



Translation and Time: Exploring the Temporal Dimension of Cross-cultural Transfer

Presentation Details

Title of Paper:

Temporality and “Dynamic” Translational Norms: A Case Study of George Kennedy’s Translation of Lu Xun’s Stories

Abstract:

The norm theory developed by Gideon Toury (1995) has been widely adopted and applied in translation studies as a potentially powerful descriptive-explanatory tool. However, one problematic of this theory is that Toury appears to assume that the initial norm which he posits “a translator may subject him/herself to” is a static object, unchangeable with the shifting of time and context. This paper presents the findings of a case study of American sinologist George Kennedy’s translation of Lu Xun’s stories in the 1930s-1940s. It was conducted with Toury’s notion of initial norm as analytical tool to test the hypothesis that translators tend to adjust their translation strategies to meet the ever-changing translation norm in the target culture and the target readers’ expectations. An analysis of the non-obligatory shifts from the source text as manifestations of the initial norm adopted by the translator demonstrates that Kennedy’s basic choice of translation strategy changed markedly over three phases of his work: his early renderings evince an attempt to pursue adequacy, and his middle-stage translations sought to balance adequacy and acceptability while his productions of the last phase lean further towards acceptability. The findings indicate that the translation norm in the target culture changes with the passage of time and accordingly translators tend to take the mainstream translation norm in the target culture as a “moving target” for them to meet in ever-changing temporal and socio-cultural contexts. The author suggests that the “dynamic” nature of translational norms should be incorporated into Toury’s theoretical model.

Author's biography:

Baorong Wang received his PhD in translation studies from The University of Hong Kong and is currently Professor of Translation Studies and Director of the Center for Translation Studies at Zhejiang University of Finance and Economics in Hangzhou, China. He has published more than 40 articles in well-established domestic and international translation studies journals, including Chinese Translators' Journal, Meta, Translation Review, etc, and a monograph on Lu Xun's fiction in English translation. He is a Visiting Scholar at Duke University, USA, in 2015-2016.