

国外翻译研究丛书之十六

TRANSLATION IN SYSTEMS

Descriptive and System-oriented Approaches Explained

系统中的翻译 ——描写和系统理论解说

THEO HERMANS



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Frank Hees

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THE BOOKS OF THE SERIES "SYSTEMS OF THE FUTURE" ARE AVAILABLE IN CHINESE

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出版说明

近年来,国内翻译研究取得了很大进展,有关翻译研究的丛书也出了多套。不过,长期以来,国内引进的原版翻译著作匮乏,不少研究都是根据二手资料;另外,学习翻译专业的研究生人数越来越多,这种状况若继续存在,将十分不利于学科的发展和翻译人才的培养。鉴于此,上海外语教育出版社约请了多名国内翻译研究著名学者分别开列出最值得引进的国外翻译研究论著的书目,并对这些书目进行整理、排序,最终确定了准备引进的正式书单。该丛书涉及的论著时间跨度大,既有经典,也有新论;内容的覆盖面也相当广泛,既有翻译本体的研究,也有跨学科的研究。这套丛书的引进将会满足翻译专业研究生教学原版参考书和翻译理论研究的需要。

上海外语教育出版社谨以此丛书献给我国的翻译学界。

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(代序)

上海外语教育出版社自成立以来一直是我国外语教育最优秀的后勤部和侦调部。因为它不但为我国各个层次(尤其本科与研究生层次)的外语教育提供了多种高水平的教材、教参和工具书,而且还出版了多学科、多语种和多系列的中文版和外文版的学术著作,比如“现代语言学丛书”、“牛津应用语言学丛书”、“美国文学史论译丛”、“外国文学史丛书”、“剑桥文学指南丛书”、“当代英语语言学丛书”以及列入国家及教育部规划的人文社科重点项目的外国语言文学、文化等方面的图书等。为了适应我国现代化建设和教育改革的需要,还出版了一批国际金融、对外贸易、涉外保险、国际经济法、国际新闻和管理科学等方面的教材与专著。这些著作在外语的学科建设与学术研究以及复合型人才培养等方面都在发挥着强有力的侦察、调研和指导作用。这是外语界有口皆碑的。

随着中外文化交流的纵深发展以及我国现代化建设对人才的需求,对比语言学和翻译学近些年来在我国有了较快的发展,最突出的证据就是①外语类硕士博士点上研究对比与翻译方向的学生在逐年迅速增多,而且我们的高校已经有了翻译学院和翻译系(当然还太少)。②外语专业的学生考中文、法律等其他人文社科专业的硕士、博士以及反方向的走向已经起步。这种跨学科的人才已成为人才资源竞争的最主要对象,因此发展趋势定会看好。上海外语教育出版社为适应这种高层次人才培养和新学科建设的需要,不但积极出版国内关于对比研究和翻译研究的专著和论文集,最近又推出了原版“国外翻译研究丛书”,这套丛书时间跨度从古代到现代,所选书目皆为译学发展史上有里程碑作用的名家名著,堪称译学经典。他们计

划分批出版,以满足读者的需求。

这套丛书的出版首先可以解决国内翻译教学原版参考书多年匮乏的困难,真可以说是我国翻译教学与理论研究的及时雨。我想学习和关心这个学科的师生和其他人士定会对这套书的引进为之欢呼,为之祝贺。

这套丛书的价值还在于能大大促进我国翻译学科建设的发展。译学学科的发展依赖于研究者在三个方面的深入研究和结合。一是对本国译学的继承性研究;二是对外国译学的借鉴性研究;三是对翻译实践和翻译教学中新问题的探索性研究。只有这三者研究深入并结合好了,才可能从经验与技巧逐步升华为具有科学性的译学理论。这三个方面的研究,改革开放以来,在我国已取得了很显著的成就,这是有目共睹的。翻译学在我国已于20世纪80年代末有了独立学科的初级形态,90年代又有了新的发展,对学科的独立性以及理论体系的结构与功能有了更多的探讨。依照学科建设的规律和研究现状,我们尚需在上述三个方面加大研究力度,而这套丛书就是借鉴性研究的主要资源。从这个角度讲,这套丛书的引进也是我国文化基本建设的重要工程之一。

