world with intrinsic logical connection; Secondly, it summarizes "ecological rationality", puts forward the concept of "ecological environment of translation", and explores one of the fundamental problems of translation theory, namely, how to describe and explain the role of the translator in the translation process. Translation Adaptive Selection Theory argues that for translators, both adaptation and selection are required. The basic theory of Eco-translatology summarizes the translation method as a "three-dimensional transformation", and explains the content of "ex post facto punishment" (Hu, 2011, p.5).

1.2 The three-dimensional transformation in Eco-translatology

The three-dimensional transformation mainly occurs at the operation level of translation, and has become one of the centers of ecological translation research. The "three dimensions" refer to the linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions respectively. "Transformation" is the multi-dimensional adaptation and selection in the translation process according to the conditions of source language, target language and other factors. The degree of three-dimensional transformation determines whether the translation can truly realize cross-cultural communication and whether the translation can reproduce the style of the original work to gain public acceptance. The success of Ying Ruocheng's translation in China's drama market proves that his translation of drama texts has made correct adaptations and selection on the basis of adapting to the ecological environment of translation.

2. STUDY OF TRANSLATION OF *DEATH OF A SALESMAN* BY YING RUOCHENG FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ECOLOGICAL TRANSLATION

2.1 Adaptive Selection Transformation in Linguistic Dimension

Translator's adaptive selection of linguistic forms for transformation is known as adaptive selection of linguistic dimensions for transformation (Hu Gengshen, 2011). Linguistic form refers to the way and structure of language expression, including vocabulary, syntax, grammar, intonation and other aspects. The difference of linguistic form reflects the personalized characteristics of national way of thinking, and the translator must take the linguistic level as an important aspect of thinking in order to translate the script well for the audience.

2.1.1 Adaptation and Selection at the Lexical Level

As in the original text "LINDA (resigned): Well, you'll just have to take a rest, Willy, you can't continue this way." The translator did not translate the word "resigned" as "已放弃的, 顺从的", but in order to better reflect his wife's feelings of worry and helplessness towards Willy, the translator translated it as "听天由命", which more profoundly reflects his wife, Linda's complex emotions of anxiety and powerlessness towards Willy. The expression "take a rest" is translated as "歇一阵子". This expression is more colloquial than "休息" or "休憩", which is in line with the characterization of character's daily conversation and communication and their social status.

The second example is "WILLY: Sure. Certain men just don't get started till later in life." The difference in the expression way of this sentence reflects the different characteristics of the two languages. The original sentence is longer, while the translator translates it into the four-word structure of "大器晚成". Translator fully understands the popularity of dramatic lines, and this expression greatly adapts to the Chinese mindset, which is more understandable and acceptable to the Chinese audience.

Besides, in the translation of the sentences "Willy: Don't insult me" and "Willy: What do you keep comin' in here for", modal verbs such as "嘛" and "老" are often used, which add details of daily conversations to the translated text, vividly show the picture of the daily conversation between two friends and outline the characters' images. This kind of treatment shows that the translator takes into account the different requirements of drama translation and other literary genres, and in order to adapt to the real ecological environment of the target language - the scenario of the drama performance, he has made adaptations and selections in the word choice and word convention. This makes the translated lines concise,

easy to understand and colloquial, so that the audiences can quickly understand the meaning of the lines and enter the story situation.

2.1.2 Adaptation and Selection at the Sentence Level

The transformation in linguistic dimension also reminds the translator to keep in mind the similarities and differences of the languages in terms of their sentence structures and expressions. The fourth example is “WILLY: (He pauses, then nods in approbation for a few seconds, then looks upward.) Biff, first thing we gotta do when we get time is clip that big branch over the house.” In Chinese, people are often used as the subject, and the translator usually adjusts the subordinate clauses in the characters’ lines in order to conform to the Chinese expression. The translator changes the subject of the original sentence from “first thing” to “咱们”, and then translates the rest of the sentence, which is consistent with the facts stated in the original sentence and with the conventions of verbal expression.

Another example is “Willy: You should see the lumber they brought home last week. At least a dozen six-by-tens worth all kinds of money”. The translator adjusts an affirmative sentence into a negative one, translating it as “你还没看见...木料呢”, which can make the audience feel that Willy praises his sons’ stealing behavior and highlights the image of Willy, the main character of the play.

Therefore, in the translation process, the translator can adapt and select the appropriate language form by choosing the appropriate words and adjusting the length and structure of sentences. This adaptation and selection is a crucial part of the translation process.

