A Review of Systemic Functional Translation Studies from an Interpersonal Perspective

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[Abstract] Since the 1990s, discourse analysis has been frequently applied to translation studies. As one resource of discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth SFL). In SFL, translation and interpreting studies are examined in the field of multilingual studies. According to Matthiessen (2009), Systemic Functional Translation Studies (SFTS) view "language as behavior." It is not a new direction in SFL, but is now developing at a rapid rate. The term SFTS is recognized in the literature and is used in studies like Matthiessen (2009), Vasconcellos (2009), Espindola (2010), Wang Yan (2015), etc.) and can be applied to analyze both the original text and the translated text. Following this approach, both texts are compared at the sociological, semiotic, generic, registerial, discoursal, and lexicogrammatical levels by adopting a top-down process. The applicability of Halliday's (e.g. 1985) linguistic framework has been widely recognized. In this paper, we would restrict the topic to one aspect only, i.e. the interpersonal metafunction. We first summarize the development of SFL and its integration with translation studies. Then, some key terms in the grammar of interaction, such as Mood, Subject, Finite, Modality, etc. are   explained. Some of the existing studies related to the interpersonal metafunction on translation studies are reviewed. These studies have generated new insights into the translation of interpersonal choices, such as meaning potential during the translation of mood type, polarity and modality, which translators may not be aware of during the translation process. The major contributions in this aspect would be summarized, with suggestions of future research addressed.

[Keywords] systemic functional linguistics, interpersonal metafunction, mood, modality, translation studies

Introduction

Translation studies could be divided into pure and applied branches (Holmes, 1988), with Theoretical and Descriptive Translation Studies under the category of Pure Translation Studies. Among the two, Descriptive Translation Studies is illustrated as an empirical, systematic, and controlled discipline, which describes, explains, and predicts phenomena, as well as carries out "studies into well-defined corpuses, or sets of problems, constitutes the best means of testing, refuting, and especially modifying and amending the very theory" (Toury, 1995, p.1).

Systemic Functional Linguistics, as its name suggests, is a sub-discipline of linguistics, which provides different models and tools for analyzing all human languages. According to Teich (2003, p. 37), the general representational categories for linguistic description used in SFL are "metafunction, stratification, axis, rank and delicacy." As to the concept of metafunction, three major components are defined – the ideational, the interpersonal and the textual metafunction. The ideational metafunction includes logical and experiential mode. In the logical mode, "our experience of the world is construed serially as chains of phenomena related by logico-semantic relationships" (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010, p. 132). While in the experiential mode, language resources are provided "for construing our experience of the world around us and inside us as meaning" (ibid: 92). The second metafunction, i.e. the interpersonal metafunction, sees language as "a

resource for enacting roles and relations between speaker and addressees as meaning" (ibid: p. 126). It is a combination of conative and expressive functions by Bühler and corresponds to the tenor system. The last metafunction – the textual metafunction is the enabling metafunction, "which provides the resources for presenting ideational and interpersonal meaning as a flow of information in text unfolding in its context" (ibid: p. 220).

Kim and Matthiessen (forthcoming) as well as Wang (2014) have reviewed studies from an SFL perspective that investigate thematic progression in translation, which involves the textual metafunction in SFL. Similarly, the current paper aims to conduct a review on the studies that explore translation choices from the interpersonal perspective. On writing such a review, features in making translation choices in interpersonal aspects, and strategies helping translators making choices on micro-levels of language are expected to be found.