在新的世纪,文化(包括各类科学技术)会多方面快速深入人类的日常生活,各国之间的交流会空前深广,因此翻译的功能会逐步扩大,实用性翻译人才的需求量定会空前增加。这就要求我们除了做好高层次研究型人才的培养以外,还应十分重视实用性人才的培养和应用译学的研究。我想出版社一定会关注和引导译学建设的理论研究与应用的发展趋势。

杨自俭
青岛海洋大学六三居室
2001年3月28日

出版前言

西奥·赫曼斯(Theo Hermans)是描写与系统理论的代表人物之一。在《系统中的翻译:描写和系统理论解说》一书中,他介绍了描写与系统理论的产生、其主要观点以及未来可能的发展方向。

全书共分十二章,引言概括了全书将要讨论的主要问题;第一章分析一种新的理论形成的条件及过程,为第二章介绍描写与系统理论早期萌芽及其如何形成学说奠定基础;第三章谈到二十世纪七十年代描写与系统理论的形成,并概括了各种观点的共同特点。在接下来的几章里,作者对一些重要观点分别进行了批评。其中,第四章主要介绍了图里(Toury)的理论,通过分析“对等”概念对翻译的定义提出了置疑;第五章围绕怎样描述原文与译文之间的关系这个问题分析了多位学者从不同角度出发所作的尝试、其观点的科学性及局限性;第六章引入“规范”(Norm)概念,分析了“规范”概念的理论背景,为翻译规范的学习提出了建议;第七章介绍了规范概念引入之后描写翻译学出现的两个不同分支,即试图为翻译寻找可能的通用法则和走进历史、探索翻译与文化身份(cultural identity)、为什么我们对翻译有相应的界定,以及如何追溯这些观点的起源等问题;第八章介绍了多元系统理论,包括其来源、作用,及局限性。由于多元系统并非系统理论的全部,因此作者在第九和第十章中引入了更多的系统理论。这些理论有的试图克服多元系统的局限性,有的则运用了人文科学其他分支中的概念和观点。作者对皮埃尔·布迪厄(Pierre Bourdieu)与尼克拉斯·卢曼(Niklas Luhmann)的理论做了尤为详细的介绍。在上述各章的论述中,作者有针对性地批评了各家各派的观点,而在第十一章中,作者则对描写与系统理论进行了全面批判;在第十二章,作者指出描写与系统理论尚待进一步完善,并对其今后可能的发展方向作出了设想。

西奥·赫曼斯在本书中的论述十分详尽、透彻,而他在书中对于如何进行翻译研究这一现实问题的关注更使本书成为翻译研究生及本领域所有研究者不可或缺的学术参考书。

Preface

The account presented in this book is narrower than the subtitle suggests, especially as regards the word 'descriptive'. Not all descriptive approaches to translation will be covered. A great deal of historical, contrastive and other research, much of it descriptive in nature, is being conducted all over the world. Many of these studies simply get on with the job, without explicit theoretical or methodological reflection, or without consciously aligning themselves with other descriptive work being done elsewhere. It would be futile to attempt to survey this vast and ever growing body of research.

My subject is more limited. It consists primarily of an approach to translation which was elaborated in the 1970s, gained prominence during the following decade, and is still going strong. It has become known under various names: Descriptive Translation Studies, the Polysystems approach, the Manipulation school, the Tel Aviv-Leuven axis, the Low Countries group, and even, incongruously, Translation Studies. In the last ten years or so it has become widely recognized that the emergence of this descriptive and systemic model marked one of the paradigmatic sea-changes in the study of translation.

There are other limitations. Since I can cope with only a handful of Western languages, much of the material that ought to have been considered remains beyond my reach. This applies particularly to publications in Hebrew, but no doubt there is relevant research also in many other languages inaccessible to me. Translation studies need translation, in more than one sense.

