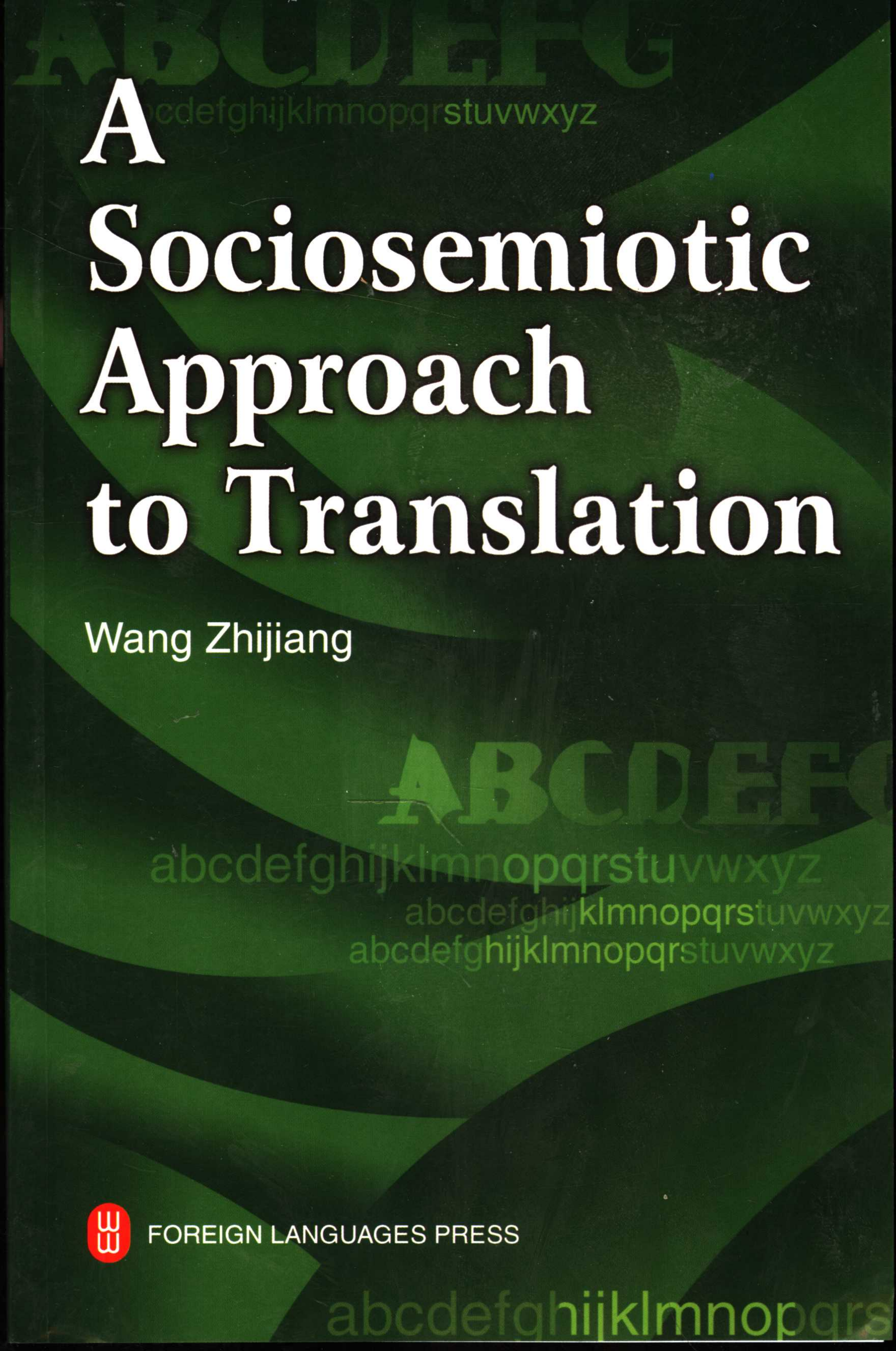

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Wang Zhijiang

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ABSTRACT

Translation has played a very important part in history. The great influence it exerts on the formation or transformation and development of every culture is undeniable. Therefore, translation studies has been given more and more attention. It has passed through several periods, from philological period, structuralist period, to postmodern de-constructional period. In each period, translation studies adopted thoughts of other relevant disciplines and achieved novel understandings of the nature and problems of translation. In this dissertation, an almost pioneering attempt is made to systematically explore the nature of translation and related elements from a sociosemiotic perspective, aiming at establishing a relatively comprehensive sociosemiotic theory of translation as intercultural communication, which not only discusses the intersemiotic interaction between cultures in a macro view, but also includes the operational organism in a micro view in the hope of bringing some fresh ideas into translation studies.