The Interpersonal Metafunction

MOOD and MODALITY are the major systems within the interpersonal metafunction. In the system of MOOD (see Figure 1), all major clauses could make its Mood selection, so as to realize its speech function. As Figure 1 shows, a major clause may choose to be indicative or imperative. If it is indicative, it could be either declarative or interrogative. If it is interrogative, it can be further refined into yes/no interrogative and WH-interrogative types.
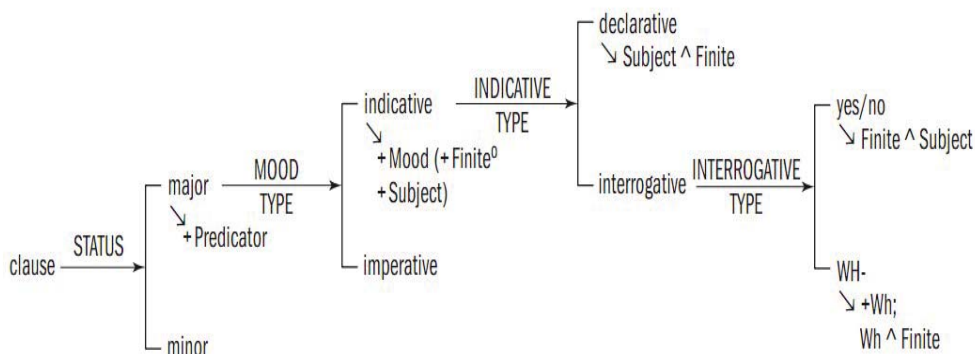

Figure 1. The system network of MOOD (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 24)

In the system of MOOD, speakers, writers, or audiences are involved in an interactive events. When a speaker adopts a certain speech role, he meanwhile assigns a complementary role to the listener. The two basic types of speech roles are giving and demanding. In addition, there is another fundamental distinction of the interaction, i.e. the nature of the commodities being exchanged, whether it is goods-&-services or information. When conflating speech roles with the commodity exchanged, we have four basic speech functions, namely offer, statement, command and question. The giving of goods-&-services has been realized as an "offer"; while the giving of information a "statement"; meanwhile, the demanding of goods-&-services has been realized as a "command", and the demanding of information a "question".

Mood is composed of Subject and Finite. "The Subject is the element in terms of which the clause can be negotiated," while "the Finite makes a clause negotiable by coding it as positive or negative in polarity and by grounding it, either in terms of time (it is/ it isn't; it was/it wasn't; it will/it won't) or in terms of modality (it may/it will/it must, etc.)" (Martin, Matthiessen and Painter, 2010: 61). At the same time, there is Modal Adjunct which adds "meaning related to the Mood element: polarity and modality (e.g. perhaps, probably, certainly), temporality (e.g. already, soon, yet) and intensity (e.g. degree: hardly, quite, almost, totally, utterly: counterexpectancy: even, actually, just, simply, merely, only)" (ibid.).

"The Subject supplies the rest of what it takes to form a proposition: namely, something by reference to which the proposition can be affirmed or denied" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004, p. 117). The Subject has an interpersonal function in that it is seen as "the first instance" from a dialogue rather than a

monologue. It has a "modal responsibility," which can be reflected in imperative clauses, in which an implicit Subject "you" has been included, as in "(You) Do not discuss affairs of state." The "modal responsiblity" could also be seen in modulated indicative clauses like: "You wouldn't understand."

There are other elements out of the Mood structure, i.e. Residue. A Residue is made up of Predicator, Complement and Adjunct, with the Predicator being the non-Finite part of the verbal group, the Complement normally a nominal group, and the Adjunct adverbial or prepositional group.

Besides the system of MOOD, there are other systems when discussing clause as exchange, such as POLARITY and MODALITY (see Figure 2). Systems of POLARITY and MODALITY are both realized by Mood elements, either by Finite or a separate mood Adjunct. POLARITY refers to the system of "positive" or "negative." It is "the resource for assessing the arguability value of a clause: yes or no — the validity of a proposition (it is/it isn't) or the actualization of a proposal (do/don't)" (Matthiessen, Teruya and Lam, 2010, p. 161). MODALITY refers to "the speaker's judgement, or request of the judgement of the listener, on the status of what is being said" (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014, p. 172). There are four main kinds of modality: probability, usuality, obligation, and readiness. Probability and usuality are referred as modalisation, while obligation and readiness as modulation.