For better or worse, I have played a small part in the approach explained in the present book. This creates a problem of critical distance, and of personal pronouns. While I am happy to acknowledge sympathy for many of the views to be presented, I intend to keep a certain distance from them. In this I am helped by the realization that in recent years my own scepticism has only increased, not as regards the fundamental orientation and value of most descriptive and system-based work, but with respect to a range of specific points and issues. No doubt this scepticism pervades my presentation of them. It also makes it slightly easier for me to avoid speaking of the group of researchers identified with descriptive and systemic studies in terms of 'we'.

The aim of this book is threefold: to explain the descriptive and systemic approach to the study of translation; to engage critically with some of the key ideas; and to suggest possible directions for further theoretical and methodological reflection.

Theo Hermans

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Preamble: Mann's Fate

Thomas Mann knew exactly why translation mattered. Every language in the world is a minority language because no single language is spoken by the majority of the world's population. If you happen to be a writer working in one of these minority languages, especially if it is not one of the larger minority languages like English or Chinese but a smaller one like German, your books need to be translated if they are to find a readership beyond the confines of their original tongue. If your work is translated, especially if it is translated into several languages or into one of the world's larger languages, it can reach audiences many times the size of that of the original publication. But there is a corollary. For those potentially vast audiences who read your work in translation because they are unable to read it in the original, the translations determine the impression those readers will form of you as a writer. Through translation writers can escape the prison house of their language, but they are then dependent on translators for the perception of their work in the wider world. Books which are translated may carry the original writer's name on the cover, but the actual words between the covers are written by translators.

Realizing this, Thomas Mann showed a keen interest in the translation of his books into English. His first and highly successful novel, *Buddenbrooks*, had come out in German in 1900; by the time his most ambitious work till then, *The Magic Mountain*, appeared in 1924, the American publisher Alfred Knopf had acquired the exclusive right to distribute Mann's work in the United States. There is grim irony in the fact that in the course of the 1930s the Nazis would suppress Mann's books in his native Germany and even deprive him of his German citizenship. In 1938 he emigrated to the US. There, a German writer in exile with no prospect of having his books distributed in Germany, he was more dependent on translation than he could ever have imagined. It was Mann's fate to be translated.

How well was he served by his main translator into English, the American Helen Lowe-Porter, who would be responsible for English versions of *Buddenbrooks* (1924), *The Magic Mountain* (1927), the four volumes of *Joseph and His Brothers* (1934-44), *Doctor Faustus* (1948) and other titles? The question recently received a pretty decisive answer, even though the arbiter's conclusions caused a brief flurry of controversy. Let us look into the issue for a moment.

In a page-long article in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 13 October 1995 Timothy Buck wiped the floor with Helen Lowe-Porter's translations. He subsequently made his case at greater length in a virulent but well-documented essay in a scholarly journal (Buck 1996). The TLS article drew several responses. First Lawrence Venuti criticized Timothy Buck's criticism of the Lowe-Porter translations, then David Luke, himself a translator of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, leapt to Buck's defence, Venuti responded again, so

did Luke, and finally, in January 1996, the two surviving daughters of Helen Lowe-Porter added their contribution.

There are some interesting things to be learned from Timothy Buck's attack, and from the responses to it. Buck begins by stressing that Helen Lowe-Porter produced "the authorized translations of nearly all of Mann's *oeuvre*, so that in most cases it is on her mediation that anglophones unversed in German are dependent for access to Mann's work" (1995:17). He recognizes that the translations proved commercially successful. Over a hundred thousand copies of *Doctor Faustus* were printed for the Book of the Month Club edition alone. On the whole, they were received favourably to very favourably by the critics. Buck also concedes that Lowe-Porter's prose generally reads well and that she "would often come up with imaginative, idiomatic renderings" (1996:910). But that is as far as it goes. The overall verdict is devastating. The translations are "seriously flawed", "unsound, erratic", marred by "unnecessary, arbitrary deviations from the author's texts" and an "extraordinary number of major or even catastrophic errors", the work, in short, of "an ambitious, startlingly underqualified translator, who plainly did not know her own limitations" (1996:919). The judgement is backed up with abundant evidence. Buck details Lowe-Porter's inadequate grasp of German by listing numerous omissions and blatant mistranslations (of the kind: *breitbeinig*, meaning 'with his legs apart', rendered as 'with big bones'). He denounces the unwarranted liberties she takes when she refashions Mann's syntax and roughly chops up the carefully crafted German sentences, adds touches or entire phrases of her own, and puts an insidious slant on some passages, altering the reader's perception of who does what in particular scenes. While young Tazio in *Death in Venice* is described as 'turning his profile towards the watching Aschenbach', in Lowe-Porter's version it is Aschenbach who is 'sitting so that he could see Tazio in profile' (Buck 1995:17; 1996:914). The imprecision and licence of Lowe-Porter's translation, Buck observes, "patently calls in question the very use here of the term 'translation'" (1995:17).