A cross-disciplinary method of research is adopted, taking sociosemiotics as the ideological framework to study the problems of translation. The present research is based on a historical review and critical analysis of literature. The discussion is basically descriptive. At the same time, ideas of other relevant disciplines such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, semantics, pragmatics, information, intercultural communication, hermeneutics, etc. are utilized to carry out thorough research on the subject, object and noumenon of translation.

The dissertation is composed of six chapters. Chapter One is an introduction that briefly illustrates the interdisciplinary and intercultural nature of translation studies. It introduces the definitions

and history of semiotics and sociosemiotics, explains the connection between sociosemiotics and translation studies and the advantages of a sociosemiotic approach to translation. It shows obvious advantages. Firstly, it studies translation in social and cultural context, emphasizing the close connection between language sign system and other sign systems of culture. Therefore, it makes us realize that translation is more than decoding and encoding; it is a process of reconstructing the SL social and cultural reality through TL recoding. Thus it leads the translator to a deeper understanding of his primary duty in translation. Secondly, the intersemiotic interaction model of translation established from a sociosemiotic perspective may help us understand the nature of translation as an intercultural communication and see clearly how SL and TL cultures interact with each other through translating activity. Thirdly, the sociosemiotic approach to translation employs sign relations to explain meanings and functions of text and to describe the process of their equivalent transmission to the translated text. It can make us thoroughly aware of the production and reproduction of sign meanings and functions. Finally, the criterion of the sociosemiotic approach to translation is based on invariant core without ignoring secondary meanings and functions of language. Such a criterion is of great validity and practicability.

Chapter Two is a literature review as to research on the application of sociosemioctics in translation studies. Achievements made by the current sociosemiotic translation studies up to present for so many years prove the applicability of the approach. Problems found from review prove the necessity of further study. Generally speaking, current researches are isolated and superficial. As a result, no systematic sociosemiotic theory of translation has been formulated.

The close connection between sociosemiotics and translation is illustrated in detail in Chapter Three. Fundamental concepts of semiotics and sociosemiotics are introduced including ideas of Saussure, Peirce, Morris, and Halliday. The fundamental concepts of

semiotics and sociosemiotics are found relevant to translation studies. From a semiotic view point, all the elements involved in the process of translation are signs including the writer, the translator, SL text, TL text, SL culture, TL culture, readers, rules and laws of translation, and so on. They are meaningful as signs and should be included in the study. Among these signs the translator, as a social sign, plays a dominant role because without the translator there would be no intercultural communication in the form of translation. The translator is not only a sign user, an interpreter, but also a sign producer. This chapter lays an ideological foundation for the framework of the sociosemiotic model of translation. The close connections once again show the applicability of the sociosemiotic approach to translation.

An attempt is made in Chapter Four to establish an intersemiotic interaction model of translation. It is the macro organism of the sociosemiotic theory of translation. The model established is different from others in that it is a two-way process activated by the translator rather than uni-directional as commonly thought by translation theorists. This part closely examines the process of translation against cultural background. Translation is taken as a process of sign interpretation and sign production, as well as an interaction between signs, especially cultures. The process of intercultural communication involves a set of sociosemiotic relationships: the relationship between the writer and the translator, the relationship between TL text (translation) and SL text (the original), the relationship between TL text and TL culture, the relationship between SL text and TL culture, etc. The set of triadic relationships show clearly how the elements interact with each other. In this interaction the translator plays a very important role. From a sociosemiotic perspective, the dissertation claims that sign relation is the translation unit. This sign relation is different from the above-mentioned sociosemiotic relationship in that the sign relation is textual while the sociosemiotic relationship is contextual. There are three general categories of sign relations: sign-sign relation, termed as linguistic relation, indicating

the linguistic meaning of language; sign-interpretant relation, termed as designative relation, indicating the designative meaning of language; sign-sign user relation, termed as pragmatic relation, indicating the pragmatic meaning of language. Each category may be subdivided into several sub-relations. The adoption of sign relation as a unit of translation is based on two considerations. Firstly, translation transmits meanings and functions of language. These meanings and functions are actually created by different sign relations: between signs themselves, between the sign and what it stands for, between the sign and the sign user. Corresponding to these sign relations are the three sign meanings: linguistic meaning, referential/designative meaning, and pragmatic meaning. Secondly, all the traditionally claimed units of translation from the word to the text and even culture contain sign relations in depth. A piece of language is taken as a unit of transference in translation because there is such a sign relation in it which makes the piece of language a meaningful segment which can be separated from other parts. Adoption of sign relation as a unit of translation may avoid the confusion caused by the so many units claimed by different approaches to translation, because it includes all these units. Sign relation is an open dynamic concept. Under such circumstances, the author argues that translation means translating sign relations.