Systemic Functional Translation Studies from an Interpersonal Perspective

Since the turn of the 20th century, some scholars have begun to investigate translation from an interpersonal perspective (e.g. Teich, 1999; Huang, 2002, 2006; Lavid, 2000; Wang, 2004, 2007, 2008; Munday, 2012). For example, Huang Guowen (2002, 2006) analyzes Chinese classical poems based on the interpersonal metafunction. His analysis focuses on the following seven aspects: Mood, question and response, vocatives, the questioner, the relationship between questioner and by-passer, speaker/listener relationship. In terms of Mood, different translators may translate the source text (ST) into a different Mood according to their own understandings and choices. Other minor variations of different translations are analyzed. He confirms that SFL has rendered a clear identification of personal relationship and more accurate understanding and translation of the Chinese ST.
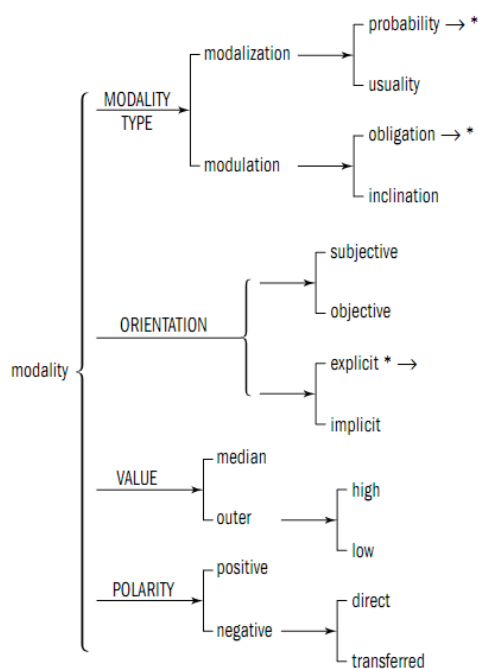

Figure 2. The system network of MODALITY (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 182)

Studies on the influence of age and gender on the translation of "could" by means of adopting SFL

modality system, WordSmith Tools, and SPSS have been conducted by Wang Peng (2004, 2007, 2008). One of the aims of his studies is to find out whether the influence of age and gender on modal auxiliary "could" remains constant in the Chinese translation of *Harry Potter*. A computer analysis of a corpus (made up of both English and Chinese versions of the *Harry Potter* series) shows that the single Mood type realized by "could" can be translated into different types of Modality, i.e. possibility, inclination, obligation, and usuality. Frequencies of utterances marked by different types of modality are calculated and related to the gender or age of characters. He concludes that the absence of meaning of usuality by "could" in ST is contrasted with its existence in Chinese translation. This added layer of meaning may be implicit in ST, but is presented in TT, which facilitates the contextual meaning and coherence of the TT.

Another finding of the study is that one mood type in ST may be translated into another in the TT, due to diverse connotations of "could." In terms of the influence of gender and age on the use of "could," female characters tend to use it to express uncertainty and readiness, while male characters tend to express permission and obligations, and young speakers may adopt less obligation while producing the utterance. In the Chinese translation, adult characters tend to use modal operators or modal Adjuncts, while young characters would use more simple and direct grammar. However, this case of above features in Chinese translation is not statistically significant. Hence, the study calls for translators' awareness of the influence of age and gender in TT, which may be beneficial to more exact equivalence to ST.

Although the studies reviewed above may be limited in number, they have somehow offered a new approach to translation studies. These text-based comparative studies may apply different systems in the interpersonal metafunction to examine texts of different kinds, thus "shedding light on questions of axiology, heteroglossia and reading position" (Matthiessen, 2014, p. 309).

Comprehensive Frameworks Involving the Interpersonal Metafunction

Various scholars have proposed their frameworks based on SFL to analyze the source text and the target text. However, their frameworks are with different concentrations. Bell (1991) offers a comprehensive picture on SFL-based TS by building up a model of the translation process, integrating Field, Tenor and Mode (each corresponds with experiential, interpersonal and textual metafunction) with translation process. What is also prominent in his book is his detailed elaboration of the three SFL metafunctions on the lexical/syntactic, logical/grammatical/rhetoric, or on the textual/discoursal levels. His elaboration helps us to understand translation beyond the linguistic layers, and his framework could build up a more systematic understanding of the ST, and, hence, a more stylistic TT.