2.2 Adaptive Selection Transformation in Cultural Dimension

The term “Adaptive Selection Transformation of Cultural Dimension” describes how a translator pays attention to how bilingual cultural implications are transmitted and interpreted during the translation process (Hu, 2011). Culture is a key factor in the translation ecosystem, and the two languages of English and Chinese have completely different cultural backgrounds. In the translation process, translators need to adapt to the two very different cultural environments and make appropriate choices to convey the cultural meanings of the source language in order to correctly deliver the message to the translation audience.

2.2.1 Adaptation and Selection of Cultural Images

In the drama *Death of a Salesman*, there are many cultural images unique to the United States, and the translation should take into account the direct effect of the stage and the feelings it brings to the audience, and do a good job of adaptive transformation of the two cultural expressions. In the text, Willy and his two sons talk about the importance of people’s looks in the business world, and he praises his sons’ good looks with the word “Adonises”. In Western

culture, Adonis is a royal man with handsome and delicate features, and in modern times it has become a synonym for an attractive and beautiful man. Considering that the character in Greek mythology is well known in the West, but not many people in China know about it, the translator used the method of paraphrasing here.

The “Hercules” mentioned in the original text is also a character in ancient Greek mythology, who was so powerful that he accomplished twelve “impossible tasks”, and later his name became synonymous with strong man. In hindsight, the transliteration as “赫拉克勒斯” does not affect understanding (Zhao, 2018, p.23). However, precisely because the audience watching the drama at that time had different cognition levels of western culture, the translator adopted a popularized expression, not only translating it as “大力神”, but also adding the information of “希腊”. On the one hand, it makes easier for the audience to understand, and on the other hand, it also preserves the national flavor of the allusion in the original text.

2.2.2 Adaptation and Selection of Idioms and Sayings

The lines of stage performances are different from the texts for reading in that they are transient and unannotable. Translators should pay attention to the presentation of culturally loaded words such as idioms and sayings in different cultural environments. There is an obvious difference between Chinese and Western religious beliefs, which is also reflected in the use of exclamations. Chinese readers and audiences usually know the meaning of Jesus, but it can also be used as an exclamation to express strong emotions. The translator translated “Jesus” into the Chinese expression “老天爷”, so that readers and audiences can fully appreciate the fullness of the speaker’s feelings in the source language. In the dialogue “WILLY (turning away): Ah, you’re counting your chickens again”, Biff intends to borrow some money from his old employer Oliver to start a sporting goods business. When Willy (Biff’s father) learns of this, he asks how much money he can get, and hears that Biff hasn’t met Oliver yet, he makes the reply. In translating the sentence, the translator, in order to avoid the difficulty of understanding caused by the direct translation, skillfully applies a familiar Chinese proverb “八字没一撇儿” to convey the meaning of the original sentence. In cases where the Chinese and English idioms do not exactly correspond to each other but share the same meaning, the set translation method can not only express the connotation of the original text, but also retain the literary color of the language (Gao, 2018, p.8).

2.2.3 Adaptation and Selection of Unfamiliar Culture Elements

How the translator can make the unfamiliar elements of a dramatic text more relatable, make

the audience more able to understand what is happening on the stage, and eliminate the threat of foreign culture is also the focus of dramatic text translation. The fifth example “Biff: I’m going to break through for a touchdown.” relates to an American sport, American football. The rules of the game of American football are: players with the ball to the opposing team in front of the goal of the scoring area for a touchdown score 6 points; can also kick again, such as kicking the ball over the opposing team’s goal cross-woods can also be scored 1 point, and other circumstances of the shotgun goal are scored 3 points. So the translator provides appropriate explanations in accordance with the rules of the game, both explains “touchdown” and adds content about scoring. The translation is “比夫：我要来一次单人突破，底线得分”。This can make the audience who do not know American football understand the content of the original text and reduce the unfamiliarity brought by the foreign culture.

2.3 Adaptive Selection Transformation in Communicative Dimension

The adaptive selection transformation of translators focusing on bilingual communicative intentions in the translation process is known as adaptive selection transformation in the communicative dimension (Hu, 2011). In order to achieve the communicative goal between the author of the original text and the readers of the translated text, the translator must be able to help the readers of the target language understand the author’s expressed intention. This will create ideological and emotional resonance or controversy.