Chapter Five can be regarded as the operational organism of the sociosemiotic model of translation. The author attempts to propose a criterion of translation: transmitting the invariant core information to the fullest extent and other information as much as possible so as to realize TT-ST sociosemiotic equivalence to the fullest extent. The components of the invariant core are categorized as meanings and functions of language, which are produced by various sign relations. By examining current criteria, namely, Nida's Functional Equivalence/Dynamic Equivalence, Bassnet's Equivalence of Cultural Functions and three Chinese traditional theories on translation including Yan Fu's "Failthfulness, Expressiveness, and Elegance", Fu Lei's "Closeness in Spirit", and Qian Zhongshu's "Transmigration

of Souls", the dissertation shows the necessity of establishing sociosemiotic equivalence, which may be regarded as the criterion of the sociosemiotic approach to translation as well as the concrete method of realizing the criterion. Because at present many people are doubtful about the concept of equivalence, the dissertation illustrates that equivalence is still a central issue of translation theory and practice. The thesis also provides philosophical and semiotic foundations for equivalence. Sociosemiotic equivalence consists of two parts. The macro equivalence refers to the replication of sociosemiotic relationships between ST and SL cultures, between the writer and SL culture, and between ST and the writer in the translated text in order to reproduce faithfully SL culture and the writer's style. This part is the guidelines for the micro equivalence. Micro equivalence refers to TT-ST equivalence in terms of meanings and functions of text. It is through micro equivalence that macro equivalence is realized. The micro equivalence is composed of three levels, namely linguistic equivalence, semantic equivalence and pragmatic equivalence. Equivalence at these levels is realized through establishing equivalent sign relations at corresponding sublevels. It is the most comprehensive equivalence of translation, which takes all the meanings and functions of language into keen consideration. The criterion is valid because it focuses on the invariant core of text and practical because it provides a systematic operational organism.

The development of the ideas of the dissertation is firmly rooted in historical retrospection and the sociosemiotic model of translation is established in the framework of sociosemiotics and intercultural communication. It takes all the elements of translation into consideration and can explain translation problems reasonably. Therefore, it is an ideal theory of translation. The dissertation has made some contributions to translation studies, if they can be regarded as such, including:

(1) For the first time, the dissertation sums up and analyzes studies on the same subject, the application of sociosemiotics in

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translation studies, in China and abroad. The rich sources of material can be of great documentary value.

(2) The dissertation adopts cross-disciplinary and descriptive methods of research. It makes an ambitious attempt to construct a new theory of translation within the framework of sociosemiotics and intercultural communication. The methodological values are obvious.

(3) The dissertation puts forth an intersemiotic interaction model of translation as intercultural communication. It explores the subject, object and noumenon of translation, bringing forward some innovative ideas such as "translation means translating sign relations", "sign relation is the unit of translation", "translation is a process of sign interpretation and production", and so on. It describes sociosemiotic equivalence as a translation criterion. A relatively systematic sociosemiotic theory of translation is formulated, which in a sense fills in the gaps in the field.

Key words: sociosemiotics, translation, intercultural communication, sign relation, sociosemiotic equivalence

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The motive and objectives of the dissertation

"Translation is probably the most complex type of event in the history of the cosmos" (Richards,1953) or the most complex mental labor of humankind (Nida,1984:137). It deserves more and deeper research from all possible perspectives because it has always played a significant role in the development of every culture. In the history of translation studies, just like other human social sciences that have co-developed absorbing the achievements of each other, interdisciplinary studies or even multidisciplinary studies have been the consistent trend in research. Thoughts of many disciplines, including philology, philosophy, aesthetics, linguistics, psychology, communication theory, information theory, sociology, anthology, logic, hermeneutics, and semiotics have been utilized in translation studies ever since. Susan Bassnett, in the "General Editor's Preface" to Gentzler's famous book *Contemporary Translation Theories*, states that:

> Translation studies brings together work in a wide variety of fields, including linguistics, literary study, history, anthropology, and economics. (Gentzler, 1993:viv)

Just one year later, the American scholar Dinda L. Gorleé also talked about "plurality of methodological and conceptual frameworks" in translation studies, and pointed out:

> Translation studies is an "interdiscipline" or rather "transdiscipline" combining an approach from general and applied linguistics with an approach from general and comparative literary studies, in addition to

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