Compared to Bell's (1991) comprehensive account, Hatim and Mason (1990) focus more on the ideational and interpersonal metafunctions instead of the textual metafunction. They see a match/mismatch between ST and TT and explain this match/mismatch from both the perspective of systemic functional and that of translation theories. Their model of translation adopts a top-down approach that starts from text-type and context for discussing translation issues and strategies. It differs from other theories in their application of Halliday's social semiotic, cultural and ideological theories in translation studies. While another interesting point is their integration of linguistic theories (e.g. pragmatics, semiotics, textuality, coherence), cultural theories (socio-cultural and socio-textual practice) with translation studies, thus reflecting the social-semiotic feature of language.

Hatim and Mason (1990) recognize that there is translation diversity around the world, which provide us a detailed account of various parameters relating to Field, Tenor, and Mode. From the aspect of Field, a language user realizes ideational meaning by making choices in such aspects as transitivity; on the layer of Tenor, choices centering on mood, modality, and tense, etc. are made to realize the interpersonal metafunction; at last, the textual metafunction is realized by choices made about coherence and intertextuality. Above all, Hatim and Mason (1990) create a model for analyzing text based on SFL and discuss its application in translator training and translation quality assessment.

Zhu (1993, 1996, 2008) reiterates the importance of textual comparison in TS, and by drawing on Halliday's (e.g. 1985) SFL theory and the speech act theory proposed by Austin (1975), he puts forward a three-dimensional model called Structure of Meaning (SOM). He states that "the systemic functional model provides us with an insight into the mechanism of text creation in relation to language user, communication

and situation, while the concept of speech act draws our attention to the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary effect of a text in actual communication, both models hinge on a three-dimensional perception of text and text creation" (Zhu, 1996, 345).

SOM is a three-dimensional framework; they are linguistic compositions of a text, which emphasize lexicogrammatical, phonological and graphological patterning, interactional dynamic, on which dimension, language becomes interaction, exchange of meaning, bearer of social values, and aesthetic impact, whose center "has shifted to information manipulation by textual means" (p. 347).

Matthiessen (2001, 2014) views translation as recreation of meaning in context through choice. Translators make choices both during the interpretation process of the ST and in the recreation process of the TT about different meaning potentials. "In terms of interpersonal meaning, translators choose how to interpret propositions, proposals and the assessments associated with them in the exchange of meaning embodied in the source text, and they choose among the options in the target language to re-enact the interpersonal meanings in the translation they are producing" (Matthiessen, 2014, p. 277).

What is more, both the environment of the ST and the TT could influence the choices made by translators. Translation equivalence and translation shift are illustrated with a cline by Matthiessen (2014), according to which "choices in one metafunction may be closer to the translation equivalence pole of the cline, while choices in another may be closer to the shift pole of the cline. Translation involves trade-offs in choices across the metafunctional spectrum" (p. 279). Meanwhile, different types of metafunctional shifts are summarized in the Matrix of metafunctional translation shifts (see Matthiessen, 2014, p. 284); there is only one type of translation shifts in terms of interpersonal metafunction, i.e. from interpersonal to interpersonal, such as shift in mood type.

Conclusion

The current study is a review of Systemic Functional Translation Studies that investigate translation from an interpersonal perspective based on a brief introduction to the interpersonal metafunction within the overall SFL theory. Several translation studies from the interpersonal perspective have been reviewed, while some comprehensive frameworks are delineated. They have shed some light on translation studies and would strengthen the descriptive branch of translation studies.

Some implications are found from the review. First, the frameworks of SFTS have a tendency of becoming increasingly comprehensive by means of involving all three metafunctions or stratifying along the stratification dimensions. Second, studies involving translation shift in interpersonal metafunction are rather limited in quantity, more studies need to be done in this respect. Third, the constant features in cross-language variations need to be studied for facilitating systematic translation. Fourth, apart from the descriptive branch in translation studies, it would be beneficial for translators to acquaint themselves with the developments in SFL theories so as to make more systematic micro-level choices in their translation, to realize the intended function of the translated texts, and to reflect the potential sociocultural meaning.

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