Zhang Jin’s translation definition: “Translation is a communicative process and a communicative tool between two linguistic civilizations, and its ultimate purpose is to advance the political, economic, and cultural development of their own linguistic society. The task of the translator is to translate and annotate the logical or artistic image of the reality world included in the original work in its entirety from one language to another” (Zhang and Zhang, 2005, p.6). The transformation of the communicative dimension is manifested in such aspects as communicative context and communicative mode.

2.3.1 Adaptation and Selection of communicative context

The first example is “Willy: I got nothin’ to give him, Charley, I’m clean, I’m clean.” In the context of the original text, Willy is having a conversation with his friend Charley and is acting very agitated and emotional. Therefore, when translating, the translator should also consider whether the feelings expressed in the translation be consistent with the source language. Instead of using direct translation for “clean”, Ying Ruocheng translates the two “clean” as “穷得叮当响的，一个子儿都没

有”，which makes Chinese readers and audiences feel the poverty of Biff as much as readers in the source culture.

Metaphor is the most frequently used rhetorical pattern in literature. Simple metaphors can be translated directly, but more metaphors can be difficult to understand with direct translation. Translators can do paraphrasing to translate simple metaphors and realize the effect of expression. The text “WILLY: The world is an oyster, but you don’t crack it open on a mattress” is translated as “这个世界有的是宝贝，可是得动硬的，软的不行”。The translator translates the original metaphor into a more popular language, showing Willy’s eagerness to see his two sons excel.

In the third example, “CHARLEY: Willy, when’re you gonna realize that the things don’t mean anything?”, Charley uses a rhetorical question to emphasize that Willy’s naming of Howard is not worth anything, and then follows it with a reference to the fact that having a job and earning an income is the most important. In translating Charley’s passage, the translator turned the original rhetorical question into an exclamatory sentence, and the original sentence “don’t mean anything” is translated as “屁钱不值”，which adds the element of “money”. This is in line with the context of the conversation, and enables the reader to realize that Charley sympathizes with Willy’s situation, but also has the feeling of “hating the iron for not being able to steel himself”.

2.3.2 Adaptation and Selection of communicative mode

For the consideration of the audience’s viewing experience in the translated language, the translator can take the translation method of amplification to process the translation accordingly when necessary. This can build a bridge of communication between the audience and the original text, convey the meaning of the original text, and show the characters’ images. For example, when Howard is playing with the radio in his office, the original script says, “Supposing you wanna hear Jack Benny, see?” If “Jack Benny” is directly translated into “杰克·本尼”，the audience will be confused as to who this person is, so Ying Ruocheng handled the translation as “你想听杰克·本尼的相声吗”，the clever addition explains the identity of the characters in the lines, so that the audience can better integrate into the story.

In the original text, Linda tells her son that she has found out that Willy is planning to commit suicide by using the rubber hose in the cellar, but she does not remove the hose. And when her son asks her in return, she replies “How can I insult him that way?” The translator uses amplification method, adding the “当面” to the original sentence to emphasize Linda’s concern for Willy and her sense of responsibility as a lower-middle class housewife taking care of her family all year round. In order to reach the best association with the audience of the translated text, between the original work and the audience of the drama, the translator processes

and adds or subtracts the translated text accordingly, so that the readers of the translated text can get the best contextual effect from the translated text, which is the adaptive selection transformation emphasized by the communicative dimension (Long, Gong, & Liu, 2018, pp.21-25).

3. CONCLUSION

Ecological Translation provides a new perspective for the translation study of the dramatic texts. This paper analyzes the translation of *Death of a Salesman* by Ying Ruocheng from the perspective of three-dimensional transformation of ecological translation, and finds that a good translation can appropriately convey the meaning of the original text as well as adapt to the needs of the target language environment. In translation, some techniques and methods are indispensable. The adaptive selection in linguistic dimension focuses on the transformation of linguistic forms, including the adjustment of words and sentences by naturalization; the adaptive selection in cultural dimension focuses on the presentation of bilingual cultural connotations, including the use of paraphrasing and set translation to deal with the cultural imagery, idioms, colloquialisms and cultural knowledge; and the adaptive selection in communicative dimension focuses on the communication effect, which can be clearly expressed with the help of amplification. The adaptive choice of communication dimension focuses on the communication effect, which can clearly express the original author's implied intention, emotion and attitude with the help of amplification method to create a reciprocal communication effect. These three dimensions do not exist independently without interfering with

each other. A good translation can take into account the adaptation and selection of the three dimensions, so as to achieve the highest degree of integrated adaptation and selection.

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