Buck also delves into the background of the whole affair. He points out that it was the American publisher Alfred Knopf and not the author who had the right to choose the translator, and that Knopf expressly overruled Mann's preference for another candidate. He contrasts the very different views which Mann and Lowe-Porter held on the subject of translation. Mann himself, who, incidentally, doubted in 1925 that a woman would be up to the task of translating so intellectually demanding a novel as *The Magic Mountain*, once wrote in a letter to Lowe-Porter that in principle he favoured translations of his work that were "as literal and accurate as the foreign language will allow". Lowe-Porter took a much freer approach and declared in the Translator's Note to *Buddenbrooks* that she had set herself "the bold task of transferring the spirit first and the letter so far as might be" (Buck 1996:901-902). Nevertheless Mann publicly praised her efforts, expressing his reservations only in private

or in guarded, ambivalent statements. Perhaps, Buck suggests, he knew the publisher would not replace her anyway, perhaps he was too busy with other things, or reluctant to endanger the flow of dollar royalties, or maybe his personal feelings of friendship for his translator outweighed his misgivings about her competence. Whatever the reasons, Buck concludes, we are landed with 'a pseudo-Mann', English versions undeserving to be called translations. Which only highlights the need for a fresh, reliable translation. Alas, the new translation of *The Magic Mountain* by John Woods published in 1995, though better than Lowe-Porter's, is still not good enough. The solution lies with the publishers. They should provide an 'English Mann' that does justice to the real Mann (Buck 1997).

The details of the brief polemic that followed Timothy Buck's *TLS* article do not need to detain us. In speaking up for Lowe-Porter, Lawrence Venuti focused on two points. Our contemporary standards of accuracy in translation, he argued, differ from those in the past; and translation always involves re-interpretation according to the values prevalent in the here and now of the translator. David Luke, siding with Timothy Buck against Venuti, replied with examples showing that the unacceptable frequency of basic howlers in both Lowe-Porter's and Woods' translations were not a matter of interpretation but simply of a defective command of German grammar and a failure to make proper use of the dictionary, demonstrating *en passant* Venuti's own less than firm hold on the German language. Venuti wisely kept his silence after this, but in a final contribution Lowe-Porter's daughters quoted at length from a 1943 letter by their mother in which she spoke about her endeavour to produce in her translations an overall effect comparable to that of the original, reminding the reviewer that he "has to look at the whole, not pick out sentences, if he means to judge the translation at all".

Who won the argument in the end? Not Lawrence Venuti, so much is certain. His point about interpretation blew up in his face, and the one about changing canons of accuracy remained a dead letter. The way Helen Lowe-Porter's daughters used their mother's own words to highlight her philosophy of translation (their term) was cunning and timely but overshot the mark, failing to address the central objection concerning grammar and the dictionary which Buck and Luke had raised. No, there can be little doubt that Buck and Luke emerged the clear winners. Luke's conclusion that "[t]he continuing circulation of debased versions of one of the great German writers of this century is a continuing scandal" therefore also stands. New and better renderings are required. The wish to see the debased versions replaced with adequate translations provided the motive for Timothy Buck's public attack in the first place. If as a result the publishers are shamed into appropriate action, culture will have been done a good turn and the world will be a better place. So the case is closed.

Or is it? If it were, this book would end here. Why go on if there are no